

OUTLINE OF PAUL'S FIRST EPISTLE TO THE THESSALONIANS

I. PAUL'S GREETING (1 Thess. 1:1).

Here Paul identified himself as the author of this epistle, told us who his companions were, mentioned those for whom this epistle was written, and his prayer for them.

II. HISTORICAL AND PERSONAL (1 Thess. 1:2-3:13).

A. A thankful review of God's work in Thessalonica (1:2-10).

After reading through the epistle it seems clear that one purpose Paul had in writing this section was to encourage the Thessalonian believers to recognize that what had taken place among them was truly a work of God in spite of what their enemies might be saying about them and about Paul.

B. A reminder of the nature of Paul's ministry among them--again marked with Paul's thanksgiving to God in 2:13 (2:1-16).

Paul's integrity was under attack and so he defended himself in this section. It shows how the work of God is vitally connected with the sincerity and holiness of the servants of the Lord. How wonderful it would be for every servant of the Lord to be able to write what Paul wrote in this section.

C. Paul's great concern for the church in Thessalonica (2:17-3:10).

This also was a part of Paul's defense against the charges made by his enemies, that he really did not care for the people. There evidently was an attempt on the part of Paul's enemies to get the people to believe that Paul was doing what he was doing for his own person gain, and not to benefit the people of Thessalonica in any way.

D. Paul's prayer for himself and for the church (3:11-13).

All of Paul's epistles show that he was a man of prayer, and that he always served the Lord by depending wholly upon Him for the blessings that were needed.

III. PRACTICAL AND DOCTRINAL (1 Thess. 4:1-5:24).

A. Practical exhortations concerning their walk (4:1-12). The emphasis is upon a holy life.

This section and the last one under point "C." below give the main practical exhortations of the epistle.

B. The doctrine: the coming of the Lord (4:13-5:5).

Every chapter in this epistle closes with a reference to the

Outline of 1 Thessalonians (2)

coming of the Lord. Cf. 1 Thess. 1:10; 2:19, 20; 3:13; 4:13-18; 5:24. In addition we must include 1 Thess. 5:1-5.

C. The practical exhortations resumed and completed (5:6-24).

IV. CONCLUSION (1 Thess. 5:25-28).

Actually three of these four verses contain additional practical exhortations, but are given by way of conclusion. Nevertheless, they are important like the others.

Paul began this epistle with a prayer for grace, and he concluded on the same note. How important this must be! It, therefore, should be a major part of our prayers for ourselves and for each other.

-- Prepared by L. Dwight Custis, September 1993.
Trinity Bible Church of Portland, Oregon.

THE FIRST EPISTLE OF PAUL TO THE THESSALONIANS

Introduction

March 8, 1993

Intro: When we were studying 1 John, which we have just concluded, I mentioned repeatedly that many consider 1 John to be the epistle which was the last to be written of all of the NT epistles. The opposite is true of 1 Thessalonians; it is considered to be the first to be written. Robertson, in his Word Pictures of the New Testament, says that "it may even be the earliest New Testament book" (Vol. IV, p. 3). Two other books have some claim to that distinction, and they are the Gospel of Mark and the Epistle of James. At least we can say with a certain degree of assurance that the NT epistles began with Paul and ended with John. They began in the early 50's and were concluded in the early 90's. So, as best we know, they covered a span of some 40 years (most of them having been written in the earlier part of that period).

One thing seems to be the case with all of the NT epistles: each was written to meet a particular need. We saw that in 1 John, and we will see that again in 1 Thessalonians. In 1 Thessalonians the problem seems to have been the coming of the Lord which is mentioned in every chapter. It was not so much that they were ignorant of the truth of the Lord's return, but there was misunderstanding about it. It appears that ^{the people in} the early Church expected the Lord to return immediately, during their own lifetime. When He did not return, and some of the believers died, it raised questions about what had happened to them--which Paul answered in chapter 4. But it also seems that some were so sure that the Lord would return immediately that they were neglecting their responsibilities, not giving proper attention to their own spiritual growth, nor to their witness to the people of the world. Along with these things, it is apparent from the epistle that the church in Thessalonica had started in an atmosphere of opposition to the Gospel, and that the affliction had continued. So Paul had sent Timothy from Corinth (where it seems that the letter was written to Thessalonica) to see how the church there was doing. When Paul wrote this letter, Timothy had returned with a good report. And Paul was responding to Timothy's report by writing to the church at Thessalonica.

The account of the founding of the church in Thessalonica is given to us in Acts 17:1-11. This was probably in A.D. 50. Paul was on his second missionary journey. Silas was his companion. Timothy had joined them, and Luke also was with them during some of this time.

At this time Thessalonica was the capital of Macedonia. A large Jewish population was there, as is seen from the fact that they had a synagogue. However, there were also many Gentiles in Thessalonica. Paul's ministry there lasted only three weeks. It seems to have been particularly fruitful among the Gentiles, but not so fruitful among the Jews. In fact, opposition broke out among the Jews, and those Jews even followed Paul to Berea to stir up trouble for him there. When Paul left Berea, and went on down to Athens, Silas and Timothy apparently stayed in that area, joining Paul later in Athens. It was from Athens (see 1 Thess. 3:1, 2) that Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to see how the young believers were doing there. Then Paul went on down to Corinth. He ~~was~~ ^{was} at Corinth when Timothy and Silas returned. (See Acts 18:1, 5.) Evidently Timothy and Silas had met somewhere on the way, possibly in Berea, and had returned together. There seems to be general agreement that it was from Corinth that Paul wrote this first epistle. Some say he wrote it from Athens, believing that Paul waited for Timothy and Silas there. But Acts 18 seems to contradict that idea. We can be certain where the Scriptures are certain, but only try to be approximately right otherwise in setting times

and places where certain things took place.

At this point let me read Acts 17:1-11.

From the apparent blessing of the Lord upon the Gentiles in Thessalonica, we can assume that the church there was predominantly Gentile at the beginning. Just how much the work spread among the Jews later, we do not know. However, we can see from this epistle which we are beginning today that the church in Thessalonica exercised a tremendous influence with the Gospel throughout that whole region. And remembering that Paul was there for only three weeks makes us realize that God can do a great work in a short time when that is His pleasure. In this respect (as well as in others that we shall see) the book of 1 Thessalonians should be an encouragement to all of us.

I hope that this will give us an adequate understanding of the situation Paul faced when he went to Thessalonica, and the proof that the Lord had done a great work as we see from the report which Timothy brought back.

But now let us turn to the epistle itself. I am going to do something today that I don't ever remember doing before: I want to read the entire epistle to you. Some of you have been reading it; probably some of you have not. It takes only twelve minutes to read this letter through. It is even shorter than 1 John. When you receive a letter at home from someone you love, you sit down and read it through right away. This was a letter. Paul meant for them to read it, and re-read it. Notice what he said in chapter 5, verse 27. (See also what Paul wrote to the Colossian church in Col. 4:16.) We not only need to do more Bible reading, but we need to read the books of the Bible through at one sitting. And then to read them again and again and again. This is more difficult with the longer books, but this should be our aim. Paul's advice to Timothy along this line is given in 1 Tim. 4:13. After writing in verse 12, "Let no man despise thy youth..." he went on to say,

Till I come, give attendance to reading,
to exhortation, to doctrine.

And so let me take the time to read it to you. Perhaps this will help to encourage all of us to do more reading of the Word of God.

One word before we start: remember that there were not five chapters and eighty-nine verses when Paul wrote this letter. It was a letter, one continuous epistle. The chapters and verses were added later, but this is one letter, touching upon several subjects. And this is the way we should read it.

(Read the epistle.)

One thing that stands out very clearly in this epistle is that the Apostle Paul was a pastor at heart. It is amazing to see how God blessed his ministry in Thessalonica in such a short time, and how much these people were on his heart, even to the extent which he mentioned in 1 Thess. 3:8. It might be a little misleading that we call 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, the Pastoral Epistles. We mean by that title that those are letters to and for pastors in the work of the church. But Paul never wrote a letter that was not pastoral, showing the concern he had for the Lord's people as a shepherd has concern for his sheep. How wonderful it would be if all of us as pastors sought to follow the example of Paul in this.

But now let us think in terms of an outline.

Paul quite evidently was very happy because of the report that Timothy had brought to him, and yet, at the same time, he had a great burden and concern for the believers in Thessalonica. He rejoiced in their present condition, but he was encouraging them to keep pressing on in lives of holiness, in spite of the opposition they were facing, as they waited for the return of the Lord.

These features of the epistle are what make it of such great importance to us. We need to ask ourselves in the light of this letter:

- 1) What is our condition spiritually?
- 2) How does it need to improve?
- 3) Are we daily looking for the return of our Lord?

Being able to answer these three questions as Paul did, is the mark of a spiritually healthy believer, and of a spiritually healthy church. But I want you to note the personal emphasis that runs through the epistle. The church is made up of the individuals who are in the church, and a church will only be as strong as those who are in the church.

March 9, 1993

The epistle has a twofold division:

- I. HISTORICAL AND PERSONAL (1 Thess. 1-3).
- II. PRACTICAL AND DOCTRINAL (1 Thess. 4, 5).

In the first part after a brief word of greeting (1:1), Paul reviewed how the Lord had worked so graciously and mightily in Philippi (chapter 1), and then he reminded them of the nature of his ministry when he had been with them (2:1-16). He was careful to give God all of the glory for the work that had been done in their hearts, but he looked upon the character of his ministry as a major reason for the blessing of the Lord. Next he expressed his present concern for the church (2:17-3:10). He had wanted to get back to them, but the Lord had not made that possible. This is why he had sent Timothy to them, and had been so overjoyed with the report which Timothy had brought back to him. The first part of the epistle ends with Paul's prayer in 1 Thess. 3:11-13.

In the second part we have, first, the beginning of Paul's exhortations concerning their walk in 1 Thess. 4:1-12. See this word in 2:12; 4:1, 12. They were to avoid sin (vv. 1-8), to love each other (vv. 9, 10), to be faithful in their work (v. 11), and to behave properly toward the people of the world.

The second part continues with an extended doctrinal explanation of the truth of the Lord's return (1 Thess. 4:13-5:5). This was one of the two major reasons why Paul wrote to them at this time, the other reason being his desire to encourage them in godly living. Paul mentioned the coming of the Lord in every chapter of this epistle. See 1:3, 10; 2:19, 20; 3:13; 4:13-5:5, 23. Then Paul resumed his practical exhortations in 5:6-24. 1 Thess. 5:25-28 give us Paul's conclusion to the epistle.

In outline form the content of the epistle is as follows:

- I. PAUL'S GREETING (1 Thess. 1:1).
- II. HISTORICAL AND PERSONAL (1 Thess. 1:2-3:13).
 - A. A thankful review of God's work in Thessalonica (1:2-10).

- B. A reminder of the nature of Paul's ministry among them--again marked with Paul's thanksgiving to God in 2:13 (2:1-16).
- C. Paul's great concern for the church in Thessalonica (2:17-3:10).
- D. Paul's prayer for himself and for the church (3:11-13).

III. PRACTICAL AND DOCTRINAL (1 Thess. 4:1-5:24).

- A. Practical exhortations concerning their walk (4:1-12). The emphasis is upon a holy life.
- B. The doctrine: the coming of the Lord (4:13-5:5).
- C. The practical exhortations resumed and completed (4:6-24).

IV. CONCLUSION (1 Thess. 5:25-28).

Let me again request as strongly as I can that, if you are really interested in getting the message of the epistle of 1 Thessalonians into your own heart (and I assume that you are), that you read it daily, or as often as you can, while we are considering it together. It is impossible to overemphasize the importance of reading the Word of God. Filling your mind and heart with the epistle will greatly add to the benefits you will receive from our time together in class.

THE FIRST EPISTLE OF PAUL TO THE THESSALONIANS

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

March 15, 1993

Intro: I have indicated in the outline that the first point is:

I. PAUL'S GREETING (1 Thess. 1:1).

What we read in this verse is characteristic of Paul's writing. However, it is to be noted that:

- 1) He did not claim his title as an apostle.
- 2) He included Silas and Timothy along with himself as equally involved in this epistle.

We saw in our first lesson that Silas and Timothy were with the Apostle Paul, and his fellow-workers, at this point in his second missionary journey. They had just returned to Paul, Timothy having brought a good report about the spiritual condition of the church in Thessalonica, and that they were very loving in their thoughts of the Apostle Paul. There were times when Paul was not encouraged by the condition in some of the churches, but that was not the case with Thessalonica. And so Paul was greatly blessed in learning how well things were going in that city.

It would seem that the reason that Paul did not call himself an apostle was because (1) there were no real problems in the Thessalonian church, and (2) because it was evident that the Thessalonian church fully accepted his apostleship. That must have been an encouragement to him as well.

For Paul to mention both Silas and Timothy spoke well for Paul as it did for Silas and Timothy.

In the first place it showed that there was no feeling of jealousy at all on the part of Paul. He was always an encourager of his fellow-workers even though they were, as we know, in the case of Timothy, younger in age and younger in the Lord. And so Paul comes to us in this epistle as an example for all older servants of the Lord to follow. There is no place for jealousy in the work of the Lord, and yet this is something that we all have to guard against.

Secondly, it was really a commendation for Silas and Timothy. Paul trusted them. They had shown themselves to be faithful. They were followers of Paul. The hearts of these men were really one in the Lord. And this is a combination that the Lord always blesses. So often younger men have their own agenda. They feel that they could do the job much better, and so are not submissive, nor are they teachable. Think of what a privilege it would have been to work under the direction of the Apostle Paul. Think of what a young man could learn about the truth of God, and about the ways of the Lord. The Lord had blessed Paul in giving him two such fellow-workers.

So, when we pick up our Bibles and read "Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus," we should know that we are in for a blessing.

The mention of these three men speaks of unity, of oneness in their fellowship with each other and in the work that the Lord had appointed them to do. And this is one example of the way God had answered the prayer of the Lord Jesus in John 17 which we studied not long ago. It is doubtful if either of these three men knew the Lord when the Lord was on earth. It is possible that Silas and Timothy may have, but not very likely. We know that Paul was not a believer at that time. Assuming that none of them did, think with me of two verses in John 17, and apply them

to the situation we can see in the mention of these three men. I am thinking of John 17:20, 21. The Lord had prayed for the oneness of His disciples who were with Him, and then He prayed this prayer:

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also
which shall believe on me through their word;
That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me,
and I in thee, that they may be one in us:
that the world may believe that thou has sent me.

Many had believed in Thessalonica. There had been, and still was, at the time Paul wrote this letter, much persecution in Thessalonica against the church, but many had believed. And we need to recognize that one major reason for the blessing of God was the oneness in heart and in the Lord which these three soldiers of the Cross were enjoying. The Lord gets the glory for it, to be sure, but it is wonderful to see how these men seemed to have wanted their ministry to be that of a closely knit team. No jealousy with Paul; no attempt on the part of Silas and Timothy to "do their own thing." They were serving the Lord as one man! And the blessing of God was there.

We come from different churches to this class, and the Lord has given us a wonderful fellowship together. Our fellowship in the Lord is so wonderful (at least I think it is) that I forget that we attend different churches. We are a good example of the truth that there is only one body of Christ. But let me give you a prayer request for your pastor, and your church staff (if you have one), and for the elders and deacons who work with them. And this ought to be on your daily prayer list, and close to the top. Pray for real oneness among your leaders. Pray that jealousy will not divide them. Pray that self-will will not divide them. Pray that the Lord will keep them walking as one man, serving the Lord, not for their own glory, but for the glory of God and the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. We all need that kind of prayer support because each one of us is only a sinner saved by grace, and there is much that the Lord has to do in all of our hearts before we will be all that the Lord wants us to be.

Paul and Silas and Timothy illustrate also what David wrote in Psalm 133. Let me read it to you. (Read.)

It surely must follow that one of the greatest reasons for the lack of blessing in our churches is that there is too often a lack of oneness among our leaders, and a lack of oneness among our people. One thing that the Lord hates is a person who sows discord. Cf. Prov. 6:19. We are one in Christ; we need to show that we are by the lives that we live. And yet such unity is only possible as we pray, and as we trust the Lord to give us this oneness. In Rom. 15:5, 6 we have one of the prayers of the Apostle Paul, a prayer that he prayed for the church at Rome--and surely a prayer which he prayed for all of the churches which were upon his heart. This is the prayer:

Now the God of patience and consolation
grant you to be likeminded one toward another
according to Jesus Christ:
That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God,
even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

On the phrase, "according to Jesus Christ," my Bible gives the marginal note, "after the example of" Jesus Christ.

And so oneness is not the result of our efforts (although we can thank God when we desire it). Nor is it just enough for us to want it. Oneness among us as the people of God is a work of God, and both the prayer of the

Lord Jesus and the prayer of the Apostle Paul tell us that oneness is a work of the Lord in our hearts, given in answer to prayer.

The desire for continued oneness was in the heart of Paul for him to pray the prayer that we find in 1 Thess. 3:11-13. (Read.)

But let us go on in this greeting. Paul began by identifying the writers; he went on to identify the people to whom he was writing. How did he speak of them? "Unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ."

A moment ago I mentioned that although we attend different churches, all of us are members of the body of Christ. This is the grandest use of the word church that we have in the NT--the largest use. Wherever believers are throughout the world, we are all members of the body of Christ. There is only one body of Christ. But that is not the way in which Paul was using the word "church" here in his greeting.

There is just one "church," one body of Christ, some members in heaven, and some of us still on earth. But there are many churches, local churches. This is what Trinity Bible Church is. This is what your church is. However, I must qualify that statement because, as we shall see, just because the word church is on the outside of a building is no sign that there is a church there. In the first place, the building is not the church. If it took a building to make a church, Trinity Bible Church would not be a church because we don't have a building of our own. No, the building is not the church; the people who meet in the church building are the church.

Paul knew because of what he had seen the Lord doing in the hearts of many people in Thessalonica, and by what Silas and Timothy had reported when they came to him in Corinth, that the Lord had established a church, a local church, in Thessalonica. That was their geographical location. That was their place of ministry. They were there to worship God together and to have fellowship together and to serve the Lord together. Thessalonica was their primary mission field.

I will have to say that I would love to have lived in a day when there was only one church in Portland. I suppose there was such a day. I would like to know the history of Portland as far as churches are concerned. Do you know what the first church was which was established here? If you do, I would like to know. But Portland, like hundreds of other cities, has grown so that instead of having the church of Portland, we have hundreds of churches. Even among true believers, our doctrines differ very much, and it sounds completely out of the question to talk about the unity of the church--UNLESS we do as some are doing today, and that is to try to unify believers organizationally but not doctrinally and spiritually. That is not the kind of unity the Lord prayed about. And I cite what Paul said about the church at Thessalonica as proof that what is being attempted today is not true unity. Paul said that they were "in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ." Most Greek texts do not have "in" before "the Lord Jesus Christ." The reading is much stronger if we leave it out although it is certainly implied by what the Apostle wrote. But to say that they were "in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" eliminates any possibility that a person can be "in God the Father" and yet not be "in the Lord Jesus Christ." Many church people say that they believe in God, but they have doubts about Who Jesus of Nazareth was. They do not believe that He is "the Lord Jesus Christ." If this is the case, then,

although people might call themselves a church, they are not a church.

And so our text tells us that they were not only "the church of the Thessalonians"; that was their geographical location. But they were also "in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ; this is where they were spiritually, their spiritual position.

Unless it is the truth of the oneness of the Members of the Godhead, there really is no truth that is more profound in Scripture than the truth of our oneness with God and the Lord Jesus Christ. If you don't think it is profound, try to explain it to somebody. It goes beyond our ability to comprehend it fully; we can only touch it on its fringes. But we should try to understand it better than we do.

Think again of our Lord's prayer in John 17. In the verses I read to you our Lord said, "That they all may be one as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us." Not just one, but "one in us."

When we were saved we were put "in God." And we were also at the same time put "in the Lord Jesus Christ." We were united to Them in a union that is inseparable. This is what it means to be a Christian. Paul said, "Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." That should show us why we cannot save ourselves. We need to be "in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" or we are not saved. This is what the Holy Spirit does for us when He regenerates us. God and Christ become our life. We are forever joined to them in a living union. This is what fellowship means. It is truly amazing to think that we are brought into the same kind of relationship with God and with Christ which They enjoy with each other. And this is the basis of our unity with each other. The person who denies that Jesus is the Son of God is not only not in Christ, but neither is he in God. But thank God that although we can't fully explain it, we know it, and we believe it, and we can live in the enjoyment of it. All that we will ever need to keep us in this life, and guarantee that we will eventually get to heaven, is traceable to these great truths, truths which apply to every child of God. And the effect is life-changing. A person who is "in God and in the Lord Jesus Christ" can never again be what they were before they were "in God and in the Lord Jesus Christ." I say to God's glory, what an amazing person a Christian is!

But we are still not finished with Paul's greeting.

The next words were not only characteristic of Paul in his writing, but seem to have been the common greeting by which believers met each other. Some MSS have only, "Grace be unto you, and peace," but I see no good reason for leaving out, "From God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ." It certainly was included in Paul's greeting in the second epistle. And everything else was the same. So why not here? I believe it should be included. Paul never seems to have tired of reminding believers that God is "our Father," and that Jesus is in reality "the Lord Jesus Christ."

If God is our Father, then we are His children. We are Members of His family. And we are in His family, not by anything which we have done to deserve it, but, as we shall see in verse 4, because He chose us to be His children. As I have said before, when we were born into this world, our parents had to take what they got; when we were born again into the family of God, God took what He wanted.

What blessing there is in meditating upon our relationship with the God of heaven and earth! When we pray, our Lord told us to say, "Our Father" (Luke 11:2). And what a unique relationship this establishes between us and the Lord Jesus Christ. I don't know of any passage where any of the disciples ever called the Lord, "Brother." But I do know that the writer of the book of Hebrews said that He "is not ashamed to call" us "brethren" (Heb. 2:11). In the first mention of God He is called "the Father"; in the second, "our Father."

But what do we need from Them, and what do we get from Them, and what is it that we can only get from Them? Many things, but here Paul specifically mentioned grace and peace. "Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ."

John Eadie, who has written some wonderful commentaries on several of the Pauline epistles, has some good comments about this familiar greeting which we see in the NT epistles. He says that this is a prayer. And we know that it is not a prayer for himself (although he surely sought the same blessings which he prayed for the people of God in his day), but it is an intercessory prayer. And Mr. Eadie said that it is "no ordinary greeting, or 'as the world giveth,' but a prayer for all combined and fitting spiritual blessings" (Eadie, John, Galatians, p. 10). And so this is the first prayer of the epistle.

But he also said that the word grace "signifies favour, and, especially in the New Testament, divine favour -- that goodwill on God's part which not only provides and applies salvation, but blesses, cheers, and assists believers." It expresses "that many-sided favour that comes in the form of hope to saints in despondency, of joy to them in sorrow, of patience to them in suffering, of victory to them under assault, and of final triumph to them in the hour of death" (Eadie, John, Ephesians, p. 7).

Concerning peace, Eadie said that "it includes every blessing--being and wellbeing." It was the word which the Jews used both when they met and when they parted. It is a word "which denotes that form of spiritual blessing which keeps the heart in a state of happy repose. It is therefore but another phase, or rather is the result, of the previous _____" (Ibid.). Eadie also said that "the favour of God and the felt enjoyment of it, the apostle wishes to the members of the...church in this salutation" (Op. cit., p. 8).

Grace surely includes the strength which Paul said is made perfect in our weakness. Cf. 2 Cor. 12:9. And his peace was demonstrated by the fact that after receiving grace he had peace.

Let us not be ashamed to use this as our greeting, but most of all as we pray for each other, remember that every day that we live we need both grace and peace. And, since they come to us "from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ," they are available in a never-ending supply. It is called grace because it is always undeserved, and can only be bestowed because of the merit of our Lord Jesus Christ.

March 16, 1993

But now let us get into the message of this epistle.

I have called this the beginning of the section that is:

II. HISTORICAL AND PERSONAL (1 Thess. 1:2-3:13).

And the first part of this is:

- A. A thankful review of God's work in Thessalonica (1 Thess. 1:2-10).

Perhaps you have been impressed in your reading of this epistle with the fact that thanksgiving is expressed by Paul throughout the epistle. Cf. 1:2; 2:13; 3:9; plus Paul's exhortation in 5:18. He had shown prior to what he wrote in 5:18 that he was practicing what he preached. Paul was always looking for things for which to thank God, and he never had to look far because evidence of the blessing of the Lord was everywhere. However, his chief reason for thanksgiving seems to have been what the Lord was doing in the lives of others, not for himself. Perhaps he reserved the latter for those times of personal and private fellowship with the Lord.

March 22, 1993

Another important thing to remember about giving thanks to God is that it is a recognition that God is the One Who has done the work. People are almost always involved, and visible. Therefore, it is natural to praise the instrument that God uses instead of praising God. This is what we must all guard ourselves against. It is not wrong to thank people for the blessings that have come to us through them, but we need to remember always that there would be no blessing if God did not give it. In chapter 1 you can see that although Paul mentioned what the Thessalonians were doing, and the kind of men that he, Silas, Timothy were, yet to God alone was the praise given for it all.

But let us look at the text.

1:2 Not only was Paul thankful, but so were Silas and Timothy. Notice the "we." This would tend, as George Milligan mentioned in his commentary on this epistle (p. 5), to turn the hearts of the people to God in similar thanksgiving instead of giving the praise to Paul or to either of his companions in the work of the Lord.

Notice, too, that these three servants of the Lord did not just thank God when they wrote to the church, but they did it "always." When we pray for people, it is so easy to be concerned with problems they are facing, or needs that they have, but it seems that Paul concentrated on being thankful for whatever he could as he prayed for churches and the people who made up those churches.

And it is important to see that he was, and they were, praying "for you all." There undoubtedly were different kinds of people in the Thessalonian church. There were Gentiles and Jews. There were young and old. There were men and women, young people, and boys and girls. There were people in different social categories. We do not know how many different kinds of people there were, but these missionaries prayed for them all!

This teaches us that we should not just pray for the people we like, nor just for the people who have helped us in the work, but every saint needs to be prayed for. Some become prominent in the work; others prefer to stay in the background. But whatever the contrast, let us make sure that we are praying for them all! You never know when you may be the only one who is praying for a particular Christian. The Lord certainly intercedes

for them, as does the Holy Spirit. But every child of God needs to have those who are faithfully remembering him, or her, in prayer, and who are giving thanks to God for them! There are many lessons we can learn from a simple verse like this which, when we first read it, seems to be only of historical importance.

Let me ask you, first of all, how many people do you pray for regularly? And how often do you remember to thank God for them? Whatever else we have to do, let us be faithful in prayer.

1:3 This verse is a continuation of verse 2. Here Paul gave a greater insight into his praying as well as those things for which he was specifically thankful. There are three things in this verse, and one more that we can add from verse 4. They were:

- 1) Their "work of faith."
- 2) Their "labour of love."
- 3) Their "patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father."

We will deal with the fourth one when we get to verse 4.

"Remembering" -- Memory is a vital part of praying continually. And it is important to recognize that we remember those we love. We do not need someone to remind us of them. They are in our hearts continually. We may in our occupation with the day's activities and responsibilities, for the moment not be thinking of them, but they soon return to our thinking and to our remembrance.

One of the purposes of the Lord's Supper is to keep us remembering our Lord Jesus Christ. And the more we love Him, the more we will remember Him. Memory is most useful in our lives as Christians. You may remember that one purpose that the Lord had in sending the Holy Spirit to His disciples, and to us, was, as He said, to "bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (John 14:26).

Most of the time when Lucille and I are together, we are talking. But sometimes our conversation will stop. It is then that I might say to her, or she will say to me, "What are you thinking about?" Thinking is remembering, and remembering the right things is a great aid to prayer.

What did Paul remember about the Thessalonians?

There probably were some unfortunate things that he could have remembered, some disappointing things, but he did not dwell on those. Instead, he remembered, as one commentator has expressed it, "how your faith works, how your love toils, and your hope endures" (Quoted of Blass in Milligan, St. Paul's Epistles to the Thessalonians, p. 5).

"Your work of faith" -- We ought to be reminded here of what James said about faith being dead without works. Cf. Jas. 2:17. So theirs was a true faith, a living faith. Their faith worked, and they worked by faith. This would mean that they worked with a steadfast confidence in God that He was leading them in what they were doing, and that He was leading them in how they were serving the Lord, and that He would bless their works with fruit. Their confidence was not in themselves, but in the Lord!

So, when we think of faith and works, it is important to see that Paul agreed with James, and that they both agreed with John the Baptist and with our Lord.

Let us be careful not to confine this expression to what we ordinarily would call Christian service. This expression included the whole of their lives. Faith does not render us inactive. But faith, faith in God, moves us to action in living as well as in working.

Perhaps you have noticed that Paul used two words in this verse for "work," or "labour." Is there a difference, and, if so, what is it?

There is a difference. When Paul spoke of "your work of faith," he was emphasizing the fact that faith in God makes us active. In using the word labor, "labour of love," he was speaking of the fact that love will motivate us to serve the Lord until our last ounce of strength is gone. It suggests that the Christian life and serving the Lord, are not easy. It never is easy. The Devil makes sure that it is not easy. The nature of the human heart guarantees that it will not be easy. Our faith moves us into action; our love causes us to toil in the work of the Lord. This is primarily our love for the Lord, but it also includes our love for people and our desire to see them saved and walking with the Lord. Continual prayer is a "labour of love." So is the study of the Word, and the preaching of the Word.

After Peter had denied that he knew the Lord, and before the Lord restored him to a place of ministry, the Lord wanted to know about Peter's love. Cf. John 21:15-17. It is our duty under grace to serve the Lord, but let us pray that our living and our serving will rise above the level of being a duty. Let us pray that it will be a delight to live for the Lord, and a delight to serve Him, all because we love Him!

We have seen that faith works, and that love labors; now let us notice that our hope causes us to be patient.

It seems that we cannot get away from that word hope. We had it in 1 John. We have had it in our Sunday morning studies in the book of Romans. It is used four times in 1 Thessalonians: here, 2:19; 4:13; 5:8. I have said that hope is a word which has to do with the future. It speaks of the coming of the Lord. It is called a hope, not because it is uncertain, but because it is future. But it is called a hope because it is certain.

However, sometimes the word hope has to do with the prospect of blessing in this life. Let me give you some passages in which we see that we have every reason to be hopeful, to be encouraged about the prospect of blessing, as we seek to live for the Lord and to serve Him. The word hope is not used in these verses, but the idea is there. Consider:

- 1) 1 Cor. 15:58.
- 2) Gal. 6:9.
- 3) Psa. 126:5, 6.
- 4) Isa. 55:10, 11.

Abraham was a good example of these three qualities that Paul mentioned here in 1 Thess. 1:3. Cf. Heb. 6:9-15.

"Patience" does not just mean waiting. It means that, but it includes much more than that. Patience means that we wait, but we wait expectantly, and we persevere in our lives and in our work while we wait. You have heard of the perseverance of the saints. This is what Paul was rejoicing in as he remembered the Thessalonian believers. They persevered in a two-fold hope:

- 1) They believed that God would bless their work.

2) They believed that their work was of eternal importance. They lived by faith, they served by faith, they labored long and hard, and they persevered knowing that the blessing of the Lord was sure to come. It did not mean that the Lord did all that they wanted Him to do, nor that He worked when they wanted Him to. But it means that they knew that He would work in His own time, and way, and for His own glory as well as for their blessing and the blessing of others, and so, by God's grace, they refused to give up. This is what made Paul rejoice. This was the basis of the report which Silas and Timothy had brought back to him from their return visit to Thessalonica.

But notice: They patiently worked in hope, not in themselves, nor in their diligence and faithfulness, but "in our Lord Jesus Christ." To them the Lord Jesus Christ was a living Lord, a victorious Lord, a faithful Lord, and they knew that they could not trust Him nor serve Him in vain.

Our hope should be in the same Person. Is it? All of our work is in vain unless the Lord blesses. You and I will never be able to turn a single sinner to Christ. You and I will never be able to build up a single believer in the faith. This is the work of the Lord, and it is imperative that we have His blessing.

One more thing about this third verse: All that Paul said that the church was doing was "in the sight of God and our Father." "Sight" means presence. How was Paul using this expression?

It could mean one of two things, or possibly both.

It could have meant (1) that he, Paul, was "remembering" all of this as in the presence of the Lord. He looked at their lives and ministry as in the presence of the Lord, mindful that it was God Who was working in them. But it could also mean (2) that their "work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope" were all done under the all-seeing eye of their heavenly Father. This would seem to be supported by what we read a few minutes ago in Heb. 6:10:

For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.

This is what gives us the greatest encouragement in the Lord's work, and the greatest incentive to be faithful, in our lives and in our work. The Lord's eye is upon us continually. What blessing it should bring to us to know that what we are doing, and the manner in which we are doing it, is pleasing to the Lord.

John Eadie says, "Faith is child-like, hope is saint-like, but love is God-like" (p. 38). "And now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor. 13:13).

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1:4 This verse belongs with verse 3.

"Knowing," or as Milligan translated it, "'having come to know'" (p. 7). Being in the perfect tense, it would suggest that he had arrived at that knowledge, and continued to be convinced of their election by God. But we might ask, "How did Paul come to know that they were the elect by God? Was it because the Thessalonians said that they were? Or was it because they had been receptive to Paul and his message? Both of these questions

could have supplied a part of the answer, but the main reason Paul could make this statement was because of the evidence that he referred to in the preceding verse. It was because of their "work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ." And it would seem that special emphasis would be placed upon the word patience. They had not only started to behave as Christians, but they were persevering. They were continuing on in spite of the opposition they had faced from people in Thessalonica, especially Jews. Persecution makes some people fall away, as the Lord indicated by the Parable of the Sower. The people who are represented by the stony ground are those, as our Lord said, who do not have root in themselves. They last a little while, but "when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended" (Matt. 13:21).

However, the Thessalonian believers had not stumbled. They had not turned back. They continued to show the evidences of spiritual life. And so we can say that the three traits mentioned in verse 3 must be found in all who are really saved. These can be added to those the Apostle John mentioned in his first epistle. We need to look for the presence of these in our own lives. None will be there in perfection. Nor will we all manifest them to the same degree. But they all should be there.

"Brethren beloved" -- This is the only time that this exactly same expression is found in the NT, although Jude 1 comes close to it: "sanctified by God the Father." Some of the better MSS have, beloved of God the Father. Here in Thessalonians it would appear that Paul did not mean that they were the beloved of the Father (although they were), but that they were "beloved" to him, Paul, and "beloved" because they were "brethren." Paul used the term "brethren" in 2:1, 14, 17; 3:7; 4:1, 10.

The use of this expression was evidence of Paul's salvation, a big change that had taken place in his own life. Cf. 1 John 3:14. Prior to his salvation he had hated Christians; now he loved them, loved them with a very special love. "Brethren" suggests that they were all members of the family of God. Notice that verse 3 ends with a reference to "God and our Father."

The commentaries point out that this expression, "brethren," which the Lord's people used for each other, was in common use until the third century. Then it seems to have become more of a pulpit word, as it mainly is today. But "brethren," or its singular form, "brother," are excellent ways for us to address each other. "Brethren" was used not only for the men of the church, but for all of the believers, men and women regardless of age.

"Your election of God" -- We all should notice that Paul made this doctrine of election a part of his thanksgiving to the Lord. Most people have trouble with it initially, but, once we know it, it becomes one of the greatest of all NT truths. It means that our salvation is not primarily traceable to our faith, but to God's sovereign choice of us. This is hard for many to accept when so much has been made of man's so-called "free will." Actually man's will is not free at all. It is in bondage to sin, and does not freely receive Christ until God works in us and sets us free from our sin.

This word "election" is used six other times in the NT "and always [*italics mine*] with reference to the divine choice" (Milligan, p. 8). Cf. Acts 9:15; Rom. 9:11; 11:5, 7, 28; 2 Pet. 1:10. The verb form is used in

1 Cor. 1:27 ff.; Eph. 1:4. When we remember what our Lord said in John 6:37 and 44, we can be so thankful that God in His grace has chosen us. And the doctrine of election is our only hope that we can expect to see people saved through the preaching of the Gospel. However, let us not be content, either with ourselves or others, with a mere profession of faith. Let us look for the same evidence which Paul saw in the lives of those who had confessed Christ in Thessalonica. As anyone becomes acquainted with the teaching of assurance in Scripture, he (or she) can see that one of the greatest problems we face in the Lord's work today is that of having unregenerate people in our churches. However, the more the Word of God is taught, the less will this be a problem. People who do not know the Lord are not going to be satisfied with just the teaching of the Word. And we need to watch carefully those who are always agitating for more than the Word of God.

I have noticed that some writers try to make election the same as the call of God. They are not the same. God has chosen us in eternity past; the call comes to us today through the ministry of the Word.

But let us be sure to notice that there is another way in which Paul was made conscious of the sovereign choice of God relating to those who had believed in Thessalonica. This is pointed out for us in verse 5.

1:5 It was to be seen in the way the blessing of God accompanied the preaching of Paul, Silas, and Timothy.

Many times when the Word is preached it appears that it is "in word only." That is, the Word is preached, but we do not see any outward evidence of blessing. We have no guarantee from Scripture that every time we preach we are going to see special blessing from the Lord. But the fact that Paul saw it, and experienced it, in Thessalonica was evidence to him and his co-workers that God had His chosen ones there whom He intended to bring to Himself. And so he saw that the preaching of the Word was with "in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance." Let us seek to understand what he meant.

Before we finish looking at verse 5, look ahead to verses 6 through 8 where we have even further evidence of the Thessalonian believers' election of God. It was to be seen in the way they responded to the preaching of the Gospel, and then the results which followed. (Read vv. 6-8.)

But let us get back to verse 5.

"For" is the translation of the common Greek word, _____, because. This gives added confirmation that Paul was pointing out how he had become convinced of their election by God.

"Our gospel came" -- Paul was not thinking here of the act of preaching, but of the message he preached. He did speak of it as "our gospel" because it had originated with them, but because it was the message by which they had been saved, and because it was the message which they proclaimed everywhere they went. "Came" suggests that the initiative was taken by Paul, Silas, and Timothy, not by the Thessalonian people. They did not ask for the Gospel; it "came" through the sovereign working of God in the lives of His servants.

"Not in word only" -- This means that the gospel did come in to them in preaching. Paul always preached the same message whether people were

receptive of not. But sometimes, as in Thessalonica, he saw great blessing; at other times and in other places, he did not see the same blessing. But his message was always the same. The message must never be changed. Nor must we give people something besides the message just because the people we are trying to reach do not seem to be receptive. But how thankful we can be when we see the blessing of God upon the ministry of His Word.

"But also in power" -- The mighty power of the Gospel had been exhibited in Thessalonica. It is a word which is often used of miraculous power, and, of course, there is no greater miracle than that which takes place in the salvation of a soul. Eadie said that the word "power" here "denotes the mighty eloquence and the overwhelming force with which they preached" (pp. 41, 42). By "eloquence" he did not mean the impressiveness of their speech from a human standpoint, but how they were enabled to speak convincingly to the people of Thessalonica.

"And in the Holy Spirit" -- This was not something additional, but explained why they were able to speak with such power. Cf. what Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 2:1-5. The same word for "power," _____, is used in verses 4 and 5 as in our text.

"And in much assurance" -- Vine says that this word describes not only the absolute confidence with which the Gospel was preached in Thessalonica, but also the willingness and freedom of spirit which Paul, Silas, and Timothy experienced in their ministry there. We sometimes describe such preaching as being with liberty.

The remainder of the verse shows that there was another factor which entered into the tremendous blessing which these men experienced in their ministry in Thessalonica. It is in the words, "as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake."

"What manner of men" -- I.e., the kind of men we were spiritually. Paul enlarged upon this in chapter 2. See esp. 2:10. The messenger is always a part of the message, and the spiritual condition of the messenger is a big factor in determining the effectiveness of the Gospel. This was true not only of Paul, Silas, and Timothy, but it is just as true for each one of us today.

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And so it is clear that one way we can know that the Lord is at work in reaching His elect is by the "power" and evidence of the blessing of the Holy Spirit which accompanies the preaching of the Word of God. So two things are very important in preaching:

- 1) We must preach the Word.
- 2) We must be spiritually prepared to be messengers of the Word. This calls for prayer, humility, obedience to the Lord, and holiness of life--all of these blended together.

But there was another way in which Paul understood their "election of God," and that is given to us in verse 6.

1:6 "And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord."

He did not say, "Because you made a profession of faith in Christ." They certainly did that in some way and at some time, but there are many who

profess to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ who never get any farther than that. What convinced Paul that God had done a work in their hearts was that the became followers. The point that Paul was making here was that their lives were changed! They no longer lived as people live who do not know the Savior, but they obviously wanted to live like the people of God.

It is interesting to me to see the order of the words, "followers of us, and of the Lord." You would think that Paul would have said, followers of the Lord, and of us. But he didn't say it that way. He said, "followers of us, and of the Lord." What are we to learn from this?

It is this: Our first lessons in learning how to live as Christians are learned from those who lead us to Christ, or those who have been Christians before us. Therefore, how important it is for each of us to be following the Lord so that younger believers will get a good start if they live like we do.

Last Sunday night I spoke on the Holy Spirit from the book of 1 Corinthians. And I reminded those who were here that the Corinthian church was a spiritually troubled church. They had many, many problems, and Paul did various things to help them. One thing that I did not mention Sunday night was that Paul told them to do what we are reading here that the Thessalonian believers did as soon as they were saved. It is recorded for us in 1 Cor. 11:1. This is what Paul told the Corinthian believers to do:

Be ye followers of me,
even as I also am of Christ.

One of the best things that young believers can do in learning to live as Christians is to follow the example of an older believer who is walking with the Lord.

We don't know if Paul told the Thessalonians to do this, or if they just did it because they did not know what else to do. But the point is that they did it.

In both 1 Cor. 11:1 and here in 1 Thess. 1:6 Paul used the verb to follow from which we get our English word mimic. That word today has become a word which we associate with a comedian. When a person mimics another person, it often means that they are making fun of them, or even ridiculing them, to amuse others. A comedian who mimics another person may try to imitate the way they talk, or the way they walk, or certain mannerisms which they have. But it is not serious. In fact, when one person mimics another it is to make you feel like you don't want to be like that person. An impersonator is a mimic. A lot of people mimic the way Ross Perot speaks. Any person who is in public very much is in danger of being mimicked. Sometimes when I have been leading singing, and waving my arms around, I have looked down into the congregation to see some little child doing what I have been doing--waving his arms around!

So, in our day this word is associated with doing something amusing to imitate what someone else does. A mimic is an actor, a person who acts like someone else, but mainly for the purpose of making fun of them.

It may have had that same meaning in NT times, but W. E. Vine says in his Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words that it is always used in a good sense in the NT. Paul used it again in 1 Thess. 2:14. (Read.) Now Paul did not mean that the young believers did what the older believers did to make fun of them, but they did what the older believers did because they wanted to be like them! How fortunate you were if right after you

were saved you were under the influence of an older, godly believer who was really living in fellowship with the Lord. To desire to be like the people of God is evidence of a person's "election of God."

How would you mimic, i.e., become a follower of an older Christian?

You would want to learn how they lived, and why they lived the way they did. You would learn about the place that the Bible had in their lives, how they prayed, what they would do, and what they would not do. You would learn about their desire to avoid sin, and to become holy. You would learn about their love for the Lord. And you would find that it could not be just like a comedian who was a mimic, just an outward imitation, but that it all had to come from the heart in order to be genuine, to be real.

This is one reason I like to read the biographies of godly men and women. I want to learn more about how they walked with the Lord so that it can help me in my walk with the Lord. I have a lot of friends who are in heaven whom I never knew here on earth. Many of them were in heaven before I was born. But I have gotten acquainted with them through their biographies.

The Lord has given Lucille and me the privilege of knowing many people who have helped us in our lives as Christians. Many of you have been a help to me. Annette Johnson was a person like that--an example for others to follow.

But now let me ask all of us a question. Are we living in such a way so that, by the grace of God, we could say to our younger brothers and sisters in Christ, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ"? Or maybe I could state it this way: Do I live for the Lord in such a way that others would want to follow me? Or let me ask it in still another way: If all believers were just like I am, would I feel that they were at least headed in the right direction? We would all be hesitant to say that we are what we should be because we know we are not. But Paul was not speaking here about perfection; he was speaking about a holy walk.

Illus: I think that it was Dr. Alan Redpath, who formerly was pastor of the Moody Church in Chicago who told this story. It took place during World War II. He and his family lived in London at the time where, if I remember correctly, he was the pastor of a church. One night the air raid sirens began to sound, and bombs were heard dropping in the city. His little girl was upstairs in bed, and she began to cry because she was afraid that the bombs were going to hit their home. Dr. Redpath went upstairs, sat on her bed, took her in his arms, and sought to comfort her talking to her about the Lord. And they prayed together, asking the Lord to take care of them. A little later the all-clear signal was given, and the raid was over. Before Dr. Redpath went downstairs he prayed for his little girl and thanked the Lord for taking care of them. Then his little girl prayed. I don't remember if he asked her if she wanted to pray, or if she just began to pray. But this was her prayer: "Dear Father, when I grow up, make me big and strong like my Daddy." What did she want? She wanted to mimic her Daddy. When Dr. Redpath told this story, he said that was not what he wanted his little girl to be. He wanted her to be much stronger in the Lord than he had been during his life.

Those of us who are parents and grandparents have a big responsibility on our hands, don't we? We want our children and grandchildren to know the

Lord, and to love Him, and to trust Him, and to walk with Him. But you know as well as I do that that is not an easy life to live, not in this world. But how much easier it is when you can look around, or look in a book, or look in the Scriptures, and see a godly example to follow. When you read the epistles of Paul, get acquainted with Paul, see how he lives, **AND THEN FOLLOW HIM!** Or best of all, study the life of our Lord, **AND FOLLOW HIM!** Follow the person, whether man or woman, young or old, who will help you to know how to mimic the life of our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

However, we are not finished with verse 6.

There was one particular way in which they were following Paul. Listen to what he wrote: "Having received the word in much affliction, with joy in the Holy Spirit."

You and I really have not faced persecution like the early Christians did. Up until now Christians have been respected, and even the world has honored and admired ministers of the Gospel. It was not like that in Thessalonica, and things may change here, too. The world is headed in a way that we cannot go. We can't accept abortions. We cannot accept the lifestyle of homosexuals. We cannot agree with the new definition that has been given to the word family. And these are issues that will not go away. Are we going to continue to follow godly examples even when it may mean suffering for us? The Thessalonian believer did. Things were black and white in those days as far as moral issues were concerned. We as Christians cannot accept situation ethics. We cannot change with the changes we face in the world. Persecution always has a purifying effect upon the Church. Those who merely profess faith in Christ, but who do not possess faith in Christ, will disappear. But the true Christian will stand--as they always have!

But there is a wonderful thing about persecution. The Lord does not leave us, and neither does the Holy Spirit. And history will tell us that some of the happiest hours in the Church, and the most fruitful hours have been during times when the Church has been the object of persecution. That is why Paul added, "with joy of the Holy Spirit."

Let me give you an example of this from the book of Acts. Please turn to chapter 5. Beginning with verse 12 we read about the miracles which the apostles were performing in Jerusalem, and the trouble that it stirred up with the Sadducees in particular. The apostles were imprisoned, but an angel of the Lord opened the door of the prison, and told them to go back to the temple and continue preaching. They did. But then the Sanhedrin acted and finally told them what we read in verse 40 of Acts 5. What is important is to see the reaction of the apostles as stated in verses 41 and 42. (Read.) God gave them grace to persevere, and the Holy Spirit gave them "joy" as they sought to do the will of God.

But this still is not the end of the evidence that proved to Paul that these Thessalonians were the elect of God. Look at what we have in verse 7.

1:7 In verse 6 Paul said what they "became." Here in verse 7 we have the word "were," but it is a form of the same verb which we had in verse 6, and it also means became in this verse as well. They became "examples," or examples, "to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia."

The Greek word for "ensamples" is the word _____, from which we get our word, type. They had become types for the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. What did this mean?

Well, it meant that they became to the believers in Macedonia and Achaia what Paul had been to them. They had mimicked Paul; the believers in Macedonia and Achaia mimicked them. You see, you don't just mimic another person because he is a Christian; you want to make sure that he (or she) reflects as a pattern what a Christian should be.

What were Macedonia and Achaia?

They were what we would call states in the Roman Empire. Thessalonica was the chief city, some say the capital, and probably the largest city. Other cities of interest to us in Macedonia were Philippi and Berea. Achaia was just to the south of Macedonia, where Greece is now, and two of the main cities there were Athens and Corinth. It was like the Apostle Paul would say of the believers in Seattle that they were examples to the believers of the whole State of Washington as well as to all of the believers in Oregon. Or that the believers in Portland were examples to all believers in Oregon and to all believers in the State of California. This was a tremendous commendation for the believers in Thessalonica. Just think what it would mean if the Apostle Paul were to say, in effect, "Nothing could be better than for every church to be just like your church," whatever your church might be. Or perhaps it was even more personal than that--not just the church, but the believers who were in the church.

So the life of Paul reflected the life of Christ, it was duplicated by the Thessalonians, and became the pattern for all believers in that area to follow. And this is the way that the Lord intended that His work should continue. Perhaps one reason so many people seem to founder, or flounder (the words are probably related), is because there is such a need for believers who are real examples of what God wants all of us to be. Using this same word, Paul told Timothy,

Let no man despise thy youth;
but be thou an example of the believers,
in word, in conversation, in charity,
in spirit, in faith, in purity (2 Tim. 4:12).

The word type is an interesting word. It speaks of an impression made by striking a blow, like you would have if you took a seal of some kind, and took a mallet, and impressed upon a piece of metal, or even paper, some kind of an impression. It would be like the picture of Lincoln on a penny. Only the impression we are speaking of is that of Christ. The Lord uses the example of believers to strike the blow in our lives which will find us more conformed to the image of Christ than we were before. Perhaps the Lord will use our study of 1 Thessalonians that way as we become better acquainted with Paul and see how much like the Lord Jesus he was.

But what was the result of this divine work which was taking place day by day in the lives of the Thessalonian believers? We see it in verse 8.

1:8 The foundation of a powerful witness is a godly life. And the burden to reach others with the Gospel is the fruit of a godly life. How wonderful it would be if we would only take the Word of God to see how the work of the Lord should be done even in our generation.

Notice what Paul said here. (Read v. 8.)

"From you sounded out the word of the Lord..." "Sounded out" -- It means to sound and resound. It was like the rolling of thunder, or the echo of a blast that can be heard far off in the distance, or as Eadie said, like "the ringing peal of a trumpet" (p. It meant not only that the Thessalonians were spreading the Gospel, but that others were spreading the Gospel, too, as the word got around as to what was going on in Thessalonica. This truly was a great spiritual awakening, perhaps one of the greatest in all of the first century. It may have been that even those who did not know the Lord unwittingly became witnesses as they reported to others what had happened when many of the Thessalonian people turned in faith to God.

Notice the expression, "the word of the Lord." This surely was the Gospel, but Eadie brought out in his commentary that this was the "word having the Lord for its origin, its centre, and its end; His life in it purity and sympathy; His death in its atoning fulness--told in man's language" (p. 47). So the message that spread was not just about the people in Thessalonica who had been saved, but it was about the Lord who had saved them. Too often we speak about the people, but not the Lord. It was different in this case. What had happened to the people had made people talk about the Lord. And the message was so complete that the Apostle Paul said that he could not tell people in those other areas anything that they had not already heard.

What a wonderful thing it would be to see a work of the Lord like that today! Usually an evangelistic meeting calls for a great advertising effort to get people to come. In this case the work in the hearts of the people was the advertisement in and of itself. Thessalonica had never experienced anything like this before. God had moved upon that whole section of the Roman Empire, and it all began when some true men of God came into the city to tell people about the Lord Jesus Christ.

I don't believe that we can do anything to cause God to give us an awakening in our day, but I strongly believe that, if we are to see a revival, a true revival, a God-sent revival, then you and I need to think in terms of our own walk with the Lord. It is impossible for any of us to measure the importance of Paul's words in verse 5 where he wrote, "as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake." And, as I have pointed out before, link this verse with verse 10 of chapter 2. (Read.)

April 12, 1993

"So that we need not to speak any thing" -- There are several places in the Psalms where we have exhortations such as are found in the first two verses of Psalm 105:

O give thanks unto the Lord; call upon his name:
make known his deeds among the people.
Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him:
talk ye of all his wondrous works.

And then in verse 5 of the same Psalm we read,
Remember his marvellous works that he hath done:
his wonders, and the judgments of his mouth.

It is natural for men to boast about the good things that they have done. Paul has much to say in his epistles about boasting and glorying. He warns against boasting in the flesh. On the other hand, he boasted in the

Lord, and gloried in the works of the Lord. The work in Thessalonica had been so phenomenal that it would have taken a true man of God not to boast in the part that he had in that work. And yet Paul felt an obligation to tell what the Lord had done! According to Psalm 105 we are to "make known his deeds among the people." We are to "talk...of all his wondrous works. It was the responsibility of the fathers in Israel to tell their children about the great things that the Lord had done in delivering Israel from Egypt, and then how the Lord had led them to the land of Canaan and had given them the land. Those who had a part in the works of the Lord were not to speak of it as though it had been their work, but they were to glorify the Lord by speaking of the works as His works!

Moses set the pattern for this when he led Israel in singing that great Psalm in Exodus 15 which commemorates the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt and the Egyptians. There is not one reference to Moses in any part of that rather long Psalm. The first verse of the Psalm reads like this:

I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously:
the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.

And so Paul felt an obligation to let people in other places know what the Lord had done in Thessalonica. But he didn't need to do it. The work was so well-known that he said, "So that we need not to speak any thing."

Why was that the case?

Verses 9 and 10 give us the answer.

1:9 The work has been so renowned that the people whom Paul would have told about it, told him. He was speaking of the people in Macedonia and Achaia. This would testify of the genuineness of the work that had been done. The city of Thessalonica was a different city from what it had been. There was still work to be done, but no one could doubt but that a great work had been done.

Contrast this with what we see so often today. Plans are made months ahead of time. Thousands of dollars are spent. Hundreds of people are trained to help. The latest technology is used so as to accommodate the large crowds that will come. But when it is over, what are the results? Too often the city is left just like it was.

It was not that way in Thessalonica. Two men came to town--unannounced. We could say three if Timothy was there for the original mission. They were true men of God. And they began to preach the Gospel. People were saved, and then more people were saved. Eadie said that the work not only started, but it had not subsided. And the Jews who hated what was going on described Paul and Silas in this way. They said, "These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also" (Acts 17:6). There originally were no Christians to advertise the coming of Paul and Silas in that way; this is what the people who were fighting their ministry were saying. What a testimony this was to the power of God and the power of the Gospel! The Jews wanted to give the credit, or blame, to Paul and Silas and Timothy, but Paul and Silas and Timothy knew that the glory belonged to God.

There is a contrast between "we" at the end of verse 8 and the "they" at the beginning of verse 9. As I have said, the people Paul and Silas would have told, told them. "Shew" is the translation of a Greek verb which

means to report or to proclaim. The Spirit of God had done a marvelous work even in this because people everywhere had become preachers of the Word.

But what were they saying?

Verse 9 contains three things--two in the first statement:

- 1) They had "turned to God from idols."
- 2) Their turn was not temporary, but permanent. They turned "to serve the living and true God."

A fourth thing is found in verse 10:

- 3) "And to wait for his Son from heaven." We will take this up in just a moment.

Let me take up the first two together since Paul put them together.

Notice what they did first: "They turned to God."

It was not that they were dissatisfied with their idols. Nor was it because Paul came to Thessalonica to expose the evils of idolatry. Luke, in the book of Acts (17:2, 3), tells us that Paul did this:

And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them
[i.e., into the synagogue],
and three days reasoned with them out of the scriptures,
Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered,
and risen from the dead; and that this Jesus,
whom I preach unto you, is Christ.

Verse 4 of Acts 17 tells us that "some" of the Jews "believed," "and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few."

Paul did not come to denounce Judaism, nor to condemn idolatry. He came to preach Christ, His death and His resurrection. His approach to them was not negative, but positive. Paul and his fellow-workers were Spirit-taught. They knew the ways of the Lord. Paul certainly must have known those words of the Lord when He said,

And I, if I be lifted up from the earth,
will draw all men unto me (John 12:32).

He said this speaking of His death, but the same applies when the death of Christ is proclaimed. It is through the message of the Cross that the Spirit of God "draws" people to Christ, draws "all men," i.e., all kinds of men. It is not by showing people how wrong they are, but by proclaiming Christ and His death on the Cross.

When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he emphasized this very fact. He said,

And I, brethren, when I came to you,
came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom,
declaring unto you the testimony of God.
For I determined not to know any thing among you,
save Jesus Christ, and him crucified (1 Cor. 2:1, 2).

Paul did not go to Corinth to argue philosophy; he went there to preach Christ. This what we need to do. We do not drive people away from what they are doing, but we preach Christ, and He draws them away from their sins.

We need to remember this. This is the Lord's way. God's way of reaching sinners is very different from the way we are inclined to do it.

But when we preach Christ, what happens? What did Paul see? He saw people turning to God, and leaving their idols. And let us be sure to learn that if people do not turn away from their sins, whatever they may be, they really have not turned to God. Cf. 2 Cor. 5:17. How did Paul describe salvation to the Colossian church? He said, speaking of God,
 Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness,
 and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.

As I have said many times before, the Bible knows nothing of a salvation that leaves people unchanged. We pass from spiritual death into spiritual life, and the traits of the old life begin to fall away immediately. There may be a struggle in some cases, but change there will be.

A man by the name of Thomas Chalmers once preached a sermon which he titled, The Expulsive Power of a New Affection. The power of the Gospel causes the sinners sins to fall away. Have you noticed that even in nature we see the truth of the Gospel illustrated. Old leaves may hang on to a tree throughout the winter, but when the tree comes out of its winter dormancy, and new life goes out into the branches, the old leaves fall off to make room for the new leaves. This is what Paul was talking about; they turned to God first, and that meant that they were leaving their idols.

In two Psalms we have a very clear description of idols: Psalm 115 and Psalm 135. Please turn to Psalm 115, and notice with me how they are described. (Explain.) Then turn to Psalm 135. (Note the contrast between "the living and true God" and idols.)

It is quite amazing that the Israelites, who had the truth of God, were always troubled with idolatry. The first two commandments were against idolatry. In the NT it seems that idolatry was particularly the sin of the Gentiles. But it is also a constant threat to us as believers. Actually an idol is anything that takes the Lord's place in our lives. We need to keep in mind what the Apostle John said at the end of his first epistle: "Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen" (1 John 5:21.)

But let us go on to the end of verse 9. Notice the third thing that happened to those who "turned to God from idols." They turned to God to "serve" Him, "the living and true God." They turned from false and dead gods, "to serve the living and true God."

To serve the Lord includes much more than we normally think of when we talk about service. We think of preaching or teaching. We think of doing things in our churches, or in connection with some mission. But serving the Lord begins before any of those things. It has to do with our submission to the Lord, our obedience to His will, and it even has to do with being what the Lord wants us to be. It also includes what we consider to be service, but a greater emphasis is upon how the servant lives.

"To serve" is a present infinitive. It speaks of something that is going to go on and on. In other words, the change was not temporary, but permanent. The people who turned to God, did not expect to go back to their idols. They intended to spend the rest of their lives doing the will of "the living and true God." This was probably what made the Lord's work in Thessalonica attract so much attention throughout that part of the Roman world. Turning to God is the only way that people can find a permanent solution to the sins. And it needs to be said that the only way

that anyone can truly turn to God is by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. As our Lord said, and His words are recorded in John 14:6, "I am the way, ...no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."

But there is still one more point, a fourth one, which Paul mentioned as characteristic of the change that had taken place in the people of Thessalonica who had "turned to God." And this we find in verse 10.

1:10 "And to wait for his Son from heaven."

"To wait" is another present infinitive, expressing something that is going to continue.

John Henry Thayer, in his Greek lexicon, pointed out that this is the only time this particular word is used in the NT. And he said that it speaks of awaiting "one whose coming is known or foreseen...with the added notion of patience and trust" (p. 40).

I have pointed out before that every chapter in this epistle ends with some reference to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul, in the short time that he was in Thessalonica, had gotten around to teaching them about the coming of the Lord. This word, "to wait," means not only that they had been told that He was coming (and so they knew it), but they really believed that He was coming, and they were patiently waiting for Him to return, expecting that it could be any day. All of that is bound up in that one word, _____.

Furthermore, this verse tells us that they believed in the Deity of our Lord. They believed that He had died, and that He had been raised from the dead. So it was possible for Him to come back. They believed in His true humanity, as Paul's use of the Name "Jesus" would indicate. And they believed that the Lord, by Himself, and by His death and resurrection, had "delivered" them "from the wrath to come." We could translate "to come" as coming, the coming wrath. The idea is that it was most assuredly coming, and that there was no way to escape it except through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so we see that two events were certain to come:

- 1) The return of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- 2) The judgment of God upon all who did not believe in Christ.

And so there are only two prospects for the future: heaven, or hell. The only way to escape the latter is by turning to Christ which the Thessalonian believers had done, not on their own, but according to the grace and power of God. And it was for this that Paul was giving thanks to God beginning with verse 2.

Verses 9 and 10 tell us that the Thessalonians had learned a great deal of theology in the short time that they had been saved. And these convictions were a part of the report that had been circulated about them, apparently even by people who did not even know the Lord.

And so what was the full report?

- 1) They had "turned to God from idols."
- 2) It was a permanent change. They expected that every day for the rest of their lives that they would be serving "the living and true God."
- 3) As they "served the living and true God," they also were patiently expecting that any day the Lord would return for them. Their main interest had turned from earth to heaven.

And we could also add:

4) That they had turned to the Lord knowing that it was through His death on the Cross that they were on their way to heaven instead of hell.

What a wonderful chapter this is! And what great lessons there are here for us to learn about the ways of the Lord in the lives of His people, and of the way He works to turn guilty, hell-bound sinners to Himself, "the living and true God," through faith in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

In our contact with the people of the world, let us not go to take away from them what they have. Let's go to tell them about Christ. If God is pleased to use His Word, they will turn to Christ and let go of the things which used to mean so much to them.

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THE FIRST EPISTLE OF PAUL TO THE THESSALONIANS

1 Thessalonians 2:1-16

April 19, 1993

Intro: Thus far in our study of this epistle we have had Paul's greeting in verse 1 of chapter 1, which was followed with Paul's thankful review of God's work in Thessalonica. This occupied the remainder of chapter 1.

In chapter 2, verses 1-16, Paul reviewed the nature of his ministry among them. This is one of those important passages in the NT which describes for us what the ministry ought to be. It tells us what Paul's message was. It tells us his manner of ministry. It tells us what he did not do. And we see throughout this section that there was a keen awareness on Paul's part, and on that of his co-workers, that God was in charge of their ministry. We can see that they knew that they were utterly dependent upon God for His blessing. Nevertheless, Paul did not overlook the importance of the one who ministered. And so we can see how carefully he watched his own motives and conduct because, above all else, he wanted to please God.

It seems, from the nature of what Paul had to say (at least in part), that Paul was answering charges that had been raised against him and his co-workers, charges which had been designed to make the Thessalonian believers suspicious of Paul, his message, and his motives. As George Milligan said in his commentary, it was something of a formal defense of his ministry. His attackers were probably Jews who were trying to reverse the effect that Paul's ministry had produced in Thessalonica. So this part of the epistle served a twofold purpose:

- 1) It reinforced the nature of Paul's ministry.
- 2) It answered the criticisms which had been raised against him.

Let me read for you the first sixteen verses of chapter 2. (Read.)

2:1. In verse 9 of chapter 1 Paul spoke of "what manner of entering in" to Thessalonica he and Silas and Timothy had. And here in the first verse of chapter 2 we see that he spoke of their "entrance" again. This is an interesting expression, and a curious way to describe the nature of their ministry in Thessalonica--an entering in. Actually it was an open door. God had opened the door, and regardless of the opposition which these servants of the Lord had experienced, the door could not be closed. The Lord was the One Who made sure that it was "not in vain." The way in which Paul expressed "that is was not in vain" (the perfect, _____) indicated that the fruit had remained. It was not a work which had generated much excitement while Paul was there, and then died out. It was a work that had continued on. And Paul appealed to the Thessalonians on the basis that they knew that this was true.

By "vain" Paul was indicating that his enemies had said that his message had no substance to it, and that the changes which had appeared would soon pass away and be forgotten.

Paul used this word (_____) again in chapter 3, verse 5. He was concerned himself that his labor not be "in vain." That is why he was so overjoyed when Timothy came back with his good report of the work in Thessalonica, and that the people were anxious to have Paul come back.

The Lord does not always work like he did in Thessalonica, but we have His promise that His word will not return unto him void. Cf. Isa. 55:10, 11:
For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven,

and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth,
and maketh it bring forth and bud,
that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater:
So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth:
it shall not return unto me void,
but it shall accomplish that which I please,
and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.

It is interesting that the Lord spoke of the word going forth out of His mouth, and then returning to Him again. Paul and Silas and Timothy were the instruments, but it was actually God who was doing the work.

2:2 Shortly before Paul and Silas came to Thessalonica, they had been in Philippi. There they had "suffered, and were shamefully treated." Actually the word means that they were abused. Not only were they beaten, but they had been humiliated as Roman citizens. Paul's rights as a Roman citizen had been violated, and he let them know what they had done. But it is important to see that he did not take action against them.

However, he wanted the Thessalonians to know that, in spite of the trouble he had in Philippi, he came to Thessalonica to do the same thing: to preach "the Gospel of God." To do this required a great deal of God-given courage. The NIV uses the word "dared." Notice the phrase, "bold in our God." This is why I call it "God-given." Paul was just as human as you and I are, and so it was only by the grace of God that he could possibly continue on in a ministry which brought on so much suffering.

This is one way the Devil seeks to intimidate us as the people of God. We run into opposition in presenting the Gospel, and so the next time we are hesitant to speak about the Lord. But that was not the case with the Apostle Paul. He did not like trouble, but he expected it, and did not let it keep him from telling people about the Lord Jesus Christ.

They found the same response in Thessalonica that they had in Philippi. He described it as "contention." From the Greek word Paul used we get our word agony. He had a fight on his hands. And so, in a relatively short period of time, history was repeating itself.

2:3 Paul's message was "the gospel of God." This means the Gospel which comes from God, which originated with Him. And so it was God's Gospel. It came from God. There would have been no Gospel if it had not been for God--the Gospel of God's grace.

And so he could say that their "exhortation" was not in error! It was pure truth. Nor did they have "impure motives" (NIV). This is what "uncleanness" means. Nor were they trying to deceive or to trick them in some way ("guile"). Matthew Henry said, "He did not pretend one thing and intend another" (Vol. VI, p. 775).

Paul evidently had been charged with all of these things, and to what extent we do not know. But Paul flatly denied any selfish ambition, any lust for power, any desire for money, any sinister purpose of any kind. He totally rejected all of these charges. How important it is for all of us to make sure that we can say the same thing! In our doctrine and in our personal lives and affairs we need to be like Paul said he was. His words are recorded in Acts 24:16:

And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.

In these verses Paul sounded very much like he did in 2 Cor.4:1, 2 (and even down through verse 7). (Read.)

2:4. Beginning with this verse the Apostle Paul sought to prove the claims that he had made in verse 3.

We could translate the beginning of this verse, "But as we were approved of God to be entrusted with the Gospel..."

Paul certainly did not mean that there was some worthiness which God saw in him, and so he was called, chosen, commissioned to preach the Gospel. No, he meant that he had been sovereignly appointed, or, as we would say today, called, to preach the Gospel. And it is apparent that he considered his ministry as a stewardship for which he was primarily responsible to God. Paul was showing that it is when men realize their divine calling that they are faithful to the message and seek to be as they should be in their relationships with people.

When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he had this to say about his ministry:
Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ,
and stewards of the mysteries of God.
Moreover it is required in stewards,
that a man be found faithful (1 Cor. 4:1, 2).

The servant of the Lord has a tremendous responsibility laid upon Him. It is a twofold responsibility: (1) to be faithful to God and the message which God has committed to him; and (2) to be faithful in his own life and in his relationships with people. It has always been the case that the progress of the Gospel has been related to the faithfulness of those who minister the Gospel. Paul here sets the pattern for all who serve the Lord to follow. Our primary task is to please God, not people. We are to give people, not what they may think that they want, but what God says that they need. And there is a big difference between the two. Much damage has been done in the work of the Lord through men who have been unfaithful in the work of the Lord. On the other hand, much good has resulted when the Lord's servants have sought to be like our Lord in His service to God, and to be like Paul and Silas and Timothy and Peter and John and a host of others throughout the history of Israel and the Church.

Note Paul's words to the Galatian churches in Gal. 1:6-24.

Our Lord Jesus Christ said concerning His life and His ministry,
And he that sent me is with me;
the Father hath not left me alone;
for I do always those things that please him (John 8:29).

In our text Paul indicated that the reason that he was so concerned about pleasing God was because it is "God, which trieth our hearts." This ought to be a warning to us not to be like the Pharisees who were hypocrites. We are not actors; we are stewards. We are messengers of the Word of God. The nature of our lives and of our ministries is not finally to be judged by men, but by God. "Trieth" means that the value of our ministry will be determined by the Lord. And He does not just try the appearance of our ministry, the things which people can see, but He looks at our hearts. Solomon wrote,

Keep thy heart with all diligence;
for out of it are the issues of life (Prov. 4:23).

No better advice can be given to anyone who knows the Lord and who seeks

to serve Him. David may have been the youngest son of Jesse, but spiritually he was far ahead of his older brothers. Cf. the Lord's words to Samuel in 1 Samuel 16:7:

Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature;
because I have refused him (Eliab):
for the Lord seeth not as man seeth;
for man looketh on the outward appearance,
but the Lord looketh on the heart.

We may not see blessing like Paul did, but we are just as responsible as he was to make sure that our hearts are right before God.

This verse (v. 4) really gives us the basic principle upon which Paul's ministry was founded. God had entrusted him with the message of the Gospel of God's grace. He was not only responsible to God for the content of His message, but He was responsible for the life he lived. In both of these areas his primary concern was that he was pleasing God.

And so in view of this he went on to remind the Thessalonians of other details of his life and ministry.

2:5 Because he wanted to please God, there was never a single occasion during his ministry in Thessalonica that he used "flattering words." What did he have in mind? What is flattery?

Flattery is insincere praise to win favor. Solomon wrote in Prov.29:5, "A man that flattereth his neighbour spreadeth a net for his feet." It is not wrong to compliment people if you really mean it, and to be grateful for what they are, or what they have done for you. But to compliment someone because you want something from them, or are trying to get them to do something, is wrong, very wrong. Flattery is often used in trying to get people to trust in the Lord. Paul never did that. He was never guilty of insincerity. And the Thessalonians knew that he was not a flatterer.

Nor did he have "a cloke of covetousness." The Apostle Peter condemned the false teachers of his day who "through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you" (2 Pet. 2:3a). Paul was not motivated by a covetous spirit so as to take advantage of the people. He was not seeking his good at the expense of theirs.

And for all of this Paul took God as his Witness, knowing that God looks on our hearts, and tries every word which we speak by what is going on in our hearts. Paul frequently used this expression, "God is witness," or its equivalent, to show that he was completely sincere in what he was saying.

And then he continued in verse 6.

2:6 "Nor of men sought we glory." The way Paul expressed this in his second letter to the Corinthians was to say, "For we preach not our selves." Paul's ministry was always characterized by the greatest humility. This was true also of the life and ministry of our Lord. Cf. Matt. 11:29, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me..."

Paul was not interested in making a name for himself, in making sure that everyone knew who he was. He did not try to lord it over people. He did not do what he did to be seen of men. Think of what Paul said to the

Philippians in Phil. 2:3, 4 and then in vv. 5-8.

They had not even "been burdensome as the apostles of Christ." That is, they did not come to have the Thessalonians support them. We know from what Paul wrote later to the Corinthians (in 1 Cor. 9) that he knew he had the right to expect support from them, but that was not his purpose in going to them, and he did not take advantage of what he had a perfect right to do. He did not come to Thessalonica to receive, but to give. As with the Corinthians, he did not seek theirs, but them. Cf. 2 Cor. 12:14.

While only Paul was actually an apostle, yet Silas and Timothy were apostles in the sense that they had been sent forth from the Lord with a message and a mission, but not in the official sense that the Apostle Paul was. These were men who believed, as the Lord said in Matt. 6:33, that, if they concentrated on serving the Lord and doing His will, the Lord would take care of their needs.

April 20, 1993

2:7. Instead of having a ministry which could be described by the words Paul used in verses 3 and 5 and 6, he, his ministry, and the ministries of those who were with him. could best be characterized as he portrayed it in verses 7 through 12.

There was a gentleness about them which was like that of a nurse caring for her children.

In 2 Tim. 2:24 where Paul was describing how the servant of the Lord should do his work, he said this:

And the servant of the Lord must not strive;
but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient.

These are the only two times that this word is used in the NT. Eadie explained Paul's words in the following way:

So far from seeking human glory, so far from insisting on official standing and prerogative, and exacting recognition and service, we were "gentle in the midst of you"; we are each of us as one of yourselves... Our deportment was mild, quiet, unassuming, and affectionate (p. 65).

Matthew Henry had this to say:

Such a behaviour greatly recommends religion, and is most agreeable to God's gracious dealing with sinners, in and by the gospel. This great apostle, though he abhorred and avoided flattery, was most condescending to all men. He accommodates himself to all men's capacities, and became all things to all men. He showed the kindness and care of a nurse that cherishes her children. The word of God is indeed powerful; and as it comes often with awful authority upon the minds of men, as it always has enough in it to convince every impartial judgment, so it comes with more pleasing power, when the ministers of the gospel recommend themselves to the affections of the people (Vol. VI, pp. 775, 776).

And so once again we are reminded that the ways of God are far different, and far higher and better, than the ways of men. The power of a servant of the Lord can be traced not only to his message, but also to his manner. That is a point which Paul made very clear in his writing to the church at Thessalonica.

It is very interesting to notice Paul's manner before he was saved in contrast with the way he and his co-workers approached the people of

Thessalonica. Luke described his procedure in Acts 9:1, 2:

And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.

The change in Paul, his manner and his method, can only be explained in terms of the transforming grace of God. Previously Paul had been like a wild beast, panting and snorting, rushing upon his prey, intending to resort to murder if such were necessary, unwilling to be stopped by anyone or anything. But Christ changed the heart of this raging Jew and made him as gentle as a woman.

After mentioning his gentleness, Paul went on to describe what he meant by that in the following verses.

2:8 One writer has suggested (Wohlenberg, quoted by Milligan, p. 28) that this might be "the language of the nursery." That is, that Paul's feeling toward the Thessalonians was similar to the way an adult might feel and speak to a baby or to a young child. And Paul was so moved by his love for them, and his desire to see them saved, that he was willing, not only to endure the afflictions that had been placed upon him, but to die in his attempt to reach them, if that were necessary.

And so, while Paul was gentle in his manner, he was as strong as anyone could be in his determination to reach the people of Thessalonica with the Gospel, even though it meant martyrdom for him.

And so we see the two ingredients that are essential in the preaching of the Gospel:

- 1) The faithful delivery of the Word of God in all of its truth.
- 2) An affectionate and gentle manner toward those we are trying to reach.

We see the gentleness of our Lord when, as His enemies had done the worst that they could do, He cried out from the Cross, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). The coming of Christ was an expression of the love of God and the love for Christ for those they intended to save. And so the Apostle Paul was walking in the steps of the Lord Jesus Christ Whom he loved more than life itself.

Matthew Henry wrote:

The apostle had a most affectionate love to their persons, and sought them, not theirs; themselves, not their goods; and to gain them, not to be a gainer by them, or to make a merchandise of them: it was their spiritual and eternal welfare and salvation that he was earnestly desirous of (Vol. VI, p. 776).

This was really the first expression of his gentleness.

But there was a characteristic in Paul's preaching that is rare in our day, and probably was rare in his. He said, "We were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls." This meant two things:

- 1) That he gave the highest priority to the preaching of "the gospel of God."
- 2) That he would let no difficulty, no danger to his own life, stand in the way of his ministry to them. He would let no obstacle stand in the way. He did not seek his own advantage, but theirs.

2:9 Have you noticed how often the Apostle Paul appealed to the memory of the Thessalonians in his defence of his ministry? Here he said, "For ye remember." In 1:5 he said, "As ye know." In 2:1 he said, "For yourselves, brethren, know..." We see "as ye know" again in 2:2. And he said the same thing again in 2:5. And he continued this in verse 10 with the words, "Ye are witnesses. In verse 11 he began with, "As ye know..." Therefore, Paul not only took God as his Witness (v. 5), but also the Thessalonians themselves, as to the character and purpose of his life and ministry among them. They knew that Paul's accusers were lying, that Paul's enemies hated him because of the Gospel which he proclaimed, and not because Paul had any sinister motives in going to Thessalonica.

What did he call upon them to remember?

Their "labour and travail." Paul had worked preaching the Gospel and supporting himself to the point where he was so weary that his strength was completely exhausted. So that they could understand from this that Paul had not come to take away from the Thessalonians, but to give to them. He did not want their money; he wanted to give them the Gospel and see them turn to Christ. He did not come to put a burden upon them, i.e., to "be chargeable unto any of you"; he came to preach the Gospel unto them so that their burden of sin could be lifted.

We are not to think from this verse that Paul worked around the clock, either making tents, or preaching, or both. But it does mean that he worked as much as he needed to work, long hours, but giving all of the time possible to the preaching of the Gospel, so concerned was he to see those people whom he loved turn to Christ. And it is the more amazing when we stop to remember that this was a Jew speaking about reaching Gentiles with the Gospel. Before Paul was saved, he hated Gentiles. But afterwards he loved them and sought diligently to lead them to Christ.

And so he continued by reminding them that they were witnesses that what he was saying was the absolute truth.

April 26, 1993

2:10 Again he asked them to remember the past when he called upon them as witnesses of the truthfulness of what he was saying, taking God as his Witness as well (see v.5b) of their character and behavior among them when he, Silas, and Timothy were among them. He mentioned three characteristics:

- 1) "Holily."
- 2) "Justly."
- 3) "Unblameably."

The first two are positive; the third is negative. Turretin and Bengel (referred to by Eadie, p. 71) may have been right when they said that the first of these words referred to God, the second to the people, and the third to Paul, Silas, and Timothy themselves. Trench (pp. 328, 329) said that in classical Greek "holily" is used of one who is "careful of his duties toward God" and "justly" of one who is careful about his duties toward men. The two together would render Paul and his co-workers unblamable. This does not mean that they were perfect. But it means that as far as anything outward could be observed, their conduct was always above reproach.

"Among you that believe" -- Paul was always careful about the testimony of

his life with those who were without Christ. But here we see that he was equally concerned that his life be as it should in his dealings with those who believe.

In 1 Thess. 1:6 Paul had mentioned how the believers at Thessalonica had become "followers of us, and of the Lord." Here in 2:10 we can see that one of his purposes for a godly behavior was that the people of God would see how he lived, and seek by God's grace to live the same way. And all of this undoubtedly contributed to the power and fruitfulness of the Gospel in Thessalonica. This is brought out in the next two verses.

2:11 In verse 7 Paul had compared his gentleness to that of a nurse taking care of children. Here he likened his manner to a father with his children.

Cf. 1 Cor. 4:14-16; 2 Cor. 6:13. In Psa. 103:13 we learn that a father pities his children. Paul sought to treat the Thessalonian believers as the Lord treated him. It was a father-child relationship. Paul had led them to Christ, and so spiritually he was their father. Paul had a father's heart with a father's love. Consequently, he "exhorted and comforted and charged" each one of them. And he asked them to remember this as well. Let us examine these words to see what Paul had been doing with them. They describe Paul's teaching.

"Exhorted" -- The word is probably used here of the practical application of the truth which Paul taught them.

"Comforted" -- Paul was an encourager. The Thessalonians soon learned that living for the Lord was not easy. They need to be stimulated to keep doing what the Lord wanted them to do, to live as He wanted them to live.

"Charged" -- This means that he emphasized with them that obeying and pleasing the Lord was not optional for us; it was a divine obligation which the Lord has placed upon all of His people.

Just as any father should take the training of his children seriously, and seek to do as thorough a job as possible, so the spiritual father has an even greater reason to be faithful in training his spiritual children to walk and to please God.

2:12 Here Paul brought out the object of spiritual instruction and training. It was (and is) so that we "would walk worthy of God."

How can we "walk worthy of God"?

It means to live in a way that is to be expected of one who claims to be a child of God. The primary objective of every Christian should be to please God! There is no higher goal that we can have. But we cannot do that without the Word (which shows us how), nor without the Holy Spirit (from Whom we get both the desire and the ability). How amazing it is that such a life is possible for us! And yet it is.

But notice the argument which Paul used at the end of this verse. We are not the children of God because we have chosen to be in His family. We are God's children because He has called us to be His children, "called" us, like the Thessalonian believers, "unto his kingdom and glory." We got into the kingdom of God through the new birth. And the ultimate objective of our salvation is that we would share our Lord's glory. God has called

us to Himself. He has given us His Word and His Spirit. He has given us teachers to lead us into the knowledge of the truth. But it is only as we live according to the truth that we can be what we ought to be, and are being changed slowly into the very glory which will finally and completely be ours when we see our wonderful Lord.

Let us remember this every day that we live. How important it is for us to read the Word, and to hear it taught.

But notice how Paul moved into verse 13 with his thanksgiving.

2:13 In view of the purpose of God in salvation, Paul here expressed his praise to God that the people in Thessalonica had received "the word of God" as it really is, "the word of God." Others scoffed at it. Many see no need for it. But those whom God calls to Himself receive it as it really is, "the word of God."

Why was he so thankful?

Because it is "the word of God which effectually worketh in you that believe." And he thanked God because in every case the only reason that people receive the Word as the Word is because of the working of the grace of God upon their hearts.

Salvation is impossible without the Word of God. Sanctification is impossible without the Word. And so there could be no hope of glorification without the Word of God. How crucial, then, it is for any person when he hears the Word of God. We ought to pray continually that the Lord would give us ears to hear and eyes to see and hearts to understand and wills to do the will of God.

Spurgeon in his sermon on verses 13 and 14 of this chapter (Vol. 33, pp. 469-480) brings out the fact from verse 13 that the Thessalonians received the Word of God twice. Paul used two different words for "received" in this verse. The first means that they were willing to hear it. When they found out what Paul, Silas, and Timothy were doing in Thessalonica, they did not turn away. They did not join the Jews in opposing them. They were willing to listen. In that sense they "received the word of God."

But, as they listened, their hearts were moved by what they heard. For some reason, unknown to them at the time, they listened eagerly to make sure that they understood what those three men were telling them. And then they found that they were receiving the Word of God in a different way. They believed it! They welcomed it into their hearts. They became convinced that it was not just the word of Paul, or of Silas, or of Timothy. It was the Word of God! They "received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God."

And what did they find out? They found out that an effectual work began in them! And that work was a work of God, a work which had continued from that day until the day that Paul wrote to them, and which would continue until it was finished "in the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6). It took the burden of sin away. Through that Word they were born again (cf. 1 Pet. 1:23). What they could not do for themselves, and what others could not do for them, God had done for them through His Word, "the word of God."

Now the Thessalonians did not get the credit for the work that had been

done in the hearts of the Thessalonian believers; God did. And from the day that Paul had started to see the work of God in the city of Thessalonica he had thanked God "without ceasing." He did not want the people of Thessalonica to be saying, as they would say in Corinth, "Paul did it," or, "Silas did it," or, "Timothy did it." No, he wanted them to be saying, "God did it; God did it through His Word." He had done what had never been done in Thessalonica before. God had used Paul and Silas and Timothy, but they were simply instruments in God's hand. God did the work, and to God Paul would give all of the glory!

To receive it as the Word of God, is to receive it by faith, but with great assurance that it cannot be anything else but the Word of God. It is to receive it as authoritative. It is to receive with submission to it. It is to be obedient to it. Nothing is more wonderful than to see even one person receiving the Bible as the Word of God. Whenever this happens it is positive proof that God is at work, and that people's hearts and lives are being changed! It should call forth from us unceasing praise as well.

May 3, 1993

"Which effectually worketh also in you that believe" -- Nothing is more important in anyone's life than the reception of the Bible as the Word of God. And Paul was deeply moved by the reception which had been given to the Word of God by the believers in Thessalonica. When Paul spoke of his message as the Word of God, he was, as Charles Erdman says in his commentary on 1 Thessalonians, expressing:

...his view of the Gospel. It is no human invention, no result of the apostle's own reasoning and experience. It is absolutely of divine origin. Its reception results in the manifestation of a divine transforming power... (p. 41).

The reception of the Word of God by faith means that the Word will produce permanently transforming effects in the life of the one who believes. That person can never be the same again. God's Word does "not return unto him void" (Isa. 55:11). It accomplishes that which pleases God, or, as Paul said here, it "effectually worketh." There is power in the Word, transforming power. As we read in Heb. 4:12, it is "quick [living], and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword." It strikes man in his inner being. How foolish it is for us to turn from preaching the Word of God to anything else!

"Effectually worketh" is the translation of one Greek verb, given here in the present tense, meaning that it is "constantly operating" (Frame, p. 108). It starts working, and never stops. It continues to work in our lives today. Paul traced the work of the Word in this verse: It is heard, received, and welcomed. And then it works!

The Word not only brings justification with God, but it produces in our hearts a desire to abide by the Word--to believe it and to obey it and to spread it! Remember our Lord's prayer for us, His own, in John 17:17, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." If we want to see a genuine, lasting work done, we must put our trust in the way the Lord sees fit to use His Word. Other methods may attract more people and produce quicker results, but they will not last. The work will not continue. It is only through the faithful teaching of the Word of God that we can ever hope for the blessing of the Lord.

2:14 What we have here had followed for the Thessalonian church because of their reception of the Word, by which Paul probably speaking of the Gospel. And it is the second time in the epistle that Paul had spoken about them becoming followers, or mimics. See 1:6. But, in reading these two verses, and comparing them, you will see that they had become followers in two different ways:

- 1) In 1:6 he was speaking of their obedience and likeness to the Lord.
- 2) Here in 2:14 he was speaking of being followers in suffering.

It is clear that Paul was not preaching a prosperity Gospel, a Gospel of health and welfare. He was preaching a message which was offensive to those who did not believe even though they might be religious. In the book of Acts we see that:

- 1) Everywhere the Gospel went there was blessing, although not always to the same degree. God works in each place as He sees fit.
- 2) Everywhere the Gospel was received there was trouble, opposition, persecution.

It seems that this is always to be expected. The Devil lets no one go easily. He always opposes the Gospel in one way or another.

In the case of the believers in Judaea (which undoubtedly was especially a reference to Jerusalem), opposition came from the unbelieving Jews. In the case of the Thessalonians, they had suffered in the same way from their own countrymen, which would have meant the Gentiles. In 1:6 Paul had mentioned that they had "received the word in much affliction." We do not know all of the forms which their persecution took, but we know that it meant physical abuse. It must have meant verbal threats which their enemies were not afraid to carry out. Perhaps some of those referred to in the latter part of chapter 4 as sleeping had been killed for the sake of the Gospel. There was often the greatest possible price in those days for people to pay who turned in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ. The similar results had one encouraging side to them: they showed that the same thing had taken place in Thessalonica which had taken place previously in Jerusalem.

What had the Jews done to the believers in Jerusalem? Paul gave the answer in verses 15 and 16. They had done five things.

2:15 First, they killed the Lord Jesus.

What greater crime could there be than to kill the Lord Jesus? And it was even aggravated by the fact that the Lord was One of their own, "Jesus." They were not satisfied just to ignore Him, nor just to denounce Him publicly; they were not satisfied until they had killed Him. Notice what Peter had told them when he preached in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2, verses 22, 23. And when speaking to the Jews in Antioch of Pisidia (see Acts 13:28) Paul said, speaking of our Lord,

And though they found no cause of death in him,
yet desired they Pilate that he should be slain.

So their killing of the Lord Jesus was made that more contemptible because He had done nothing which was deserving of death. Paul began with their worst offence, and then went on to speak of others, very, very serious, but not to be compared with what the Jews had done to the Lord. Dean Alford suggested that the proper translation for "the Lord Jesus" here would be, Jesus, the Lord.

Although the Jews did not actually kill the Lord, yet it was because of

their relentless opposition to the Lord Jesus that the Romans were left with no alternative but to put the Lord to death. And so, even though the Gentiles would have to accept their responsibility for their part in it, Paul was speaking about the Jews and charging them with this great crime. They refused to listen to evidence from their own Scriptures that the Lord was their Messiah. They were not influenced either by His teaching, or by His miracles. They closed their hearts to the unique character of our Lord. If we ever had an illustration of the total depravity of the human heart, it was to be seen in what the Jews did to our Lord. Only His death could satisfy them. Erdman said, "This was the supreme sin of the nation" (p. 42).

Second, they "killed...their own prophets."

Paul attached this to the death of our Lord because they were closely connected. Our Lord was certainly a Prophet, the greatest of all of the prophets. Listen to the Lord's lamentation over Jerusalem which is recorded for us in Matt. 23:37, 38:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets,
and stonest them which are sent unto thee,
how often would I have gathered thy children together,
even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings,
and ye would not!

Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.

Why did the Lord send the prophets to Israel and Judah? They were God's emergency men, sent to call the nation back to the Lord and to His Word. They were sent in each instance as an act of God's grace. They always preceded judgment even when the people knew that they were deserving of judgment. But instead of being thankful for them, and responding to them, the people killed the prophets, stoning them as men who were worthy of the worst offenses toward God. So it is not surprising that they treated the Lord Jesus the same way.

The Lord did not promise the disciples that their treatment by their own people would be any different from the prophets. You may remember that He said to them,

Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you,
and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.
Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven:
for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

But there was a third thing that the Jews did.

"And persecuted us," i.e., Paul, Silas, and Timothy. The attacks upon the servants of the Lord had continued. And, according to reliable tradition, Paul suffered death just like the Lord Jesus did, and like the prophets before Him had suffered. The word for "persecuted" which Paul used here is different from the one he normally used. This word means to expel, or to pursue out. That is, their enemies would keep after Paul and his companions until they could not longer stay where they were.

Matthew Henry made this comment upon these words of Paul:

Bitter zeal and fiery persecution will set countrymen at variance,
and break through all the bonds of nature, as well as contradict all
the rules of religion. In every city where the apostles went to
preach the gospel the Jews stirred up the inhabitants against them.
They were the ringleaders of persecution in all place; so in particu-

lar it was at Thessalonica (Vol. VI, p. 777).

Fourth, "And they please not God."

Men in their opposition to the Gospel forget about God. In fact, in their hatred of the truth they will even think that they are serving God by killing those who preach the Gospel. We have these words of our Lord recorded in John 16:1, 2,

These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended.
they shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh,
that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.

The fifth point that Paul was making is the last statement of verse 15, but it carries over into verse 16. They "are contrary to all men."

What did Paul mean by using the word "contrary"?

He meant that although "supposedly" the enemies of Paul and the Gospel would have claimed that they were doing what they were doing for the benefit of the Jewish people, yet actually they were working against them. They were antagonistic against them. This word is used in Mark 6:48 where we read of the disciples in the ship and that "the wind was contrary to them." The wind was not helping them. It was keeping them from getting to their destination. It was their enemy.

So the Jews were not helping people to find God; they were keeping them from God. And you will notice that Paul said they were affecting "all men." This was because what they did in Jerusalem was designed to keep the Gospel from going anywhere! So in seeking to deny the Jews the privilege of hearing the Gospel, they were denying the Gentiles that privilege also. And this is what Paul went on to explain in verse 16.

2:16 They showed that they were "contrary to all men" by their unceasing attempts to forbid Paul and Silas and Timothy to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles "that they might be saved." This means that they did everything to hinder them. They used every means possible to withstand any attempt on the part of the Lord's servants to preach the Gospel.

Our Lord rebuked the scribes and Pharisees for this very thing when He spoke the words which are recorded for us in Matt. 23:13:

But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!
for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men:
for ye neither go in yourselves,
neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.

So we have these five things that the Jews did:

- 1) They "killed the Lord Jesus."
- 2) They had "killed...their own prophets," men of their own nation whom God had raised up to minister to them.
- 3) They had "persecuted" Paul, Silas, and Timothy.
- 4) They did not please God--which should have been their primary concern.
- 5) Their actions not only kept the Jews from hearing the Gospel, but they also stood in the way of the Gentiles hearing the Gospel.

Why did the Lord let such things go on?

In answering a question like that we have to look in several directions:

- 1) First, at God Himself. God is never frustrated by the actions of men,

nor are His purposes ever permanently hindered. He takes glory to Himself by overruling the sinfulness of men so that His purposes are being accomplished. Paul had placed a strong emphasis in chapter 1 upon the fact that God had reached His elect in Thessalonica, and that the work was going on still. So in this way God was demonstrating His mighty power, showing that all of the evil that men might do would only serve His eternal purposes.

2) Second, we think of Paul and Silas and Timothy. The Lord could have made it easier for them, but He did not do it. Instead, the opposition which they faced everywhere they went only served to strengthen their desire to preach the Gospel to every creature. It would make them realize how dependent they were upon the Lord for His blessing--a fact which is reflected in the praise that Paul and his co-workers gave to God for the blessings they had seen in Thessalonica. The opposition would cause them to spend more time in prayer seeking the Lord's blessing. The NT is full of truth which helps us to understand why the Lord does not make His work easy for us. In fact, sometimes we may feel so alone that we wonder how much the Lord cares about what we do.

2) Third, we see that the Lord had a purpose even as far as the enemies of the Gospel were concerned. They were filling up their sin "alway." The Lord was giving them time, time to repent, time to realize that they were sinning against the Lord. It was like the Lord told Abraham about the Amorites. The Lord did not give the land to Abraham during his lifetime; He would wait 400 years because "the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full" (Gen. 15:16b). At the same time the Lord promised Abraham that judgment would come. And this is what we have here!

Paul concluded this verse by saying, "For the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost."

This sounds like God had already judged those who were aggressively opposing the preaching of the Gospel. And yet we have no such evidence in Scripture that God had put an end to the sufferings of Paul and others who were engaged in the preaching of the Word of God. To the contrary we know that it did not stop. It eventually brought about the death of the Apostle Paul. And Paul warned Timothy in his last letter to him that his suffering for the Lord's sake would continue. What then can we make of this statement?

I am not going to be dogmatic about this, but it seems to me that this is another of those places where the Spirit of God was speaking prophetically about the certainty that something was going to happen in the future, yet so certain was it that He spoke of it as something which already had taken place.

Will those who caused the Lord Jesus to be crucified get away with it? In no way! Will those who killed the prophets have to stand judgment for what they have done? Yes, they will. Will those who opposed the apostles and their ministry be held accountable by God? They certainly will. And someday, in the Lord's own time and way, God will bring judgment upon those who have opposed His servants so as to keep others from hearing the Gospel.

Therefore, although it was not encouraging to speak about suffering for the sake of the Gospel, yet in another way it was encouraging. Even with the death of our Lord the work of the Lord had not come to an end. In fact, through His death the work of salvation had its fulfillment. Although many prophets and apostles and other servants of the Lord have

laid down their lives, yet the work of the Lord has continued on. The work of the Devil and of all who are on his side, will come to an end. The Lord will accomplish everything that He has planned from eternity past to do. Nothing will be left undone.

So the Thessalonian believers could be encouraged, and so can we! The Lord will not let His work fail. It is still being opposed in many ways-- by the indifference of people, by the wicked things which people and their governments are doing. Even by the coldness of heart which is manifested by many who profess to know the Lord. The Lord knows how He is going to work all things out; we must be faithful in living for the Lord, faithful in proclaiming His Word. He will give us the fruit which He intends for us to have, and in the end all of the glory for all that has been done.

And so let us persevere, and let us praise the Lord what is going on, trust Him for what is yet to be done, hoping that by His grace we might still see a great work of God done before the Lord comes.

THE FIRST EPISTLE OF PAUL TO THE THESSALONIANS

1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:10

May 10, 1993

Intro: After Paul gave his greeting in 1:1, he began a section which I have called, HISTORICAL AND PERSONAL (1:2-3:13). That is, we can say that it occupied the first three chapters. The second main division is PRACTICAL AND DOCTRINAL (4:1-5:24), with the Conclusion in 5:25-28).

In the HISTORICAL AND PERSONAL section we have seen so far that Paul did two things:

- 1) In chapter 1 he gave what I have called a "thankful review" of God's work in Thessalonica.
- 2) In chapter 2, down to verse 16 which we have completed, Paul was reminding the Thessalonian believers of the nature of his ministry among them--what he called their entering in. And this was given also with thanksgiving to God.

We are now ready to begin the third part of that HISTORICAL AND PERSONAL section in which Paul showed his continuing great concern for the church in Thessalonica. He had tried to return to them, but Satan had hindered him. And so he sent Timothy. Timothy had returned with a glowing report of the work and of the strong desire the believers in Thessalonica had to see the Apostle Paul. This was a great encouragement to Paul.

2:17. The believers in Thessalonica had experienced the fury of those who hated Christ and the Gospel. This is what the Apostle had just written about in the preceding verses. And then he said, "But we..." (emphatic in the Greek text). Paul, Silas, and Timothy were the very opposite of their persecutors. They wanted to be with them. The only reason that they were not still in Thessalonica is because they had been "taken away"--an expression which shows that they had been removed against their will.

The word "taken away" actually means to be bereaved. Being forced to leave the believers in Thessalonica was like experiencing a death. But it appears from this verse that Paul and the others consoled themselves with the idea that they would be back soon. They had left in body, but not in heart. And this is what made them more diligent than usual to get back to Thessalonica as soon as they could. It is quite amazing to see how deeply Paul, Silas, and Timothy had come to love the Thessalonians in such a short time.

2:18. Many times Paul had planned to get back to Thessalonica, but on every occasion he knew that "Satan" had "hindered" him, as well as the others. They were determined to return, but Satan (their Adversary) hindered them.

George Milligan said in his commentary (p. 34) that "hindered" originally meant to break up a road so as to make it impassable. Paul did not mention how Satan had done this, just that he had done it. He worked in such a way that there was no possibility for Paul and his co-workers to carry out their plans.

Paul spoke of being hindered when he wrote to the church at Rome. Cf. Rom. 1:13 and 15:22. There his hindrance came from the opportunity to preach the Gospel in other places. Such hindrances were of the Lord. But Paul's inability to get back to Thessalonica, he knew, had come from Satan. Only the Lord can give us the discernment to distinguish between what the Lord is doing as compared to what Satan is doing.

We can always be sure that when the Lord is at work, Satan will do his utmost to hinder the work, and to destroy it, if he possibly can. See 3:5. Frequently we can be in a situation where it seems that the Lord has worked in the hearts of people, but we cannot be absolutely sure until it has all been tested by time. And so Paul knew that one of the reasons Satan had for hindering their return to Thessalonica was because Satan did not want Paul to be able to establish the people in their faith.

Not all hindrances are from Satan. God sometimes blocks the way. Or we may be slothful or negligent in doing the will of God. But it is good for us to remember what the Apostle Paul said in Eph. 6:10 ff. about our warfare.

And we are also told in Jas. 4:7 and 1 Pet. 5:6-9 what to do in our conflict with Satan, or the Devil. From these passages, and the Ephesians passage, we get some idea as to why the Lord permits Satan to hinder us. We know that God is sovereign, greater than the Devil, and so He could keep Satan from hindering us at all. Why does He not overrule Satan each time Satan tries to hinder us in the work of the Lord. Let me suggest several reasons.

First (referring to the passages above), the Lord knows that we need to be humbled. Facing a situation which we cannot handle is very humbling.

Second, hindrances make us realize our need for the Lord and His blessing. We cannot do the work of the Lord in our own strength, or in our own wisdom. We are not working for the Lord, but with Him. And He is working in us. Our need for the Lord makes us realize how important it is for us to be faithful in prayer. And so hindrances make us pray. Hindrances make us draw near to God. Hindrances cause us to cast our care upon the Lord.

Third, hindrances are used by the Lord to strengthen our faith. If we are to resist Satan steadfast in the faith, we need to know our faith. This, in turn, causes us to pay closer attention to the Word of God.

Fourth, hindrances strengthen our determination to do the will of God. We can see this in the writing of the Apostle Paul. His hindrances did not make him want to quit; they made him more determined than ever to do the work that the Lord had given him to do. He was determined to persevere. This was Spurgeon's advice to the Lord's people who knew that they were being opposed by Satan. He said that we should go on in the path of duty as the Holy Spirit enables us to go. The greater the opposition, the greater is the victory when it comes, and the greater the glory we will be able to bring to the Lord's Name.

Fifth, hindrances provide us with the opportunity to search our own hearts to see if the Lord has ordered this because there is something amiss in our lives. This was the case with Job. He was the most godly man on the whole earth, and yet he was not perfect. He still had a ways to go, and the Lord used His troubles for his growth in grace.

Sixth, hindrances make us more sympathetic with others who are facing Satanic opposition. Cf. 1 Pet. 5:9. And this will make us more faithful in praying for them.

So, Satan hinders, but God works all things together for good. And we can see in 1 Thessalonians how Paul and Silas and Timothy profited from the

troubles which Satan brought their way. Cf. Rom. 8:28.

2:19 This verse, and verse 20, explain why Paul, Silas, and Timothy were so anxious to get back to Thessalonica. Also it shows that Paul was not discouraged by the hindrances which he had faced. But he related all of his expectations to what would take place at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. (Read.)

I am sure that we all believe in the coming of the Lord. We know that this old world is not going on forever and ever like it is today. We know that the time is coming when we are going to be taken to be with the Lord, either through death, or at the rapture. But what is it that we are looking forward to the most as we anticipate the coming of the Lord?

It is easy, and perhaps most common, for us to think about what it is going to mean to us. It will mean that we will see the Lord, and be like the Lord. What could be more wonderful than that? It will mean no more sinning. What a relief that will be! It will mean no more sickness. And we could go on and on. But as Paul thought about the coming of the Lord, what did it mean to him?

Paul was not just thinking about what the coming of the Lord was going to mean to him. He was thinking about what it was going to mean to those believers in Thessalonica who were so dear to him.

He said, "For what is our hope," -- our certain expectation for the future -- or joy," -- that which will make us supremely happy, -- "or [our] crown of rejoicing" -- the victor's crown? He said, "Our hopeful certainty is that you will be there. Our joy will be to see you. Our crown of rejoicing for the way the Lord has used us in your lives, is all of the reward that we will ever want."

We are going to look at things very differently when the time comes that we are with the Lord, and so we need to start being more mindful of heavenly things now. Paul was not just thinking about what the coming of the Lord would mean to him, but what it would mean to him to see them there with the Lord in that great day. His love for them was not that he wanted to boast in his labors, but that the Lord had used him to prepare others for that wonderful day when we will be forever with the Lord.

2:20 "For ye are our glory and joy."

How many people will be in heaven because the Lord used us to take the Gospel to them, and then bring them to Christ? That is what is going to make heaven really glorious, when we see those there whom we have helped to know the Savior and have had a part in teaching them to walk with the Lord. May the Lord give us such a love for each other that our thoughts of heaven and glory will always cause us to put the joy and blessing of others ahead of ourselves.

Chapter 3, the first ten verses, continues and concludes what Paul was saying at the end of chapter 2.

May 11, 1993

3:1 In view of the fact that Paul could not return to Thessalonica himself, he decided to send Timothy. The first ten verses of this chapter tell about that decision, what he wanted Timothy to do, and what

the outcome of Timothy's visit was.

Paul faced this situation as long as he could, and when he could not endure it any longer, he and Silas agreed that Timothy should go back to Thessalonica to find out how things were going in the church there. Although Paul needed Timothy in Athens, yet his burden for the Thessalonians was so great that he felt it "good," profitable, necessary under the present circumstances, to be deprived of Timothy's help for a time in order to make sure that things were right in Thessalonica.

3:2 Notice how Paul described Timothy. He was "our brother, and minister of God, and our fellowlabourer in the gospel of Christ." Timothy was the youngest of the three, and the least experienced, but he had already shown himself to be a faithful and trusted co-worker of his two older brothers in the Lord.

"Our brother" -- Although Paul was definitely the leader of the three men, yet he looked upon Timothy (and Silas, too) as brothers in the Lord, members of the family of God, born again by the same Holy Spirit and through the same Savior. Timothy was a younger brother, to be sure, but he was a brother. This word was used regularly by the early Christians to show their relationship to each other in the Lord.

"Minister of God" -- This is the word which in the early church came to mean deacon, but it is used here in its basic meaning, "one who executes the commands of another" (Thayer, p. 138). Timothy was a faithful servant. He could be depended upon to do what he was told to do--a rare quality even among the Lord's people. Many young men have their own agenda, their own ideas about how the Lord's work should be done. Timothy was not that way. Although he might have preferred to stay with the Apostle Paul, yet, if Paul wanted him to go back to Thessalonica, that is what he wanted to do. And by the use of this term Paul was indicating that Timothy would carry out Paul's wishes just like Paul would have done if he, Paul, had gone back to Thessalonica.

There is also the idea in this expression that God was Chief Worker, and that Timothy was committed to do the will of God, believing that often God's will for him would be expressed through Paul and Silas.

"Our fellowlabourer in the gospel of Christ" -- Timothy was just as devoted to the spread of the Gospel as were Paul and Silas. It was their united passion and burden to tell others about Christ.

See these other passages in which Paul commended Timothy: 1 Cor. 16:10; Phil. 2:19-24. It was a great blessing for Timothy to be able to work with and to learn from Paul, and also Silas, but it was a blessing for Paul and Silas to have such a faithful co-worker as Timothy was. One of the greatest commendations that can be given to any young servant of the Lord is that he follows the leadership of those who are over him in the Lord. The Lord has blessed Paul in a special way through Timothy. By talking to pastors you will usually learn that their greatest problems have come through unfaithful staff members. At one time Paul had that trouble with John Mark. But that was cleared up later, and John Mark became profitable to Paul in the ministry.

What was it that Paul wanted Timothy to do in Thessalonica?

Two things:

- 1) "To establish you" -- Timothy was being sent to strengthen them by teaching them the truth of God.
- 2) "To comfort you concerning your faith" -- They needed encouragement. They needed to be reassured that they were on the right track. The Christian life is always different from what young believers think it is going to be, especially because of unexpected trials and tribulations, and so Paul anticipated that the young church could be in trouble because of what they were suffering. We see this from what Paul wrote in the next verse.

3:3 "That no man" -- Lit., that no one, whether he be man, woman, young person, or child. To Paul every child of God was important. He did not want to ignore anyone. All needed to be taught. All needed to be established. All needed encouragement. Let us make sure that we are the same way. If we are thinking only of men, or only of adults, the work of the Lord will be weakened. We need to bring the little lambs along with us.

"Be moved" -- Paul did not want anyone to be troubled, disturbed, or agitated, by their afflictions. Paul was expressing the same concern here that Peter did in 1 Pet. 4:12, 13. Not only were "afflictions" to be expected, but Paul had told them before "that we are appointed thereunto." By this he meant that God had a purpose for their "afflictions," that they were not just by chance, nor were they helplessly left to whatever the enemy might do. God was in control, and He was fulfilling His purposes for His people by the things which they were suffering.

It can be a great help to all of us to remember this about our trials. They are sure to come. They are not ever enjoyable in themselves. But they are in the purpose of God for us, and therefore we can rejoice in what the Lord is accomplishing in our lives through them. But it is important to realize that we all need to be told these things, and then reminded from time to time that this is characteristic of the way the Lord works in our lives. It is like we have seen about God's reasons for allowing Satan to hinder us. Cf. 2:18. Our tribulations are designed to humble us, to make us realize more deeply our need of the Lord, to make us more prayerful, and to drive us back to the Word of God.

3:4 Paul had included all of this as a part of his original instructions to the believers in Thessalonica. We need to do the same with those who come to Christ.

3:5 Paul repeated here the words he had written in verse 1 of this chapter. He could not stand it any longer not to know how things were in Thessalonica. And so he sent Timothy "to know your faith." Paul wanted to know if the Thessalonians were continuing to trust the Lord in spite of the troubles they were experiencing.

Paul knew that just as Satan had been opposing him, so he would also be working among the believers in Thessalonica. It was not that Satan could be in two places at the same time. He is not omnipresent. But he works through those fallen angels who do his bidding. And Paul was concerned lest that which our Lord spoke of in the Parable of the Sower, might be taking place in Thessalonica.

Please turn to Matt. 13. See verse 4. And then see the Lord's explanation in verses 18 and 19.

We know from the teaching of the Apostle Paul that he did not believe it was possible to be saved and then to be lost again. He knew that when the Lord saves anyone, He keeps them. Salvation is eternal. But what Paul did not know, and what we never know, is what is actually going on in people's hearts. People can show great interest in the Gospel, and can profess to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, but we often see people like this who continue on for a while and then fall away. Have they lost their salvation? No, they never were saved in the first place. Cf. 1 John 2:19. However, Paul also knew that when people hear the Word of God, even though they might not be saved at the time, even though they thought they were, yet the Holy Spirit will continue to use the Word and may bring them to Christ at some later time.

Paul would remind all of us from what he said here that there is a great need to follow up the ministry of the Gospel with personal contacts and with continued teaching. It might appear that a certain person has been saved, but we do not know. That can only be proven by time, and by testing. To cite another example from the Parable of the Sower, see verses 5 and 6, and our Lord's explanation in verse 20 and 21. No servant of the Lord should overlook the Lord's teaching in all of the Parable of the Sower. The responses of people do not always reflect what has really taken place in their hearts. If the Devil cannot hinder the preaching of the Gospel, he will seek to render it ineffective. That was Paul's concern about his ministry in Thessalonica. And we can be sure that he always was aware of the damage the Tempter could do.

Paul had this same concern about the churches in Galatia as we can see from his words in Gal. 4:11 ff.

In all of this we cannot but see reflected in the life of Paul the concern which the Lord has for His people. He is "that good shepherd of the sheep" (Heb. 13:20). He is the One who is "able to keep" us "from falling" (Jude 24). No one is able to pluck us out of His hand, nor out of the Father's hand. Cf. John 10:27-30. And we all should seek to follow our Lord's example as Paul did.

Up to this point Paul expressed his deep concern for the work of the Lord in Thessalonica. He told why he had sent Timothy. But from this point on we see his relief and his joy because of the good report that Timothy had brought back to him.

3:6 When Timothy returned, Paul learned that there was no cause for the fears he had experienced. Could we say that Paul was not trusting the Lord? I don't think so. He was a wise servant of the Lord. He never underestimated what the Enemy might do. And so he carefully followed up on his ministry there to make as certain as he could that he had really seen a true work of God. The more widespread a work is, the greater the danger that people will do what everyone else is doing, even to the point of professing to receive Christ. Those times when the Gospel has the greatest acceptance are times when there can be the most empty professions of faith made. Paul knew this, and this explains why his concern for Thessalonica was so great.

Timothy brought "good tidings," and, from the word that Paul used, Milligan said that "it was a veritable 'gospel'" (p. 40). Timothy came back preaching good news. And the good news had to do with their "faith and charity," or love. We would assume that he was speaking of the way they were trusting the Lord, and of the love that they were showing toward each

other. Calvin said that "in these two words he (Paul) comprehends briefly the entire sum of true piety. Hence all that aim at this twofold mark during their whole life are beyond all risk of erring: all others, however much they may torture themselves, wander miserably" (Vol. XXI, p. 268).

And so Timothy brought back to Paul undeniable evidence that the work of the Lord in Thessalonica was genuine, and the evidence that it was genuine was that it was continuing.

May 17, 1993

And so Paul found comfort in four things:

- 1) Their faith.
- 2) Their love for him.
- 3) Their good remembrance.
- 4) Their desire to see him and his fellow-workers again.

3:7 As Paul rejoiced over Timothy's report of his visit with the Thessalonian believer, he lumped them all into one. "Therefore" is lit. for this cause, or, on account of this. Any one of these alone would have caused Paul great joy, but all of them put together meant more than he could say. That apparently is why Paul used the singular for all four things.

All of this added up to encouragement, comfort, and greater strength to face his own trials when he was assured that the believers in Thessalonica were continuing to believe and to trust the Lord. The "your" in "your faith" is emphatic.

What is the difference between "affliction" and "distress"?

Afflictions are pressures. Distresses are anxieties, worries, strain. Paul was evidently continuing to face persecution himself, and it was all taking its toll on him both physically and mentally. The work of the Lord was hard. The pressures continued day after day. So that he was not only burdened because of the ministry he was involved in, but because of his great concern for the church in Thessalonica. Timothy's report brought great relief and blessing to the heart of the Apostle Paul even though he had not seen any change in his own situation.

The Lord often works like this. When we are laboring perhaps with little or no evidence of fruitfulness, then the Lord sends a letter to us, or someone brings a report concerning our ministry in past days, and it brings relief to our trouble souls. And Paul found new strength to go on in his own work when Timothy brought the encouraging word from Thessalonica.

When Paul wrote to Philemon, he said this:

For we have great joy and consolation in thy love,
because the bowels of the saints
are refreshed by thee, brother (Ph. 7).

Let us remember that, if a man like Paul needed encouragement and strengthening, then we all do. And it is good for us to be looking for those opportunities where we can be "encouragers" to someone else.

It is very likely that the words found in Isaiah 50:4 were meant to be words of our Lord. He was the Great Encourager -- and still is! Think of

or Lord saying these words:

The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned (or, learner),
that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary:
he wakeneth morning by morning,
he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned (or, learner).

May 18, 1993

Some people, even some Christian people, are so occupied with themselves that they really do not think about the needs of others. The experience of Paul shows that the Lord is most gracious in sending us encouragement as the need arises.

To see how closely Paul's life was related to the lives of the Thessalonians, see the next verse.

3:8 "Now" can mean either now in time, or now, under these circumstances. Probably both ideas are here.

Paul was manifesting here that he had the heart of a true under-shepherd. The ministry of the Word was not a professional thing to him as it would have been in Judaism in his unregenerate state. As E. M. Bounds said in his book, Power Through Prayer, preaching to the Apostle Paul was the outflow of his life.

Back in 1884, one hundred and nine years ago, Spurgeon preached on this text at the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London. His outline was very simple, and it reflected what every true pastor has observed about his own people:

- 1) Some people are not in the Lord. They come to church regularly, but they do not give evidence that they have ever been born again. These are always a great concern, and a source of grief, to the true pastor.
- 2) Others give evidence that they are saved, but they are not really standing fast in the Lord. Spurgeon called them "Marah--a bitter well" (Vol. 30, p. 10).
- 3) And then there are those who are standing fast. These are the delight of any pastor.

But listen to what he had to say as he began his message:

Ministers, who are really sent of God, greatly rejoice in the spiritual prosperity of their people. If they see God's word prosper, they prosper; if the church of God is blessed, they are blessed. Their life is wrapped up in the spiritual life of their people. Never is the servant of God so full of delight as when he sees that the Holy Spirit is visiting his hearers, making them know the Lord, and confirming them in that heavenly knowledge. On the other hand, if God does not bless the word of his servants it is like death to them. To be preaching and to have no blessing makes them heavy of heart: the chariot-wheels are taken off, and they drag heavily along: they seem to have no power nor liberty. They get depressed, and they go back to their Master, with this complaint, "Who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?" He (the Lord) revives and cheers them, and they come back again to their service; but yet if they do not see a manifest blessing resting upon the people, they cry and sigh, and are like dying men. If the Lord willed to do so, he might have made automaton to preach; and these would only need to be wound up, and to be allowed to run down again; they would have known no feelings of joy

or sorrow, and would have been invulnerable to the arrows of grief. We have heard of the Iron Duke; iron preachers would have been enduring instruments, and would never have been laid aside by mental depression.

But the sympathy of the preacher is God's great instrument for blessing the hearer. If you read a sermon in a book it is good; but if you hear it preached fresh from the man's heart, it is far more effective. There is a living fellow-feeling about it, and that is the power which God has in all ages been pleased to use--the power of a spirit which God has made sensitive with affection, so sensitive that it rises to joy when its affectionate purpose is accomplished, and sinks to depths of grief when that purpose fails. This, I take it, is what the apostle means when he says, "Now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord." The people can make the pastor happy beyond expression by their being rich in grace and happy in Christ, but they can make him miserable beyond all description if they are either unstable in insincere (Vol. 30, pp. 7, 8).

In spite of all of the trials in Paul's ministry (and we know that they were many and severe), if he saw the blessing of God upon his ministry, he lived! But if not, then his trials became all the more unbearable.

Listen to the way David expressed himself in Psalm 130: "...in his (the Lord's) favour is life... Lord, by thy favour thou hast made my mountain to stand strong; thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled" (vv. 5m, 7).

Cf. Eph. 6:10-13; Phil. 1:27-30; 4:1.

What does it mean to "stand fast"?

This is the doctrine we have come to know as the perseverance of the saints. It is the person who continues to walk with the Lord in spite of all of the difficulties he faces. He will not turn away from the faith. He has what the Psalmist called a fixed heart. Cf. Ps. 50:7,

My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed:

I will sing and give praise.

Job was standing fast when he said, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust Him" (Job 13:15). Abraham was standing fast when he proceeded to offer up Isaac. Daniel's friends were standing fast when they faced the fiery furnace rather than bow down to Nebuchadnezzar's image. Daniel himself was standing fast when he faced the lion's den rather than discontinue calling upon the Lord. The same can be said of the apostles who refused to stop preaching when they knew that their lives were in danger if they continued.

But it is not only in times of trouble that we stand fast. We are standing fast when day by day we continue to enjoy fellowship with the Lord by spending time reading the Word and giving ourselves to prayer. While others deny the faith, we are standing when we remain true to the Word of God, in doctrine and in practice. Nothing gives the servant of the Lord greater joy than to see his people standing fast. Cf. 3 John 4.

3:9 Matthew Henry said about this verse,

When we are most cheerful we should be most thankful. What we rejoice in we should give thanks for (Vol. VI, p. 780).

Paul did not congratulate himself nor his co-workers that things were going so well in the Thessalonian church. He knew that it was all due to the blessing of the Lord. And he found himself unable to express ade-

quately the joy that he felt in his heart. It is easy to rejoice without giving thanks. When we give thanks we are glorifying God by recognizing Him as the Source of all of our blessings, the Cause of all of our fruitfulness.

3:10. And although Satan had hindered Paul time and time again from getting back to Thessalonica, yet it continued to be the subject of his praying "night and day." Even though Satan had been successful in blocking the way up to that point, it did not mean that God would not eventually open the door for Paul. And so he continually prayed. In the morning and at night and throughout the day, this was the prayer he prayed.

Notice he spoke of their face and their faith collectively. He was not overlooking them as individuals, but he was thinking of them as a church. He wanted to be with them, not just because he loved them, but because he wanted to "perfect that which" was "lacking in" their "faith." All well as things were going in Thessalonica, and as spiritual as the people were, they could always be better. THE CHURCH COULD ALWAYS BE BETTER. The good news that Paul had received from Timothy did not make Paul less concerned about the church in Thessalonica. If anything, it made him even more concerned! And so he wanted to be with them.

By the Lord's own testimony Job was the godliest man on earth--AND YET THE LORD KNEW THAT HE COULD BE BETTER, AND NEEDED TO BE BETTER! That was the reason for all of the trials that he had. And so in Thessalonica things were good, but Paul wanted them to be better. No church is so good, but what it can be better. And individually, none of us is so good but what we can be better, and do better. Until we get to glory we will always need to love the Lord more, to know the Word better, to be more faithful in prayer, and to serve the Lord better than we have. Solomon wrote,
The path of the just is as the shining light,
that shineth more and more unto the perfect day (Prov. 4:18).

May the Lord enable us to see these truths in connection with our own lives as well as about those whom we love so dearly in the Lord--AND THEN TO PERSEVERE IN ORDER THAT THE BLESSING OF THE LORD MIGHT ABOUND.

THE FIRST EPISTLE OF PAUL TO THE THESSALONIANS

1 Thessalonians 3:11-13

May 18, 1993

Intro: This could actually have been a part of the preceding verses, but I have separated it from the rest of the chapter because of its importance as a prayer of the Apostle. As I have indicated in the outline, this is Paul's prayer for himself and for the church at Thessalonica.

3:11 This verse gives us Paul's prayer for himself. This certainly does not include all that Paul prayed as he prayed for himself, but it includes his burden for himself as he thought and prayed for the church at Thessalonica.

Notice first that Paul believed that God, his Father, Who was also Silas' Father and Timothy's Father, as well as the Father of every believer in Thessalonica, was concerned about Paul's future ministry in Thessalonica. Paul believed that the Lord Jesus Christ was just as concerned.

Furthermore, he believed that his return to Thessalonica was entirely in the hands of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Notice this evidence of Paul's faith in the unity of the Godhead.) I do not think that Paul was saying that he knew that it was the will of God for him to get back to Thessalonica, but that, if He did, then He would "direct" as to the time, the expense, and everything else connected with such a trip.

"Direct" -- Paul was asking the Lord for guidance. He was asking the Lord to remove all of the obstacles which stood in the way. He was asking the Lord to select the time. He was asking the Lord to show him who, if any, should go with him. He was placing his plans entirely in the Lord's hands.

Paul used this word again in 2 Thess. 3:5. It is found also in Luke 1:79 where Zacharias, in his prayer, indicated that the Messiah would come, or hand come, "to guide our feet into the way of peace."

This verse shows how utterly dependent upon the Lord Paul knew himself to be. As Leon Morris says in his commentary on the Thessalonian epistles, "Paul does not forget that God rules in the affairs of men. Even his incidental expressions reveal how much the sovereignty of God means to him" (p. 110). And then he added about the word "direct,"

The verb has the idea of "making straight," perhaps even "making level."

The thought appears to be that of preparing a road so that all unevenness is removed, and travel facilitated (p. 111).

In practical ways Paul always demonstrated his belief that God was his God and that the Lord Jesus Christ was his Lord.

The last two verses of this prayer have to do with Paul's concern for the church in Thessalonica.

3:12 Paul's basic request for them had to do with their love for each other. Then he went on in verse 13 to indicate what would be the fruit of such abounding love.

In the Greek text this verse begins with, But. It would indicate that Paul was praying that even though he might not be able to visit them, yet he knew that the Lord's work in their hearts was not limited to what he might be able to do. As Leon Morris said, Paul realized that "their spiritual growth was in the Lord's hands, not in his" (p. 111). There may

have been some question as to what the Lord would do concerning Paul's request in verse 11, but there was no question about His will here in verse 12. The Lord wants us to love each other. He wants us to be continually growing in that love, increasing. He also wants us to "abound" in our love for each other, making this the dominant characteristic of the fellowship of the Lord's people. Cf. in this connection what Paul wrote in 4:9.

In the expression, "and toward all men," it is important to know that the Apostle Paul actually said, and unto all. This means that a lit. translation would be rendered, in love toward one another, and toward all. It does not seem that Paul was exhorting them to love believers and unbelievers alike, but to love those who were a part of the Thessalonian church, as well as all other believers, wherever they might be!

What was a major purpose of such a love? We see that purpose in v. 13.

3:13 There can be no real holiness of character and life without love.

This is something that we all need to remember. The Lord makes us abound in our love for each other; He also establishes our hearts "unblameable in holiness before God." It is not a work of man, but of the Lord.

The Apostle Paul was looking here at the goal of our salvation. It is what we will be before God when our Lord Jesus Christ comes with His saints. We will be "unblameable in holiness before God." And this will be, not merely an outward manifestation of holiness, but it will be holiness of the heart. It is simply another way of saying what Paul said in Romans 8:29, that we are predestined "to be conformed to the image of his (God's) Son." The fact that it will be "before God" means that it will be acceptable to Him.

Paul always kept the goal in mind. And he knew that neither he nor any of the Lord's people would reach that goal until the Lord returns. Therefore, he kept seeking greater love among the people of God, and greater holiness of heart, until the Lord returns.

"Stablish" here is the same word which we had in 3:2. Dean Alford translates it confirm. Thayer translates it as having to do with the strength that the believer needs to be constant in his pursuit of holiness. And this was the burden of Paul's prayer.

Concl: One reason for the recording of the prayers of Scripture is to teach us how to pray. In our prayers we may be inclined to deal with less important and matters that are superficial. However, nothing could be more basic than Paul's praying. We see in his prayer:

- 1) His desire to visit the Thessalonian believers and the reason he wanted to be with them.
- 2) His concern for their perfection even though he might not be able to be with them.
- 3) His belief that whether he got to them or not, in either case it was important for him to be praying for them day by day.

We, too, need to be praying that Paul's purpose in fellowship might be ours, and that we would be faithful in prayer as he was for the spiritual growth of the Lord's people as we move closer and closer toward the time when our Lord will come.

THE FIRST EPISTLE OF PAUL TO THE THESSALONIANS
Summary and Review
September 20, 1993

Intro: It has been four months since we had our last class in the study of 1 Thessalonians. Although we have gotten down to chapter 3, verse 11 in our studies, I felt that it would be wise to survey the epistle again as we resume our studies, and review some of the things which we have already considered.

Before we get into any of that, however, you probably will not be surprised that I am going to ask you to be reading through this epistle AT LEAST ONCE EACH WEEK as we get into it again.

You know, even through these summer months I have had a growing feeling that there is not much Bible reading being done by those of us who profess to be the Lord's people. We don't expect other people to be reading the Bible, but we ought to. We ought to not because we are asked to, nor as a duty, but because we love it and can't keep away from it! And the only way I know to get an increased appetite for the Word is by reading it, reading it often, reading large portions of it. And I have found that reading it aloud helps me to concentrate. I can tell you that this little epistle of 1 Thessalonians can be read out loud in less than fifteen minutes. But the important thing is not to see how quickly we can get through a book; the important thing is that we read it prayerfully, accurately, thoughtfully, and frequently.

So I hope you will plan to read it at least once a week. And I am sure that if you do this for a few weeks, the time will soon come when you will be reading it every day. But let us all be reading it. I am not asking you to do something which I do not plan to do. One advantage of studying a shorter book of the Bible is that, if we are faithful in reading it often, it will encourage us to read the larger books, too.

Set a time when you can read it at one sitting. You husbands and wives, read it together as well as by yourselves. If you don't live with someone you can read with, ask a friend to read it with you, and then talk about what you have read. Pray before you read, and pray after you have read. Ask the Holy Spirit not only to help you to understand, but also to obey the Word. Much time in the Word always leads to much blessing. And this is what we want and need: BLESSING!

And now to get us off to a good start, I am going to do what I did once last Spring as we began the study of 1 Thessalonians; I am going to read it to you. And as I read it, let us pretend that we are in ancient Thessalonica, perhaps in my home, or your home. A messenger has brought us this epistle from our beloved Apostle, and we are all gathered together to hear what he has to say to us. Have you notice 1 Thess. 5:27? But before we read, let us pray for the Lord's blessing upon our reading.

(Pray, and then read the epistle.)

THE HISTORY OF 1 THESSALONIANS

Who wrote this epistle? When did he write it? Where did he write it? To whom was it written? These are some important questions for us to be able to answer.

The Writer

John Eadie wrote in his commentary in the 1870's, "The Church has been unanimous in holding the Pauline authorship up till a very recent period, and the objection of some German critics scarcely disturbs the harmony" (p. 15). It seems that those who do question Paul's authorship are among the more liberal scholars, and they do so on the basis that this is not like his other epistles, that is, Paul was not defending any particular truth nor opposing any error. But on the more positive side we can see that it claims to have been written by Paul. The people mentioned in the epistle were his close acquaintances and fellow-workers, and the experiences he referred to are consistent with the history given to us in Acts 17. The teaching is definitely consistent with Paul's other epistles. So we have no valid reasons for thinking that Paul did not write this epistle.

William Hendriksen, in his commentary on 1 and 2 Thessalonians, said that this epistle gives us a great insight into the character of Paul himself. We see Paul, the man of God; Paul, the teacher, or theologian; and Paul, the missionary.

Thessalonica

(Use a map.)

Thessalonica was a very important city in Bible times. It had become a part of the Roman Empire when Macedonia, in which it was located, was conquered by the Romans in 168 B. C. In Paul's day it was inhabited, according to Erdman, by Greeks, Roman colonists, Orientals, and many Jews. It is still a thriving coastal city today, and it has the name, Salonika. It is located about 100 miles south of the ancient site of Philippi. The church was established by Paul and Silas when they carried the Gospel to eastern Europe on their second missionary journey. Timothy was with them, and also Luke for at least part of the time.

The Date

Various dates have been given for the writing of the epistle. It seems that the early 50's after Christ is the most reliable date.

The Place of Writing

There seems to be general agreement that Paul wrote this epistle from Corinth, and that it is the first of his epistles written under the direction of the Holy Spirit. We know that Paul was in Athens when he sent Timothy back to Thessalonica, and some believe that Paul wrote this epistle from Athens. But seems more likely that Paul had moved down to Corinth by the time that he wrote this epistle.

THE APOSTLE PAUL'S REASONS FOR WRITING THIS EPISTLE

The best way to learn why Paul wrote this letter to the church at Thessalonica is by reading it. As you read it, and re-read it, Paul's reasons will become increasingly clear to you. But just to refresh our minds, let me point out what we find in the epistle.

- 1) He wrote because he had been unable to get back to visit them, and he was concerned about how the church was getting along. Paul was con-

cerned for them because of the persecution which they were facing, persecution which had caused him to leave them earlier than he had planned to leave. Generally speaking, the report was good. However, there were some parts of the report which gave Paul great concern, and this made him feel all the more compelled to write to them.

Paul's concern for them is expressed in 1 Thess. 1:2-4, 2:17-3:13.

- 2) Some "serious insinuations" (Erdman, p. 14) had been made against Paul and his ministry by his enemies. It had to do with Paul's motives and methods in coming to them. His enemies questioned his sincerity. Such charges as were made affected the Apostle Paul deeply, and we can see in his epistles that he often spoke in his own defense against similar accusations.

We can see this in 1 Thess. 2:1-12.

- 3) The believers there still faced dangerous temptations in the flesh. It was usually the case that Gentile believers were saved out of circumstances where immorality was a way of life. And some found it very difficult to get away from it. They needed to learn that their relationship to the Lord not only involved faith, but that it was faith which leads to a holy life.

See how often Paul referred to their testings and persecutions. Cf. 1 Thess. 1:6; 2:14; 3:1-5.

Concerning the holiness of their lives, cf. 1 Thess. 4:1-8; 5:21-24.

- 4) There were doctrinal difficulties especially related to the truth of the Lord's return. There was great expectation among the early Christians that the Lord would come back during their lifetime. When, however, some believers died, this raised questions which Paul had not been able to deal with in the short time that he had been with them.

Cf. 1 Thess. 4:13-5:11.

- 5) Even though the church was young, there was a lack of discipline and also of respect for those who were in positions of leadership in the church. It was in connection with these problems that Paul urged them to be steadfast and faithful to the Lord.

Cf. 1 Thess. 5:12-28.

Therefore, we can see that Paul had some very important reasons for writing to the believers at Thessalonica--reminding them of what God had done, assuring them of his own sincerity in coming to them, encouraging them, rebuking them, instructing them, and showing his great love for them.

THE OUTLINE

After having examined the epistle to see why Paul wrote it, we now need to examine the epistle to see its orderly arrangement. I gave you an outline last Spring when we started the study of this epistle. I see no reason to change what I gave you then, but will only add a few explanatory details.

(The outline is on a separate page.)

THE FIRST EPISTLE OF PAUL TO THE THESSALONIANS

1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

September 27, 1993

Intro: It seems that Paul's prayer recorded in the last three verses of chapter 3 prompted him to write this section which we are now beginning. Paul was praying that God would "stablish" their "hearts in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (3:13). And it was for this purpose that he wanted to visit them, to "perfect that which was lacking in" their "faith" (3:10).

To say that he was concerned about their holiness means that he was concerned about their sanctification. He was concerned about their spiritual growth. In fact, this was the prevailing concern that Paul had in all of his epistles. And so, when he did not see his way clear to visit them as yet, he did the next best thing: he wrote to them.

This ought to be instructive for us.

We can't necessarily write to people the way Paul wrote to the Thessalonians because we don't have the relationship with everybody like Paul had to them. But when we write to people, without "preaching" to them, we can say things that will be an encouragement to them in their walk with the Lord. We can tell them about a verse, or verses, from the Bible which have been a blessing to us recently. Or we can tell them about some book which we are reading, or have just completed, which has been a blessing to us--and encourage them to read it, too. Or we can tell them how the Lord has been dealing with us, and how He has blessed us in some particular way. Or we can speak of the spiritual progress that some believer has made whom you both know. If you are writing to someone whom you have brought to the Savior, then, of course, you have the same kind of liberty with that person that Paul had with the Thessalonians. But the point is this: When you can't minister to a person in one way, look for another way. This seems to have been the way Paul worked, and it was through Paul's letter-writing that we have thirteen, and possibly fourteen, of the most wonderful books in the Bible.

Now let us look at this section before us in 1 Thess. 4. In my outline I have given this part of 1 Thessalonians the heading:

III. PRACTICAL AND DOCTRINAL (1 Thess. 4:1-5:24).

"I." was PAUL'S GREETING in 1:1. "II" was HISTORICAL AND PERSONAL. And now we come to PRACTICAL AND DOCTRINAL. It is unusual for Paul to wait until later in his epistle to get to the doctrinal part, but, then, this is a different kind of an epistle. His main purpose was not to teach them about the Lord's return, but to clear up some questions that they had about the coming of the Lord. We will see more about that when we get down to 4:13.

The practical emphasis that Paul made had to do with holy living. This as a subject occupied his attention from verses 1 through 8. Beginning with verse 9 he began to speak about the love they had for each other, which in itself is an aspect of holy living.

Charles Erdman wrote in his commentary on 1 Thessalonians, Christianity is eminently practical. Its adherents believe that "truth is in order to goodness" and that there is an inseparable connection between creed and character, between doctrine and duty, between faith and life (p. 50).

Now let us look at the text.

4:1 I think that we can see in the verses of this part of the epistle that Paul was not instructing them in things that they had not been taught before, but (1) he was reminding them of what he had taught them. In addition, (2) he was encouraging them to abound in the right things that they were doing. We never do things so well but that we can do them better. And this seems to have been behind what Paul was saying.

Paul used two verbs preceding his instructions to them. The first shows how deeply he felt, and how much he wanted to impress upon the Thessalonians the importance of what he was saying. To "beseech" is to entreat, and to entreat is to make an earnest request.

But he followed this with the word "exhort." This was more of an official word. He was writing not just as an advisor, but as an apostle. He was pleading with them, but he was also seeking to impress upon them the fact that they were under a divine obligation to do as he was saying.

So Paul was writing to them affectionately, calling them "brethren," and lovingly entreating them, but he was also speaking with great authority, and the people were to accept this as coming from the Lord Jesus Himself.

All of us should remember this. As the Lord's people obedience to the Word of God is not an option for us; it is a God-given responsibility. Not to be obedient, not to be holy in character and life, is sin! And Paul was making his exhortation even stronger when he added the words, "in the Lord Jesus."

This statement needs to be considered along with the statement in verse 2, "through the Lord Jesus." Obviously Paul was not saying anything here that the Lord had not said. And Paul was acting on behalf of the Lord. Paul's exhortation was not to be taken as just coming from him, but primarily from the Lord, and in the Lord. Eadie believes that the expression "in the Lord" means that the only way the people could do, or continue to do, what he was saying here, was when they realized that the power for such holy character and conduct can come only from the Lord Jesus Himself.

So Paul introduced his subject in a very powerful and significant way. We only need to seek to be holy in our living to realize that we can't do it ourselves. Sanctification is a work of God in our hearts.

"How ye ought" -- This is the word must which we had several times in the Gospel of John, and we can translate it that way here. They must walk so as to please God. That is the main reason for everything that we do as the Lord's people. We are to live lives that please God! It is not enough that we know the truth, nor even that we are saved. The Lord did not save us just to keep us from going to hell. He saved us to make us holy! And so to live a holy life is the only way that we can possibly please God.

Paul said, "As ye have received of us." So he was not telling them something that he had not told them before, but he was saying it again, and saying it (as the verse shows us) even though there was much evidence that this is the way they were living. The only addition that Paul was making here was that they needed to "abound more and more" in what they were doing.

Think of what Paul was saying here in the light of what he had already said about them earlier in the epistle. Cf. 1:6, 7; 2:6-8. These people were holy and living holy lives. But they needed to be more holy than they were. They were doing well; Paul wanted them to do even better.

Matthew Henry made this excellent comment:

Those who most excel others fall short of perfection. the very best of us should forget those things which are behind, and read forth unto those things which are before.

And then he added:

It is not enough that we abide in the faith of the gospel, but we must abound in the work of faith. We must not only persevere to the end, but we should grow better and walk more evenly and closely with God (VI, p. 782).

We all can understand what Paul was saying, can't we? There is not a one of us here this morning who would not say that there is not a lot of room for improvement in our fellowship with the Lord. And this will always be true. We not only need to be holy, but we need to abound! There is something very wrong when we feel that we are as good as we can be. We can always improve, always be better. And this was the burden that the Apostle had for the church at Thessalonica.

This should be our objective, too. And this should be our burden for each other. Note what Paul said in 3:12 about their love for each other. The Christian life can rightfully be called, The Abounding Life. That would be a good title for a book on the Christian life. We are all inclined just to maintain the status quo of our relationship with the Lord. We need to pray that we will be more faithful, more zealous, more obedient, more prayerful--more of everything that has to do with the Lord's will for us!

4:2 Paul did not mean by his words here that the Thessalonian believers knew everything that they needed to know. But they had been sufficiently taught the commands of the Lord Jesus. And Paul had taught them in such a way that they knew the commandments had come from the Lord. We can go to the four Gospels and find passages where the Lord taught holiness of life, and where He taught that believers should love each other. So they had no excuse. They could not plead ignorance.

This tells us something very important, too, about the ministry of the Apostle Paul. Perhaps I should say two things: (1) Paul taught them what the Lord Jesus had taught. (2) This statement seems to indicate that Paul had focused his ministry upon the teachings of the Lord, as some have said, nothing more, nothing less, nothing else.

It would be good for all of us who teach to be able to say what Paul said. I hope that from my ministry here at Trinity those of you who regularly listen to me have no doubt about what the Lord wants you to be and how the Lord wants you to live. People today are generally ignorant of the commandments of the Lord Jesus. As parents we need to make sure that this is what we are teaching our children.

4:3 Here Paul comes to his main point. Let there be no doubt with any of us. It is the Lord's will that we be sanctified. It is the Lord's will that we be holy, holy in character and holy in conduct. The Lord Jesus has saved us from our sins--not just the penalty of our sins, but also from the power of our sins.

But let me say a word here about the doctrine of sanctification. There is a sense in which we are already sanctified, already holy in God's sight. In this sense sanctification is like justification. Our standing before God is perfect. But in another sense, we are being sanctified. We all know that we are not as holy as we need to be, and as we want to be. That can only come through obedience to the Lord, through fellowship with the Lord. That comes through prayer and the Word of God. That comes through the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives. And this is what Paul was saying here. It is God's will for us to be holy, and if we really know Him and belong to Him, He is going to see to it that we are holy. If we forget what He wants us to be, or if we deliberately violate what He wants us to be, the Lord has ways of bringing us back where we belong. This process of holiness is going on in our lives every day, and it is the will of God that we do everything to make as much progress in that direction as we possibly can.

Being holy not only means that there are certain things that we need to do, but it also means that there are certain things that we are not to do! And fornication is one of them.

What is fornication?

Fornication is sexual intercourse between two people who have no business involving themselves in such a relationship. This means between a man and a woman who are not married. It means between one person who is married with another who is not. It means two people who are each married to someone else. It includes incest--sexual intercourse between two people who are closely related to each other--a father and daughter, or a mother and son. And since the word fornication has to do with perverting the marriage relationship, it would also include sexual activity between two people of the same sex.

In our society we have gotten as bad as they were in ancient Thessalonica. They did not even consider the things I have mentioned as sin. It was a part of their culture, and most often even of their religion. But the fact remains that all forms of fornication were sinful in God's sight, and they still are! God has not changed. The Word of God has not changed. Sin is still sin. What used to be sin continues to be sin. But people feel safe doing such things today because it is so widespread, and most people seem to be getting away with it!

Listen to what the Word says: "Thou shalt not commit adultery." This was the seventh commandment in the Law. Cf. Ex. 20:14. But before that Joseph knew that it was sin, and he refused to do it. David knew that it was sin. But listen to what the writer of Hebrews said,

Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled;
but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge (Heb. 13:4).

This law of God has never been changed, and the people who engage in this are certain to face the judgment of God. People think they are getting away with it today, but they aren't! Our society is guilty of so many things that grievous in God's sight that we can be sure that we are in for judgments to come from the hand of God.

Now Paul wasn't warning the citizens of Thessalonica about this. He was writing to the church. We might feel that a pastor would be out of place, especially on Sunday morning, to talk like this, or to write like this in a pastoral letter. But Paul did! Thessalonica, like most of the Gentile communities, was very permissive where sex was concerned. Most of the

people who were in the church at Thessalonica, had been saved out of this kind of living. And there was always the danger that they could be pulled back into it. And so Paul was very frank. Sanctification and fornication cannot possibly exist together.

The Christian needs to "abstain"--to hold one's self off. It means that we are to keep ourselves at a distance from this. The same word is used of all kinds of sin in 5:22. We are not to put ourselves in a situation where we will even be tempted. Stay as far away from it as you can possibly get--IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN PLEASING GOD!

Paul continued on this theme in the following verses.

4:4 Notice that this verse begins with, "That every one of you..." And verse 6 is all-inclusive too: "That no man go beyond..." Everybody needs these warnings because we are all susceptible. Paul was writing to the Corinthians about the sins of the Israelites on the way to Canaan when he added this important word:

Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth
take heed lest he fall (1 Cor. 10:12).

What did Paul tell the Thessalonians at this point? (Read verse 4.)

Here is a responsibility that each one of us has before God--"every one of you." And it seems that Paul was speaking to both men and women because both are in danger of the sin Paul was discussing here.

Much has been written about what Paul had in mind when he used the word "vessel." There are two main interpretations, and the first of these two seems to have the greatest support among expositors:

- 1) That it refers to the wife who in 1 Pet. 3:7 is called "the weaker vessel." This might also mean that the husband is a vessel because the wife is referred to as the weaker of the two.
- 2) That it refers to each believer's body. In 2 Cor. 4:7 Paul spoke of the body as "earthen vessels."

In support of the first view we have Paul's statement in 1 Cor. 7:2 where he was writing about how to avoid fornication:

Nevertheless, to avoid fornication,
let every man have his own wife,
and let every woman have her own husband.

There is no question but that marriage is a safeguard against fornication. In that same passage Paul taught that a wife does not have authority over her body, nor does a man have authority over his. The wife has authority over her husband, in this case, and the opposite is true of the husband. And a husband and wife are not to keep themselves from each other lest the Devil step in and tempt one or the other to go outside of the marriage relationship. This is very clearly the teaching of Scripture.

One problem I see with this interpretation is that if knowing "how to possess your vessel in sanctification and honour," then how could an unmarried woman do this? She cannot take the initiative in getting a husband. And so it would seem that she would be unable to "possess her vessel," if vessel means her husband, because she does not have one and may not be able to get one. Marriage is a safeguard against illicit sex, but surely not the only safeguard.

However, I can't completely give up the idea that Paul was talking about

each believer and his or her body. When there is fornication, the body is always involved, perhaps more so than in any other sin. So each believer, whether man or woman, must "know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour." Contrary to the trend today, the Scriptures often address the man when the woman is also included. That is, as far as this text is concerned, the man is to do this, but the wife is to do it also, and even men and women who are not married.

If this refers to the wife, then possess a man's vessel "in sanctification and honour" would mean being married. But if it refers to the body, how do we "know how to..."?

The key to the answer is probably in the word "abstain" in the preceding verse. "Abstain" sounds negative, pointing to things we are not to do. But nobody can really "abstain" who does not have some positive fortification.

If we are going to possess our vessels, then it is important that our bodies be presented to the Lord in accordance with Rom. 12:1, 2. We need also to remember 1 Cor. 6:19, 20. We need to maintain close fellowship with the Lord and with His people. On the other hand we need to be careful about what we read, and what we see, and what we listen to. We need to be careful about our contacts with people of the opposite sex. I know of a husband and wife who have just recently broken up, and the husband's departure started when he started having coffee with another man's wife.

We need to remember that our culture in the US has broken down. People joke about unfaithfulness in marriage. Television makes light of it. Even churches today take a very weak position on divorce and adultery. But let us remember that we are headed straight for terrible judgments because of the things that we do which are abominable in the sight of God.

So let us beware. There is a very interesting word about fornication in the book of Proverbs, in fact, many of them. But I am referring especially to Prov. 22:14:

The mouth of strange women is a deep pit:
he that is abhorred of the Lord shall fall therein.

"Strange women" are those who seek to seduce men into sin. The man who gets caught has been displeasing the Lord in other things, and so the Lord lets him fall into the pit of iniquity.

4:5 "Not in the lust of concupiscence" -- Paul could be speaking here of the degrading of the marriage relationship where the husband or the wife is interested in the other merely for the gratification of their baser desires. Or he could be speaking of the fact that no one is to allow his lusts to dominate his life and behavior. This is what happens when we go along with the atmosphere in which many people are living today. We can see much evidence of unbridled sexual desire and activity. Murder is often the result. Sin makes people this way, but it is not what the Lord intends for sexual behavior to be.

Unfortunately we as the Lord's people are not immune to the things which are going on in the world. The world has always exercised a powerful influence on the church. It ought to be otherwise. But here Paul was warning the believers against doing what they did before they knew the Lord, or doing what people still do "which know not God." We need to follow holy people, not those who are living in sin.

4:6 A more accurate translation of this verse would be, "That no one," instead of "no man." Both men and women have reason to beware and to be careful not to violate the will of God. Defrauding a brother would mean doing anything that would affect that brother's home. And since Paul used the word "brother" he was primarily thinking about how believers can sin against each other, and homes can be broken up. But in a secondary sense it can refer to anyone.

The warning is that "God is the avenger of such." And what an unspeakably terrible thing it is to fall into the hands of an angry God! I repeat, people feel safe in doing things forbidden by Scripture, but no unrepentant sinner will escape the judgment of God. It may not come in this life, or it may. But if not now, it will come when people stand before the Lord and it is too late to repent and change.

It is interesting to me that Paul had said these things to the Thessalonian church before. This was undoubtedly a part of his instruction to them as they were brought to the Lord. But here he is repeating it again. It shows what a terrible influence our lusts can have upon us. And that is especially true if people have been promiscuous before they were saved. It is so easy to go back to it. There are many passages in the book of Proverbs which speak of this very thing. We can be sure that this would not be in Scripture if it were not a major threat to the homes of believers and to the testimony of churches.

4:7 We need always to keep this in mind. The Lord has not called us to Himself so that we can go on in our sin. He has called us to be what we never before: "holiness." In this context, "uncleanness" would be sexual impurity. "Holiness" is altogether different. It is what God is and what we will eventually be by His grace.

4:8 This verse concludes what Paul was saying on the subject of fornication. And it contains two very important statements. One which should cause us to think twice before we give in to such sin; the other is a word of great encouragement in our battle to be what God wants us to be.

Paul warns us here that anyone who despised his teaching, was not really despising him (the Apostle Paul), but they were despising God! People may reject our teaching thinking that it is only our opinion, but they do not know that those who wrote the Scriptures were men who spoke as they were moved upon by the Holy Spirit. And the one who preaches the inspired word speaks with divine authority and has the blessing of almighty God upon him.

What does it mean to despise God?

We are despising God when we reject, when we set aside, His Word. And that is what we do when we sin whether we realize it or not. God has put a conscience in all of us, and we know that certain things are wrong. But our consciences can be so hardened by sin that our consciences no longer trouble us as much as they did at the first. How tragic it is for any person when knowingly, or unknowingly, he rejects the Word of God, and goes ahead with what he wants to do.

But what has God done to help us?

He has given us His Holy Spirit. Let us remember that we cannot be holy if we ignore the Holy Spirit. He is our Helper Who make us holy. He

indwells each one of us, and we need to be trusting Him to make us willing to do the will of God, and then to actually do it. Holiness is only possible through the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is mentioned three other times in this epistle: 1:5, 6; 5:19.

October 4, 1993

On the importance of the ministry of the Holy Spirit, cf. Rom. 8:13. As Frame said in his commentary on 1 Thessalonians (ICC), the Holy Spirit "is the energising, consecrating power in the hearts of the believers" (p. 155). Such a gift would obviously be intended to inspire obedience in each believer's life. The Holy Spirit gives us the assurance that a life of holiness is possible for us. Even many times when we would give up because of discouragement, we learn that the Holy Spirit will not let us give up.

Notice how the Apostle Paul sought to make the Thessalonians realize that this gift was for them! The preferred reading of this verse is into you, not "unto us." How important it is for each one of us to know that the Holy Spirit has been given to each one of us individually, and that He is in us, not temporarily, but permanently. Even the realization that the Holy Spirit is with us continually will make a big difference in the way we live.

At this point Paul went on to the other subject which we need to be really concerned about if we are "to walk and to please God" (4:1). It is our love for the brethren, our fellow-believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The order here is important! We need to have things right in our lives with God first. This means holiness of character and behavior. Afterwards we need to have things right with our fellow-believers in the body of Christ. This means that we need to love each other. Paul would have us know that there cannot be real progress in our fellowship with each other until we are right with the Lord. The Lord always must come first. Then believers are second. After that we need to be concerned about our relationship with people in the world. Speaking of people generally, the reason that we have so many troubles today among people is because so few have any concern at all for their relationship to God.

4:9 We can assume from the fact that Paul said that there was no need for him to write unto them about brotherly love, and then went on to write about it, that he meant that he was not going to write as much as he would have written otherwise.

Note what he had to say in 3:12, 13. Notice how Paul in these verses linked together love for the brethren and holiness toward God (as he did on a larger scale in chapter 4). As I have said, we start with God, and then move on to the people in the church. But as holiness toward God seems to beget love toward the brethren, so love produces more holiness.

As he had said in 4:1 that they needed to walk and please God more and more all of the time, so that seems to have been their greatest need concerning their love for each other. Cf. 4:10.

The last part of verse 9 is very interesting, about being taught of God that they should love each other before they were actually told that this

is what they should do.

On being taught of God, cf. Eph. 4:21-24; Heb. 8:10, 11. See also Isa. 2:3; Isa. 54:13.

We would all be surprised to learn how much the Lord has taught us without using a human teacher. He is the One Who teaches us even when He uses other people. But often He teaches us directly. When we are saved it seems that we have a God-given understanding that we should love each other. And we have it before someone tells us that we should.

4:10 But notice the expansion of their love for the brethren in this verse. We may get to love the people of our own fellowship the most (because we know them the better), yet our love for the saints must not be confined to just our own church. Macedonian was to Thessalonica what Oregon is to Portland. Or what Washington is to Vancouver. And Achaia (1:8) was like an adjoining State. There were not as many believers then as there are now, and they had an opportunity to get better acquainted with believers because the groups were small, and because there was just one church in each city. Also they were thrown together by persecution. However, although things are different for us today, yet the lesson remains the same. We have many people today who profess to be Christians who very clearly do not know the Lord. But wherever we find true believers, we are "taught of God" to love them.

What does this mean--to love each other?

It means that we will be concerned about them spiritually. It means that we will pray for them. It means that we will rejoice when we are aware of the Lord's blessing upon them. It means that we will be grieved when they have troubles.

Cf. what the Lord said in Matthew 22:34-40, and then in John 13:34, 35. Note the differences between those two passages. What are they?

Read 1 Cor. 13:4-8a in the light of what is going on in our churches in our fellowship with each other. Does this describe your heart, and does it describe the fellowship that we have in our churches.

Remember what the Apostle John said about our love for each other. Cf. 1 John 3:14. Our love for each other was one of the main points that he made which give us assurance of our salvation. Unbelievers do not love the saints. If they did they would be filling our churches. But they don't, and they usually avoid us.

But this verse indicates that as wonderful as our fellowship with each other may be, IT CAN ALWAYS GET BETTER! Nothing really stands still in the Christian life. We are either getting better, or we are getting worse. But we are not standing still. This is why we are making a mistake in our own lives as well as in our churches when we are content to maintain the status quo. Paul said, "We beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more." This was not growth in numbers, but growth in love. That which is good can always be better until at last it is perfect.

Let us make sure that we apply these exhortations personally. It is impossible to measure the damage done to the cause of Christ by Christians who can't get along with each other. It makes non-Christians feel that

the farther away they can stay from Christians, the better. Actually, it should be the other way. The Lord intended that our love for each other should be one of the most attractive things about the people of God. People are quick to notice love. When our Lord wept at the tomb of Lazarus, the Jews said, "Behold how he loved him!" (John 11:36).

But let us go on to verse 11.

4:11. Do verses 11 and 12 have anything to do with love. Yes, they do. But let us see how.

What an interesting exhortation this first statement is: "That ye study to be quiet."

The verb translated "study" is used three times in the NT: here, Rom. 15:20, 2 Cor. 5:9. The idea in the word is that of being motivated to do something because of a love of honor. Perhaps our first reaction to this idea is that only a very proud person could be moved to action for this reason, the love of honor. But when you see how the word is used in these three passages you can see that it was not selfish pride that Paul had in mind (and he is the only one who used the word), but an intense desire to please God.

Let me illustrate what Paul meant.

Please turn to Rom. 15:20. (Read.)

Here the word was used of Paul's desire concerning the preaching of the Gospel. We can say that it was his ambition, that which motivated him in his work. It was not to make a great name for himself. He was devoting all of his energies to accomplish what the Lord had told His disciples that they were to do, to go into all the world to preach the Gospel to every creature! Paul was working for the honor of hearing His Lord say, Well done, thou good and faithful servant...enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (Matt. 25:21, 23). More than anything else Paul wanted to make sure that He was doing what the Lord wanted Him to do.

Now turn to 2 Cor. 5:9. (Read.)

Let me read it to you from the NASB:

Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him.

Williams, in his translation, rendered it this way: "It is my constant ambition to please Him," speaking of the Lord.

Ambition is not a bad thing unless it has a bad objective. But the Lord has given us ambition, and when it is directed in ways that are pleasing to the Lord, it brings blessing to others and to us, and it brings joy and delight to the heart of God! People without ambition don't usually accomplish anything. Think of those who have been ambitious to translate the Word of God. Think of those who have been so ambitious to preach the Gospel that they were willing to die rather than to give up. Daniel was so ambitious to please the Lord that he went to a lion's den rather than dishonor the Lord. The same was true of his three friends who were cast into the fiery furnace. The apostles were driven by a holy ambition when they said, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

We need to be ambitious to please the Lord in what we say, where we go, what we do, and in what we refuse to do. The only way you and I can explain the life of the Apostle Paul is by seeing that he was driven by an intense ambition to please the Lord.

But now let us go back to 1 Thess. 4:11. Here our translators have used the word "study." But the NASB has it this way: **"And to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life."**

We might get the idea from what Paul had written about our love for each other that we should try to get involved in each others' lives. Sometimes we will be involved. But we have to be careful not to intrude where we are not wanted. Read Proverbs if you want some help on that. What we need to do is to be ambitious to be quiet in our hearts, and to live a quiet, peaceful life. This doesn't mean that we become withdrawn from people. It doesn't mean that we should seek to avoid trials. They are going to come our way regardless of what we do. But it does mean that we need to be ambitious, not to be the life of the party in every instance, but to have the peace of God ruling in our hearts.

Stress and turmoil are the characteristics of the day. We have more things, and we can go more places than any generation before us. But we have less peace.

Do you remember what Peter wrote to the wives? He said that they were not to be primarily concerned about their hair, or their jewelry, or their clothes. Instead, he wrote in 1 Pet. 3:4),

But let it be the hidden man of the heart,
in that which is not corruptible,
even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit,
which is in the sight of God of great price.

Can I say that what is good for the ladies, the wives, is also good for the men, the husbands? Even our Lord said, and you will find His words in Matt. 11:29,

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me;
for I am meek and lowly in heart:
and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

David wrote in Psa. 34:14,
Depart from evil, and do good;
seek peace, and pursue it.

And to show how important this verse is, Peter quoted it in 1 Pet. 3:11.

Check your own life on this point. What is your main ambition--or do you have one? We all need to be motivated strongly to do the will of God.

What else did Paul tell the Thessalonians to do?
And to do your own business,
and to work with your own hands,
as we commanded you.

It is like my mother used to tell me every once in a while: "Tend to your own business."

A Christian can easily make two mistakes while he is making one. He will get so involved in other people's business that he does not take care of his own.

In studying the NT I am often reminded of the book of Proverbs. Solomon took up several themes, and he came back to them again and again throughout the book. One was slothfulness. This evidently has always been a problem to the Lord's people. It is the opposite of being ambitious. A big part of our testimony is to be seen in the way we do our work, whether it is at home, or on the job, or wherever it might be. In our work our main purpose should be to please the Lord, and that always elevates what we are doing, even the most lowly jobs. Listen to what Paul told the servants of his day. You will find this in Eph. 6:5-8:

Servants, be obedient to the that are your masters
according to the flesh, with fear and trembling,
in singleness of your heart, **as unto Christ;**
Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers;
but as the servants of Christ,
doing the will of God from the heart;
With good will doing service,
As unto the Lord, and not to men:
Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth,
the same shall he receive of the Lord,
whether he be bond or free.

When Alexander Maclaren spoke on this passage, he gave it the title, Small Duties. By that subject he did not mean that they were of minor importance. Instead, he meant that they were things to which we often do not give the attention that we should. And he said this:

We may note that the plain, prosaic duties enjoined in verses 7-12 lead on to the lofty revelations of the rest of the context without any sense of a gap, just because to Paul the greatest truths had a bearing on the smallest duties, and the vision of future glory was meant to shape the homely details of present work (Vol. 9, pp. 183, 184).

4:12 Paul here expressed that he had two reasons for writing what he had written. One had to do with the people of the world; the other, with themselves:

- 1) "That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without," i.e., without Christ, or outside of the fold of salvation.
- 2) "That ye may have need of nothing.

Will you notice something very interesting here? Our work is a part of our walk. Paul started this chapter by saying that we need to please God with our walk, our lives. As we come down to the end of this section he made is clear that our work is a part of our walk.

Our work makes up a large part of our lives, doesn't it? And the way we do our work, the integrity that we manifest, the desire to do our work as it should be done, influences our testimony with the people in the world. A lazy, sloppy Christian is no credit to the Name of our Lord. And a believer who depends upon others to take care of him when he is physically able to do so himself, brings reproach upon the Name of our Lord.

We have evidence in the book of Acts as well as in Paul's epistles that he practiced what he preached. Those of us who are serving the Lord in the ministry need to be just as careful about these things as anyone else. And so let us all seek by God's grace to be today what Paul told the Thessalonians to be two thousand years ago. The need is great for Christians like Paul was describing here.

THE FIRST EPISTLE OF PAUL TO THE THESSALONIANS

1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:10

October 18, 1993

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Intro: (On 10/12/93 Gary Custis taught 1 Thess. 4:13-18, and so the following notes begin with 5:1.)

Now we are ready to move on to chapter 5. I have indicated in the outline that Paul's teaching on the coming of the Lord goes down to verse 5 of chapter 5. Some think that verses 6 through 10 should be included also. I put them with the following section because of the practical emphasis in those verses. I know that they have to do with what Paul has just written about in verses 1-5. And so if you feel that verses 6-10 belong to verses 1-5, we are not going to part company over that. But let us get started with chapter 5.

The outline at this point is:

III. PRACTICAL AND DOCTRINAL (1 Thess. 4:1-5:24).

B. The doctrine: the coming of the Lord (1 Thess. 4:13-5:5).

The subject here is THE DAY OF THE LORD. Cf. v. 2.

We might think that Paul was going on with what he had taught in 4:13-18 except for the fact that the day of the Lord is a theme that is prominent in the OT while the truth in 4:13-18 is called in 1 Cor. 15:51, "a mystery." A mystery, by its NT definition, is truth not revealed in the OT, but revealed in the NT. Cf. Rom. 16:25-27; Eph. 3:3a, 5, 6; Col. 1:25, 26.

There are many passages in the OT prophets which speak of the day of the Lord. Five in particular are:

- 1) Isa. 13:6-13.
- 2) Joel 1:15; 2:1, 2, 11.
- 3) Amos 5:18-20.
- 4) Zeph. 1:7-18.
- 5) Mal. 4:1-6.

In addition to our text in 1 Thess. 5:2, 2 Pet. 3 also deals with the Day of the Lord (cf. esp. v. 10).

Some expositors believe that the prophets were speaking of the captivities which Israel and Judah have experienced. We might agree except for the words which our Lord spoke in Matt. 24:21, 22 when He was speaking of The Great Tribulation. When we compare His words with what Joel said in Joel 2:2, we must come to the conclusion that the Day of the Lord is still future, and that it actually will be The Great Tribulation. See also Dan. 12:1; Rev. 16:17-21 (see v. 18). Also Jer. 30:7.

Now when we put all of this together, what the OT teaches about the Day of the Lord, what Paul taught about the Rapture, and what our Lord taught about the Great Tribulation followed by the return of our Lord to the earth. We come up with this order:

- 1) The rapture of the Church.
- 2) The Great Tribulation, known in the OT as The Day of the Lord. Some passages seem to extend The Day of the Lord to include the time of blessing which will follow in the millennial reign of Christ. Cf.

Isa. 14:1-3.

3) The Second Coming of Christ to the earth.

And we know from other passages, e.g., Rev. 20, that this will be followed by:

4) The Millennium, a thousand year reign of Christ upon the earth.

Now, when we put the latter part of 1 Thess. 4 together with the first part of 1 Thess. 5, it would appear that someone had troubled the believers in Thessalonica with the idea that they were in the Day of the Lord. And they seemed to have a point because of the persecution which the church in Thessalonica was going through. And so Paul not only had to comfort the believers about the Christians who had died, but also to relieve their fears about being in the day of the Lord.

With this explanation, let us look at our text beginning with 1 Thess. 5:1.

5:1 Here we have the same expression that Paul used back in 4:9: "Ye need not that I write unto you." The reason Paul made this statement here in 5:1 seems to be that Paul himself had taught them about the Day of the Lord. He hadn't taught them about what happens to believers who die before the Lord returns, but he had taught them about the Day of the Lord.

What did Paul mean by "times and seasons"?

The Lord Jesus used both of these words together, as they are here, in Acts 1:7 when the disciples asked the Lord, "Wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). His response was, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father has put in his own power" [authority].

"Times" is the translation of the Greek word from which we get our English word, chronology. It speaks of the whole plan of God from beginning to end throughout time. "Seasons" are those epochs, or periods of time, which make up the chronology. The Lord obviously did not mean that we could not know anything about coming events, but that we could not know the specific time when those events would occur. Thinking back to what Paul wrote at the end of chapter 4, we know that the Lord is coming, but we do not know when. And so those who try to set dates for future events of Scripture are clearly in violation of the Word of God. We are told what, but not when, and even sometimes the sequence of events is not absolutely clear to us.

The Lord emphasized this fact in Matt. 24:36 when, speaking of prophetic events leading up to the return of the Lord to the earth, He said,

But of that day and hour knoweth no man,
no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.

Paul had taught the Thessalonian believers much about prophetic truth. He had told them about what we sometimes call, God's plan of the ages. He had point out how God had dealt with His people in different ways, and that He would continue to do so to the end of time. We speak of these as dispensations. And so they knew where the Day of the Lord would come in the plan of God.

So Paul did not need to go through all of that again. We know that the Rapture of the Church and the Second Coming of Christ to the earth cannot be the same when we compare 1 Thess. 4:13-18 with Matt. 24:29-31; 25:31ff.

But let me remind you that not all believers agree. There are true Christians who are amillennial, and many of them are very godly people. There are also true Christians who are postmillennial. Spurgeon seems to have leaned in this direction. It was probably the great blessing he saw in his ministry that made him feel that the world could be won for Christ. However, taking all of these things into consideration, let us remember what Paul wrote to the Corinthians in 1 Cor. 13:12:

For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face:

now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

If the Apostle Paul had to say that, you and I certainly have to say that, too. We can say no more than he could.

Remember this, too. Our fellowship as believers is not based upon the fact that we agree 100% on all points. There are basic truths which are essential to our fellowship: that the Bible is the Word of God, that there are Three Persons in the Godhead; that the Man, Jesus Christ, is the Son of God, that man by nature is a sinner and in need of a Savior, and that it is only through faith in the sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus Christ that anyone can be saved. We have to agree on these points. The Scriptures are crystal-clear on these points. But there are many points on which believers do not agree. In these we need to be charitable, and continue to ask the Lord to give us all greater understanding as we all move toward that time when we are with the Lord, and our understanding will be perfect.

5:2 One thing they knew about the Day of the Lord was that it would come "as a thief in the night." And Paul said that they knew this "perfectly." By this he meant that what they had been taught was "precise, clear, and accurate" (Eadie, p. 175).

Isn't that an interesting expression: "the **day** of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the **night**." Paul probably expressed it this way for two reasons:

- 1) It was going to be a night of terrible trouble as the Tribulation began, a night that would get darker and darker.
- 2) The Jewish day began at sundown, as the shades of night began to set in.

From what we have already seen, Paul was not speaking of a twenty-four hour period, although that is most common meaning of the word. Paul was using the word day for an extended period of time. We use it the same way. We talk about the day in which a person lived, for example, in my grandfather's day. We are speaking of his lifetime and possibly of conditions which existed before he lived, and after he lived. We speak of working an eight-hour day.

If it is coming "as a thief in the night," this would mean that we surely don't know when it will be. Thieves do not make appointments with us and let us know that they are coming. They want to come when they are least expected. And so this was another way the Apostle had of emphasizing the fact that they could not possibly know the time when the Day of the Lord would begin.

In the following verse we see even more how unexpected the Day of the LORD will be.

5:3 Unregenerate people living on the earth at that time will feel that they have come into a time where peace will prevail throughout the world, and that there will be no further danger of war. Our politicians

foolishly think that this is a very real possibility--that we can have peace without the Prince of Peace.

Cf. Matt. 24:36-51.

Man has always been inclined to ignore God and to think that he can have peace even though he is doing things that displease God. Belshazzar felt very comfortable in his feast, even drinking wine out of the vessels that had been taken out of the Temple in Jerusalem. But suddenly a hand appeared, and began to write on the wall. At that moment his peace vanished.

Paul also likened it to a woman expecting a baby. She knows she is going to have a baby, but she does not know how great her travail will be.

Cf. Matt. 24:37-39.

This means that the first part of the Tribulation period will appear to be bringing on world peace. The book of the Revelation seems to teach this very clearly. But all of a sudden it changes, and no one will escape the judgments which follow. The Lord will deal with the nations of the earth for the way they have despised Him and violated His Word and His people.

5:4 It is obvious at this point that what Paul was saying in verse 3 applied to unbelievers. The unbelieving world has no idea of the judgment that is to come. And so they will not be ready for it when it does come. And this was because they are in darkness, i.e., ignorant of spiritual truth and living in their sin.

But it is different with believers. While we do not know everything, and really don't know anything as well as we should, yet we do know what God has been pleased to reveal in His Word. And so going back to what he had said about a thief in verse 2, he said that the Day of the Lord could not overtake us as a thief would. It would not surprise them because they were no longer "in darkness."

This is a passage of Scripture which has caused some to think that the Church is going through the Great Tribulation. And we who do not think so have to admit that there is a problem here. However, let me remind you that there is no doctrine in Scripture which does not have its problem passages. This is a problem passage for those of us who believe in a Pre-Tribulation Rapture. Perhaps this is a good place to state the purpose of the Great Tribulation.

The Tribulation really has a twofold purpose, and it is important that we keep these in mind:

- 1) God will be judging the world for its sin.
- 2) God will be working to bring the elect of Israel to Himself. It will also be a time when many Gentiles will be saved, as the judgment of the nations indicates.

I do not say that the Church will not suffer before the Lord comes for us. The Church has suffered greatly in the past, and suffering may be in the plan of God for us in the days ahead. But that is not to say that we will go through the Great Tribulation. The Day of the Lord was a part of the prophetic picture before there was a Church.

However, it seems from many OT passages that warnings of future judgments

were often used with people who would not live to see those judgments. That is true of many of the Day of the Lord passages. And so Paul seems to be doing that here, as a true NT prophet. He was really comforting them that they would not be in the Day of the Lord, and so they did not need to be afraid that their present circumstances were proof that they were in the Day of the Lord. They knew about this Day. They were no longer in ignorance and sin. And so he wanted them to know that the Day would not overtake and surprise them as a thief.

And then he added to this in verse 5, telling them what they were.

5:5 He said on that positive side that they were all, lit., sons of light and sons of the day. They had been brought out of darkness into the light. Cf. Col. 1:13. In Eph. 5:8 we read,

For ye were sometimes darkness,
but now are ye light in the Lord:
walk as children of light.

God has brought His children out of sin into righteousness, out of ignorance into an understanding of the truth. And so, first of all, this means that we must depend upon the truth, the truth of the Word of God. False teachers and false alarms will not dismay us when we pay attention to the truth, and walk in the truth. Who we are makes a great deal of difference to God, i.e., whether know Him, or not. And it ought to make a great difference to us and to the way we live. So Paul was using their present alarm over the Day of the Lord as an opportunity to teach them.

It is very clear from what Paul wrote here that a person cannot be in the light and in the darkness at the same time. The people who are in the darkness are the ones who can be deceived. We who are son of light, are in the light, and who have the light, should not be deceived.

The outline:

- C. The practical exhortations resumed and completed (1 Thess. 5:6-24).

The practical exhortations were started in 4:1-12. After speaking of the coming of the Lord, here in 5:6 Paul got back to more practical exhortations.

5:6 In these verses we have the beginning of Paul's exhortations, verses 6 and 8 in particular having to do with the problem Paul had discussed in the first five verses of this chapter.

I can't see that this verse has anything to do with whether or not the Church will go through the Great Tribulation. This applies just as much to what Paul taught in chapter 4:13-18 as to what he taught in 5:1-5. In the light of the truth that the Lord is coming and that this will be followed by judgment, we need to be careful not to go to sleep, but to "watch and be sober."

Therefore let us not sleep, as do others." The "others" to whom Paul was referring here had to be the people who were "in darkness" and "of the night" and "of darkness." That is, the unregenerate. They sleep. The truth of the coming of the Lord means nothing to them. Peter in 2 Peter 3 referred to the fact that this was a truth people scoffed at. "Where is the promise of his coming?" (1 Pet. 3:4).

To sleep, Charles Erdman said, "denotes the careless indifference which would be startled by the unexpected coming of the Lord" (p. 60). The world is asleep. We cannot afford to be like they are. The coming of the Lord is our hope. Without it we are of all people the most to be pitied. It should be constantly in our mind, and we should be living and working with this ever before us.

To keep from sleeping, we must "watch and be sober."

The word "watch" would suggest that we are like soldiers on guard. We are watchful against sin and even against temptation. We have a real Enemy in the Devil who would like to lull us to sleep, or to strike us down. And we live in a world whose attractions continually threaten us in our fellowship with the Lord.

The other day in our Bible reading I came across those words which Paul wrote to Timothy when he said, concluding some things he had been saying to Timothy,

Meditate upon these things;
give thyself wholly to them;
that thy profiting may appear to all.

I haven't been able to get away from the middle part of that verse: "Give thyself wholly to them." How many of us really live that way? This would be a good definition of what it means to watch. The best defense is a strong offense. If we are giving ourselves wholly to the Lord, to be obedient to His Word, what a lot of trouble it would spare us, and what great blessing it would bring to us! Stand guard against anything that would dampen your zeal or lessen your love for the Lord. The Lord is coming. Don't let Him come like He did to the disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane, and find you asleep.

"Be sober." Dr. John Walvoord has an interesting comment on this word in his commentary on 1 Thessalonians. He said this:

The word sober in the original means exactly what is meant by it in English. It is the word for not being intoxicated. We are so prone to be intoxicated, not necessarily by liquor but by the stimulants of the world--its glamor, pleasures, and appearance (p. 84).

In these days when the church has been so greatly influenced by the world, and when even Christians have grown lax about drinking intoxicating beverages, this is a good word for us. The influence of the world and all that is in it has a tendency to intoxicate us. To be intoxicated is by common definition to be under the influence of. We need to be under the influence of the Spirit, under the influence of the Word of God, not under the influence of the world and its sin. A worldly Christian is one who has gone to sleep. And there are many sleep-walkers in the Church today.

However, when the truth the Lord's return grips our hearts, we fight sleep. We stand guard over ourselves and, by prayer, over each other. And instead of neglecting the Word, and neglecting the Church, we give ourselves wholly to those things that will make us pleasing to the Lord.

5:7 This verse confirms the meaning of verse 6. Sleep and drunkenness both belong to the night. Therefore, those who sleep and are drunk identify themselves with the night, and not with the day. What a tragedy it is when those who have the light live as those they were still in the darkness.

5:8 Here Paul repeated his exhortation to be sober. And the second part

seems to agree with Paul's exhortation that they watch.

Notice that both in verse 6 and again here in verse 8 Paul identifies himself with the believers in Thessalonica by saying, "Let us..."

The breastplate and the helmet are both defensive part of the armor. The imagery suggests that the believer is a soldier who is engaged in warfare with the Enemy. It is hand to hand conflict. Faith and love protect the heart; the hope of salvation, the head. The combination of these three prepares the child of God for the coming of the Lord.

These three graces were mentioned in 1:3 as already characterizing the believers in Thessalonica. None of them is passive. In fact, they are very active. And it would seem that all are directed toward the Lord, and faith and love, as in 1:3, are probably to be manifested in faithful service to the Lord, trusting Him and loving Him. And their energies in living for the Lord and serving Him are to be intensified with the prospect of seeing the Lord and being like Him.

"Putting on" -- Putting on faith and love and the hope of salvation would indicate that they are not a normal part of the believer, but that which is acquired by the grace of God. And we are to cultivate those things which will strengthen our faith, increase our love for the Lord, and make us anticipate more and more the coming of the Lord.

In view of the fact that Paul spoke here of that which had to do with the heart and the mind, it is interesting to see what Paul said to the Philipians about the heart and mind in Phil. 4:6, 7:

Be careful for nothing:

but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving
let your requests be made known unto God.

And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding,
shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Paul would not ignore the other parts of the armor (as mentioned in Eph. 6), but would emphasize these as particularly important in the light of the need of the Thessalonian believers.

Erdman said of faith and love, "here they are means of protection against the assaults of moral evil..." Concerning hope, "That hope is the safeguard against carelessness and despair. It is certain to give victory in the time of conflict (p. 61).

Matthew Henry has some very worthwhile comments on this verse. He said, Our spiritual enemies are many, and mighty, and malicious. They draw many to their interest, and keep them in it, by making them careless, secure, and presumptuous, by making them drunk--drunk with pride, drunk with passion, drunk and giddy with self-conceit, drunk with the gratifications of sense: so that we have need to arm ourselves against their attempts, by putting on the spiritual breast-plate to keep the heart, and the spiritual helmet to keep the head; and this spiritual armor consists of the three great graces of Christians, faith, love, and hope... We must live by faith, and this will keep us watchful and sober... True and fervent love to God, and the things of God, will keep us watchful and sober, and hinder our apostasy in times of trouble and temptation... This good hope, through grace, of eternal life, will be as a helmet to defend the head, and hinder our being intoxicated with the pleasures of sin,

which are but for a season (Vol. VI, p. 788).

And why should we be so careful and diligent about these things? Verses 9 and 10 give us the answer.

5:9 Here is the sovereignty of God in our salvation. Why are we in the light and son of light, while others remain in darkness? It is certainly not because we are worthy of what we have in Christ. It is not because we have in some way earned this position. We have been "appointed" by God, not "to wrath," not to judgment, not to eternal damnation, "but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ."

How wonderful is that word "appointed"! It means that God has ordained us for salvation. It is by His eternal decree that He has chosen to save us, lit., to put us in salvation. It is by His grace, and His grace is all that is needed. It is "by Jesus Christ."

Therefore, this fact is to become one of our greatest incentives for watch and being sober as we look forward to the completion of our salvation when the Lord Jesus Christ returns.

But what did our salvation cost the Lord Jesus Christ?

5:10 He "died for us." And this was, that "whether we wake or sleep," not the sleep of 5:6, 7, but of 4:13--whether we live or whether we die, "we should live together with Him." This is what will make heaven, heaven. We shall live together with Him forever. It will be "in His presence, and in communion with Him. Of that life, so blessed and unending, His presence is the primal element and the chiefest joy" (Eadie, John, p. 194).

Again quoting Matthew Henry, "Christ died for us, that, living and dying, we might be his; that we might live to him while we are here, and live with him when we go hence" (VII, 788).

And so, if we truly love the Lord, we are going to live each day in the hope of His return, not really satisfied until we see Him face to face.

THE FIRST EPISTLE OF PAUL TO THE THESSALONIANS

1 Thessalonians 5:11-24

November 1, 1993

Intro: We are reminded many times in Scripture that doctrine leads to practice, dogma involves us in duty, creed is the foundation of conduct. Paul was a master at emphasizing this. One of the proofs that we understand the teaching we are receiving, is that there will be an increase of holiness in our lives. Doctrine which is an end in itself, kills. It hardens the heart. But when the one who is taught puts into practice the teaching he has received, then there is spiritual growth and blessing. Then there will be real joy in the Lord. As Paul told Timothy, 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 perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (2 Tim. 3:16, 17).

The Psalmist wrote in Psa. 119:101,

I have refrained my feet from every evil way,
that I might keep thy word.

On one of the last occasions when the Lord was with His disciples, teaching them, He said concerning His teaching, "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them" (John 13:17). And then we all remember those familiar words of James found in Jas. 1:22-25):

But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only,
deceiving your own selves.

For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer,
he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass:

For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way,
and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.

But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty,
and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer,
but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

Later in his epistle James said,

Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not,
to him it is sin (Jas. 4:17).

An emphasis upon holiness of life is very appropriate in connection with the truth of the coming of the Lord. After the Apostle John had spoken of the Lord's coming in 1 John 3:2, he added this word of exhortation:

And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself,
even as he is pure.

The person who believes most strongly in the coming of the Lord, will be the one who is most concerned that he, or she, is living a holy life. A holy life is nothing more, and nothing less, than a life lived in obedience to the Word of God.

Not only is obedience a proof that we understand the doctrine, but it will always be, and always has been, a proof that we really know the Lord. Cf. Matt. 7:21-29. (Read.)

The Apostle John said,

He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments,
is a liar, and the truth is not in him (1 John 2:6).

Remember also that it is proof that we really do love the Lord. Cf. John 14:21-23.

The great sin of the children of Israel was disobedience. And the same is true of the Church today. We wouldn't be doing many of the things that we

do if we really were obeying God. On the other hand, we would be doing many of the things we are leaving undone, if we were really living in obedience to the Lord. There is not a one of us who does not need to be concerned about this. We all need to know more than we do about the doctrines of Scripture. But we also need to be careful to see the practical effect that the Word of God is to have in our lives. The twentieth century Church is weak in doctrine and weak in practice. If we are weak in our knowledge of the truth, it inevitably follows that we are going to be weak in holiness of life. So let us give ourselves to learning the great doctrines of the faith, but in doing this, let us also look for the ways in which the Lord intends for the truth to affect what we are and what we do. I firmly believe it is impossible for us to overstate the need for obedience to the Word of God.

Now let us look at our text beginning with verse 11.

5:11 When Paul finished what he had to say about the rapture, he gave the Thessalonian church the words which we find in 4:18. (Read.)

When he finished what he had to say here in chapter 5 about the day of the Lord, he finished with the same word: "comfort." It is a present imperative, which means that it is a command which the Lord, and the Apostle Paul, expected them to be doing right then, and to continue to do. As long as they lived this was to be one major part of their ministry to each other.

Anyone who is familiar with the Greek verb παρακαλέω knows that it means two things. It means to encourage (and this is what we do when we "comfort" each other). But it also means to exhort. And an exhortation is another word for a command.

This is the NT word from which we get that title for the Holy Spirit which the Lord used when He called the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, or lit., the Paraclete. He is our Encourager. And He is our Exhorter. We grieve the Spirit when we are disobedient. We quench the Spirit by our disobedience. A Spirit-filled Christian will always, always, without exception, be an obedient Christian. The Holy Spirit teaches us the truth, and then He gives us the desire to live the truth, and finally, through His power, we are able to live the truth.

Isaiah faced this same problem of disobedience in the lives of the Lord's people in his day. Early in his prophecy we find him saying,

O house of Jacob, come ye,
and let us walk in the life of the Lord (Isa. 2:5).

Isaiah was comforting the Lord's people. He was not seeking to console them in their disobedience, but he was encouraging them and exhorting them to live for the Lord.

Matthew Henry points out that the people who are most likely to be able to comfort others are the people who have learned to comfort themselves. Our comfort comes from the Lord, and it comes through the Word. But there will always be times when we need others to comfort us. So this is a reciprocal ministry -- and, as the word "comfort" indicates in the original, a ministry that needs to be going on continually.

This does not mean that we are continually rebuking each other if things are wrong, nor does it mean that we are "preaching" to others. Paul said, "Wherefore comfort yourselves together." This means that the one doing

the comforting is being comforted while he comforts someone else who needs comfort. We all profit from it.

But how do we do it?

We do it by discussing appropriate teaching from the Word, citing special verses or passages that will help. We can pray together. We can praise the Lord together. We can cite from our own experiences, or the experiences of others, ways in which the Lord has given help. However, let us always remember that it is focusing our attention upon the Lord that we are comforted.

Cf. Isa. 26:3, 4. This was one of Isaiah's words of comfort.

The Lord met two disciples on the road to Emmaus who were very discouraged, very much in need of comfort. They had believed that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah. But after He was put to death, they did not know what to believe even though they had heard the report from the women that the Lord's body was not in the tomb when they went to anoint it, but that angels had told them that He was alive. What did the Lord do to encourage them? He took them to the Word. What was the result? Listen to what they said to each other as it is recorded in Luke 24:32:

Did not our heart burn within us,
while he talked with us by the way,
and while he opened to us the scriptures?

What had happened? The Lord had comforted them.

Closely related to the ministry of comforting is the ministry of edifying. This, too, is a present imperative, second person plural. It means that just as the Lord's people will always need comfort, so they will always need to be edified.

The verb to edify is built upon the Greek word for house. And so edification has in mind, not only the building up of individual believers, but the building up of the house of God, the Church. In view of the fact that Paul had just spoken of faith, love, and hope, he probably had in mind that these are the three areas in which the Thessalonian church, that local part of the Body of Christ, needed to be strengthened. A church that is strong in these three characteristics, will be less likely to fall under the attacks of the Devil -- and even of the flesh and the world! In our fellowship with each other the Thessalonians needed to be constantly concerned with comforting and edifying each other.

But notice the expression, "even as also ye do."

Most of the time when we think of exhorting and edifying each other, we think in terms of getting the Lord's people to do what they are not doing, or to quit doing things that they are doing, things that might be displeasing to the Lord. However, here Paul exhorted them to continue doing what they were already doing. Let us remember this. They were comforting each other, but they needed not only to continue doing what they were doing, but they needed to do a better job of what they were doing, and to do it even more than they were. The same would be true of the ministry of edifying. Regardless of how well the Lord's people may be doing, some may be ready to quit. But regardless of the situation, everybody can do better the good things that they are doing.

The church at Thessalonica was truly a remarkable church. It was young,

but outstanding. However, the Apostle Paul knew that as good as it was, it could be better, and needed to be better. And this is true of every one of us, and of the churches we attend. No child of God is perfect; no church is perfect. And so we need to persevere with what we are doing, and always seeking to serve the Lord more faithfully, more diligently, and more joyfully.

5:12, 13 One area where we all have trouble at one time or another is that of submission to authority. Some people always have trouble with it. When what we want is different from the will of those who are over us, we have trouble. We become rebellious. This has to do with wives in their relationship with their husbands. It has to do with children and their relationship with their parents. It has to do with workers in their relationship with their employers. It also has to do with citizens in their relationship with their political leaders. And we can always see reasons why we do not have to be submissive to those who are over us.

This problem of rebellion against authority also has to do with people in the church. Paul here was addressing the subject of their relationship with their spiritual leaders. By nature we are all self-willed. There are some people who insist of having things their way. And they will do whatever they need to do to get it. But God has established authority in the church, and to please Him we need to be submissive to those who are over us.

As Paul addressed this sensitive subject, we see that he besought them to do as he was about to instruct them to do. And let us keep in mind that obedience is the key word for all of us both in our personal lives as well as in the church. Paul had every right to lay down the law to the people in the church, but he did not do it that way. In other epistles he said that he would use his authority, but that was not his approach here. Probably the reason for his gentleness was that this was not a problem at that time. But he was instructing them so that it would not become a problem.

As a fellow-member of the body of Christ, the Apostle Paul was presenting this as a request, and yet a request which was expressive of the will of God in the functioning of a church.

Paul describes their leaders, which would mean their elders, in three ways:

- 1) They "labour among you."
- 2) They "are over you in the Lord."
- 3) They "admonish you."

And then he exhorted the people to do three things:

- 1) To "know" their leaders.
- 2) To "esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake" (v. 13).
- 3) "And be at peace among yourselves" (also v. 13).

Let us examine each one of these points.

First, he described their leaders as those who "labour among you." He was speaking of the fact, not only that they were themselves a part of the work that they all had to do, but, as leaders, they were under the burden of the work. The work took its toll upon them in physical weariness and sometimes exhaustion. They were in a position where they could not get

away from their responsibilities, and would not want to. But it was an expression which indicated that leading in the work of the Lord, while one of the greatest honors, and one with the greatest joys, is also one of the hardest works, if not the hardest, that any person can be engaged in. The work of the Lord is never easy, and nobody in the church knows that better than the leaders do.

John Eadie, in his commentary on 1 Thessalonians, said,
The Christian ministry rightly discharged is no sinecure (meaning, a position which does not involve hard work), it is the highest and hardest of human enterprises; the reward is proportionate (p. 107).

Second, they "are over you in the Lord." Paul described the leaders as men who were placed before or over the people in the church. This means that they were to superintend the work. They were the ones who would decide how the work should go. The same word is translated "ruleth" in 1 Tim. 3:4 where Paul was giving Timothy the qualifications of the elders. They had to rule well their own households. So the elders have the same position in the church which fathers have in their homes. In 1 Tim. 5:17 we read this:

Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in the word and doctrine.

A church is not a democracy, nor a republic. People in America are inclined to think that the church is to be run by popular vote. That is not the case, and it never has been. The leaders of the church are to decide how the work is to be conducted, but they themselves are responsible to God and must guide His people by the Word of God. So they are in authority over the people "in the Lord." They are to conduct the work as they believe the Lord would have it conducted, and to do it for His honor and glory and praise.

It will help all of us to remember that God's plan for the Church is completely different from the trends we see in the world today. This makes it especially important that we know what the Word teaches, and then abide by it. When we think of practical matters, we usually think of how the Word of God relates to us individually, how we should live, what kind of people we should be. But we do not think the same way about the ministry of the Church, and how He wants His work to be conducted. The women's lib movement has found its way into the church. We have women in some of the pulpits of America, and women serving as elders in churches. But this is contrary to everything that the Word says on the subject. And it is just as wrong for any woman or man to try to run the work of the Lord from the sidelines. To avoid future problems, Paul was addressing himself in this passage to issues which, if followed, would preserve the blessing that they were seeing in the early days of that church in Thessalonica.

Third, the work of the leaders is here described as that of admonishing the people of God. This same word, "admonish," is used in verse 14 where it is translated, "warn." The word seems to contain two ideas:

- 1) That of put people in mind of the truth. That is an awkward way of saying that the Lord's people occasionally need to be reminded of truth that supposedly they know, but are not obeying.
- 2) Coupled with that is the idea of warning them. It would be wonderful if all that was required of spiritual leaders was teaching Bible classes and enjoying fellowship with the Lord's people. But sometimes leaders need to warn people of the consequences of pursuing the course

they have taken. Moses had to do that. David had to do that. The prophets had to do that. Our Lord did that on earth. The Apostle Paul did that. Read 1 Corinthians and Galatians as examples of warning. This is never a pleasant task, but it is always necessary when things are amiss in people's lives. It should be done privately at first, then publicly if personal efforts are not fruitful.

With those three expressions Paul has given us quite a comprehensive picture of the work of the leaders in a church. Now what were the people to do in their responsibility toward their leaders. Again we have three things.

First, they were to "know them." This means more than just being acquainted with them, although it does include that. It means that the people need to respect and appreciate them. And such appreciation includes a willingness to submit to their leadership. To "know them" means to recognize the place that they have in the church, a God-given place.

Second, in verse 13, the people were "to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake." The leaders are to be regarded, not only "highly," but "very highly for their work's sake." So it is not just the man as such, but the man in the position that he holds. And it is not to be done out of fear, nor by force, but "in love."

Third, "and be at peace among yourselves." A person who is rebellious against authority, or dissatisfied in any way, soon can become a sower of discord among the brethren. And this is one thing that the Lord hates. Cf. Prov. 6:19. And what the Lord hates, He judges. Nobody is happy with everything, but where peace reigns in any church, there you will find the blessing of the Lord. As Paul wrote his epistles he was always concerned that those to whom he was writing would experience "grace" and "peace" from God and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Cf. 1 Thess. 1:1.

When Paul in Romans 14 was discussing some of the things over which believers differ, he said this in verse 19:

Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace,
and things wherewith one may edify another.

If we insist on having our own way, there will be no peace. If we are committed to our leaders and seek the glory of God, then there can be peace.

5:14 Having said all of this about the leadership, Paul went on to show how the brethren themselves could be of help to the leaders by their ministry to each other.

Notice that Paul wrote in the first person plural. In verse 12 he said, "And we beseech you, brethren." Here in verse 14 he wrote, "Now we exhort you, brethren." He had to be including Silas and Timothy who would have been in full accord with what he was saying. And, as an exhortation (the same word used in verse 11), these instructions were not simple requests, they were divine commands.

"Warn them that are unruly." "Unruly" is a military expression. It describes a person who is out of step with the others, or an army that is moving ahead without any order whatsoever. The church often has people who are "out of step" with what the leaders are doing. And they try to make everybody else get in step with them. Paul says that they must be warned. They are not just dealing with their leaders, but they are

dealing with God. They need to be told to get in step with those who are leading.

"Comfort the feebleminded." The "feebleminded" that Paul had in mind are the fainthearted. They are the people who are discouraged, and who are either inclined to give up, or have given up. The way can get very hard for any of us. Troubles come and stay instead of going away. And other troubles may be added to them. Prayers go unanswered even when we seek to do everything that we can to please the Lord.

Perhaps it will encourage us to know that even some of the greatest saints have shown that they have had their times when they were about to faint, or actually did faint. Abraham went down to Egypt when he came to a famine in Canaan. Elijah prayed that he would die. He felt that he was the only one left in Israel who wanted to live for the Lord. David was fainthearted, and went to live with the Philistines because he thought he would never be king. John the Baptist, one of the greatest saints of all time, sent and asked the Lord, "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" (Matt. 11:3). Spurgeon has a chapter in his book, Lectures to My Students, called The Minister's Fainting Fits. We all have a streak of faintheartedness in us.

How you we "comfort the feebleminded," the fainthearted?

One way is by praying with them, and for them when we are not with them. Our Lord said, "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18:1). Another way is by taking them to the Word because there we find the promise that "in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Gal. 6:9). Paul said that the thing which kept him from fainting was the mercy of the Lord. See 2 Cor. 4:1. And in that same chapter in 2 Cor., verse 16, Paul said that realizing that he was working for the glory of God kept him from fainting. In Heb. 12:3 we learn that if we "consider" our Lord and all that He endured here on earth, He will keep us from getting weary and eventually fainting. These are all ways that we can "comfort the feeble-minded."

"Support the weak." Paul was speaking of those whose faith was weak because they did not have the understanding which is required for a strong faith. These people are in every church, and they need to be supported like we would assist a person who is physically weak. These people need teaching. And they often need the truth repeated to them over and over again. We cannot abandon them like the Amalekites left the Egyptian to die. They must be brought to full strength in the Lord where they will be able to stand and to walk so as to please God.

"Be patient toward all men." This kind of patience is longsuffering when a person has been wronged. This kind of patience keeps a person from retaliating. It is natural to want to get back at people when they do something against you. Matthew Henry's comment on this command is as follows:

We must bear and forbear. We must be long-suffering, and suppress our anger, if it begin to rise upon the apprehension of affronts or injuries; at least we must not fail to moderate our anger: and this duty must be exercised towards all men, good and bad, high and low. We must not be high in our expectations and demands, nor harsh in our resentments, nor hard in our impositions, but endeavour to make the best we can of every thing, and think the best we can of every body" (Vol. VI, p. 790).

It is often easier for us to be longsuffering with those we don't know, than with those we do know, who are close to us, and whom we love. It is important for us to follow this command in the church as well as out of it. Paul's words to the church at Rome provide us with a good explanation of what it is to "be patient toward all men":

If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:18-21).

November 8, 1993

5:15 In verse 13 Paul had admonished the believers in Thessalonica to "be at peace among themselves." In verse 14 he exhorted them to "be patient toward all men." This exhortation in verse 15 follows those as Paul wrote, "See that none render evil for evil..."

However, this verse also follows from verse 14 where Paul must have had in mind those who were more spiritually mature and the responsibilities that they had toward those who were not as mature. The stronger were to make sure, to take it as their personal responsibility, that no one (the many watching each believer) would pay back evil for the evil that had been done to them.

There is in all of us a deep feeling of resentment toward those who would take advantage of us. And we immediately want to get even -- to retaliate toward others with the same kind of evil that they have done toward us. We would even like "to get the best of them."

Perhaps you have heard that the authorities in California have taken a man into custody who may have been involved in some of the fires they have had down there recently. Evidently the government had taken some of his land, and it had so infuriated him that he wrote a letter and threatened to "set a big fire." This is the very kind of thing that Paul was instructing the people in the church at Thessalonica not to do!

Much of the killings we are hearing about these days by various gang members are in retaliation for something that someone has done. And, as we have heard so many times, innocent people have been killed who were not involved in the problem at all.

This is not the way the Lord would have His people respond to wrongdoing. And this is where our faith is put to the test. It is hard to leave with the Lord that which we are capable of doing ourselves. And yet that is exactly what we are instructed to do.

Many Scriptures deal with this subject. Cf. Matt. 5:43-48; Rom. 12:19-21; 1 Pet. 3:8-12. The OT "eye for eye, tooth for tooth" principle was the law for the judges to follow, but people were never to take the law into their own hands. Paul was quoting from Prov. 25:21, 22 in the passage from Romans cited above (at the beginning of this paragraph). So the OT and the NT are in agreement on this subject.

This was God's will in dealing with everybody, whether they were believers or not. And so instead of retaliating with evil, they were to "retaliate"

with "good." In fact, we are to be so inclined toward doing good to others that we should look for opportunities to do good to others even when they have done neither bad nor good to us. Cf. Gal. 6:10:

As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.

The people of the world may refer to us as "do gooders," but let them call us what they may. As long as we do good from the heart, with sincere humility, and because we want to please and glorify the Lord, what they call us is not important. The Scriptures make it very clear that we are never, under any circumstances, to retaliate for the wrongs done to us. This takes much grace, but it surely will bring the blessing of God. Think of the troubles the people of the world would avoid if they would only act on this principle. The retaliation of one nation against another nation for some wrong done, is the stuff wars are made of. Even our Presidents often are to be seen retaliating.

5:16 The ASV very interestingly puts verse 16 through 18 in one paragraph, and verses 19 through 22 into a second paragraph. Matthew Henry suggested that these were written in brief statements to make them easier for the people to remember.

Here Paul said, "Rejoice evermore" -- always! We could translate this: Always be rejoicing. Whatever the circumstances, even in spite of trials, the child of God is to be rejoicing always!

This, too, takes the grace of God. It does not take a Christian long to learn that, if he is to please God by the way he lives, he is going to have to learn to live in a way that is entirely different from the world, and to rely very heavily upon a constant supply of the grace of God!

This command, of course, means that we are to rejoice in the right things. We are not to rejoice when our enemies suffer. We never are to rejoice in sin. Perhaps the Thessalonians understood from Paul's teaching when he was with them, that what he meant by this statement was that they were always to rejoice in the Lord, as Paul told the Philippians later when he wrote to them in Phil. 3:1 and 4:4.

Rejoicing, as James Frame said in his commentary (ICC, p. 201), can be "expressed or unexpressed." Joy is primarily a matter of the heart, and if we have to be talking about it all of the time, it probably is because people can't see it in the way we live.

How do we rejoice in the Lord?

We all can rejoice that He has saved us. And, we can also rejoice that He keeps us even when we deserve to be cast away. We can praise him for His faithfulness, for His love and His grace. We can praise Him that He is in control of our circumstances, and that He always has good purposes in the things which He brings or allows to come in our lives. Matthew Henry said that the Christian life "is a life of constant joy" (Vol, VI, p. 790). When the burdens are the heaviest, we need to rejoice the most.

5:17 "Pray without ceasing."

This does not mean that we are always on our knees. Nor does it mean that we always are to have our eyes closed, and words of prayer coming out of our mouths. It includes those times when we are on our knees. And it

includes those times when we can close our eyes, and pray audibly. Paul did not mean that we should do nothing but pray, but he did mean that everything we do should be done praying.

However, let me say that the person who always prays "on the run" is a person who knows very little about true prayer. The importance that we attach to prayer will be seen in the way we faithfully devote certain times in our days to private prayer. The person who prays when he has the time, will never do much praying because life is so busy that the duties of any day can gobble up all of our time. We always seem to be complaining that we don't have the time to do what we need to do. That is probably not true. We just need to be better organized in the use of our time. However, I have found that if my day is built upon my time with the Lord, I seem to get more accomplished during the rest of the day. Time for prayer with the Lord in the morning somehow makes it easier for us to continue in our fellowship with the Lord throughout the day. What a wonderful thing it would be if all of us could say that David said in Psa. 5:3,

My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord;
in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up.

When Spurgeon was walking down the streets of London and would meet one of his people, he would often greet them by saying, "Do I meet you praying?"

In Luke 18:1 we read,

And he (i.e., the Lord) spake a parable unto them to this end,
that men ought always to pray, and not to faint.

The Lord wants us to bring our burdens and our petitions, but let us remember that bringing our requests is not the only thing we are to do in praying. I read many years ago, and I have forgotten who said it, that "prayer is being with God." Just as any parent enjoys, or should enjoy, being with his children, so the Lord delights in it when we come just to be with Him. And this is always one of the reasons for the troubles we have. The Lord knows that our trials are His instruments for bringing us back to the throne of grace.

"Pray without ceasing." What a great word this is for all of us. In Romans 12:12 Paul wrote that we should always be,

Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation;
continuing instant in prayer.

"Continuing instant" means persevering.

5:18 It may very well be that Paul, in verses 16, 17, and 18, was speaking of three kinds of prayer: rejoicing in Him, having fellowship with Him and bringing our petitions to Him, and here in verse 18, thanksgiving. It may be that most of the time these three will be blended together. But Paul spoke of them individually because he did not want the believers in Thessalonica to omit any part of true prayer.

In Phil. 4:6 Paul said that we are to make our requests known to God "with thanksgiving." In Eph. 5:20 he said that we should be "giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." That is a big order, to thank God "for all things." There are always things in our lives for which we cannot honestly thank God unless we are seeing His purpose in what we are experiencing.

So we give thanks with our requests. We give thanks for all things. And

C.F. HES.
13:15

we are to give thanks, according to our text, "in everything." This means that we give thanks while we are "in" our trials, or while we are experiencing some blessing. We are not to wait until they are history. It is easy to appear thankful, but the Lord knows if we are sincere. And, although it should go without saying it, let us remember that our thanksgiving is to be direct to God. You often hear people say that they are thankful. They are thankful for good weather. Or they are thankful for something that somebody has done for them. But I often wish that I could ask them, "You are thankful, but thankful to whom, or thankful to what?"

And then Paul added, "For this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."

Twice in this epistle the Apostle Paul has told us what the will of God is for us:

- 1) 1 Thess. 4:3 -- our sanctification.
- 2) 1 Thess. 5:18 -- our thanksgiving to God.

Of course, everything that Paul told us to do, or not to do, in this epistle, is the will of God. But it should be of special interest that these are the two things that he emphasized as being the will of God. He wants us to be holy, and He wants us to be thankful. And usually where you find one you will find the other. They are the Siamese twins of 1 Thessalonians.

Some believe that when Paul said, "For this is the will of God," he was including what he had said in verse 16 and verse 17 as well as in verse 18. And I really have no objection to that at all. That may be the best explanation of verse 18.

James Frame translated the beginning of this verse, "Whatever happens, give thanks." It is easy for us to give thanks when things go our way, and when we get what we want, but remember that Paul was writing to a church which was experiencing great persecution. It is one thing to tell us that, but it meant something much harder for them because of what they were going through.

For those of us who are the Lord's people, it ought to mean everything to us that something is the will of God. That puts an end to all discussion and all excuses. "Whatever happens, give thanks." This means that in every situation we can always find reasons for giving thanks to God. One of the most repeated sayings given to the people of Israel in the OT, was,
O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good:
for his mercy endureth for ever.

Cf. Psalms 136:1. Many of the Psalms begin and end with the word, Hallelujah, praise ye the Lord. Let our days begin with thanksgiving and end with thanksgiving, and soon the time in between will be filled in with the same, thanksgiving.

5:19 Let me remind you again that the ASV makes verses 19 through 22 one paragraph. And it is easy to see the Holy Spirit in each verse although He is only mentioned in this verse. "Quench not the Spirit."

He, of course, was speaking about the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, the One we often refer to as the Third Person of the Godhead. And please notice that I am referring to Him as a Person. And I do that because He is a Person, just as much as the Father and the Son are Persons. This is the fourth and last time that Paul referred to Him in this epistle: 1:5, 6; 4:8; and here.

What did Paul mean by the word "quench"? John Eadie mentioned in his commentary, "The verb often occurs, and means literally 'to put out a fire or a light' (p. 208). And then he cited Matt. 12:20 and Eph. 6:16 along with other verses.

John the Baptist spoke of the Lord Who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire! When the Holy Spirit was given on the day of Pentecost, He appeared as "cloven tongues like as of fire" (Acts 2:3). But even if we did not have those other verses, 1 Thess. 5:19 would be sufficient for us to say that fire is a type or representation of the Holy Spirit. And we are not to extinguish Him as we would put out a fire by pouring water on it.

Paul did not mean, of course, that we could do away with the Holy Spirit. Neither did He mean that we are greater than the Holy Spirit, and that we can keep Him from doing what He intends to do. He meant that we can resist the Spirit. We can grieve the Holy Spirit. We can be in rebellion against the Holy Spirit. And this is what He was telling the believers in Thessalonica that they were not to do.

Does our text give us any hint of what in particular Paul had in mind. I think that it does, and it follows right along with what Paul had been telling the believers to do.

In answering this question, let me go on to verse 20.

5:20 Notice that Paul went on to say in verse 20 that they were not to despise prophesyings. In the day in which Paul was writing, the NT was not yet completed. As far as we know, 1 Thessalonians was the first epistle that Paul wrote which was a part of the Word of God. God was in the process of revealing His truth, and one term that was used for those revelations was "prophesyings." To "despise" those revelations meant that they might run the gamut from treating God's words to them as not being very important to the extreme of treating it with regret. The Lord condemned the Pharisees of His day because they paid more attention to their traditions than they did to the Word of God. He was accusing them, and rightly so, of despising the Word of God.

And so we quench the Spirit when we despise the Word of God. You might say that you would never treat the Word of God as anything less than it is, the Word of God. You are probably like the old preacher who said that he believed the Bible from cover to cover, and that he even believed the cover! You and I have no question about the divine origin and inspiration of the Scriptures. So we would not despise the Word that way. But how responsive are we to the Word when we read it, and when we hear it preached and taught? When we see in the Word that we are to do something, do we do it? If we don't, then to that extent we are despising the Word. If we are not obeying the Word, then as far as we are concerned, we are setting the Word aside. We are quenching the Spirit because He is the Author of Scripture. He has come to guide us into the truth. But if we read it, or hear it, and don't obey it, then we are closing our hearts to what the Word says and to the way that the Lord wants us to live.

So let us pray that the Spirit of God will open the Word to us, and open our hearts to the Word. Let us be doers of the Word, and not be content just to hear it. If we are living according to the Word of God, then we are not quenching the Spirit nor despising the Word of God.

But when we go on to verse 21, we see another thing that we need to do with regard to the Word of God.

5:21. As I have said, when Paul wrote to the Thessalonian church, the Bible was not completed in its written form. And so, like the people of God in OT times, they were dependent upon the preaching of men of God who were appointed by God for that ministry. So to that extent the people of Israel in the OT and the people of the early Church were in a similar situation. And so it was necessary for them to listen with discernment to what they heard. And then to "hold fast" to that which was really the Word of God, and to reject what was not the Word of God.

We are in the same position today. Even with Christian radio and Christian TV, you can't believe everything that you hear. Some is true according to the Word of God, but much is not true. And we all need to know the Word well enough so that we can reject what is wrong, and "hold fast that which is good." Many of the Lord's people are being led astray today because they do not know the Word of God. As a result, their spiritual growth is stunted, their work is fruitless, and God is robbed of the glory which belongs to Him.

It is important that every child of God know how to "prove all things." We speak of having discernment, and this is what Paul had in mind. It is the ability which the Holy Spirit gives us to recognize the difference between truth and error. But it is not a gift which is suddenly bestowed upon a believer. Discernment is the result of applying what we know to what we hear, or what we read. Now if we don't know anything, then it will be impossible for us to put what we hear to the test with the idea in mind that we are going to accept what is true, but reject what is false.

We have in 1 John an example of what it means to "prove all things." Cf. 1 John 4:1 ff. When John said, "try the spirits," he was using the same verb, and even the same form of the verb, which Paul used in 1 Thess. 5:21. It is a present imperative: _____. It means, prove, and continue to prove. We get so we trust certain pastors and teachers, and this is good. But we still need to listen to all teaching with a discerning ear and heart.

Paul did not tell the Thessalonians how to "prove all things," but John gives one test which we must apply to everything that we hear. He said that we can know if a person is being guided by the Holy Spirit in his teaching by what he teaches about Jesus Christ. If a man teaches that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, you can trust him. But if he does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh (which can also mean that he simply doesn't say what he believes about Jesus Christ), then he is not of God, and his teaching is not of God.

To believe that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh means that you believe that He existed before He came in the flesh, and that He continued to be the Christ, the Son of God, after He was born. So a preacher may be well educated. And he may be very impressive as a speaker. But if he does not positively declare that he believes that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah, God manifest in human flesh, then you can't really trust anything else that he has to say. On that one point he has departed from the Word of God, but there could hardly be a more crucial point.

Often I have asked people what their pastor believes about Christ, or what he believes about the Bible, and many times I have heard the answer, "You

know, I am really not sure what he does believe." If you don't know, or if you have to guess, it is most likely that he does not believe what the Bible teaches. And so his teaching should be rejected, and people should not stay with such a preacher. If the people in the pew were more discerning, there wouldn't be as many false teachers as there are today in the pulpits of our land. But usually people who sit under such a ministry do not know enough about their Bibles to be able to test what they hear.

One thing that many false teachers do is to use Biblical terms, but they do not attach Biblical meanings to those terms. They may talk about being born again, but they are not talking about becoming a child of God. They may be talking about a person who has turned over a new leaf, or who suddenly gotten active in civic affairs where before he was not involved at all. The Devil is very clever, and there never has been a day when there was a greater need for us to be discerning than in our day.

We need to be receptive to good teaching, but we need to be discerning so that we will not be deceived by false teaching. And when we hear the "good," we need to hold it fast. To hold it fast means to receive it, and not let anyone take it away from you. Take it, and keep it. It is precious, far above rubies, more valuable than the finest gold. Make sure you examine everything you hear in the light of the Word of God. Ask the Lord to give you discernment. And, if you are going to hang on to it, you must make it a part of your character and our life as soon as possible -- which means, immediately, without delay.

It is interesting to note the connection between verses 20 and 21. The prophesying which Paul spoke of quite obviously is Spirit-taught prophesying. But even that must be put to the test.

5:22 This verse is really the negative side of verse 21. We are to "hold fast that which is good," and at the same time we are to "abstain from all appearance of evil." The Greek would bear the translation, Hold yourself off from every form of evil. The NIV reads like this: "Avoid every kind of evil." And the NKJV says, "Abstain from every form of evil." But the idea of "appearance" must not be completely dismissed. We need to stay away from all kinds of sin, but also from any behavior which might a question as to what we are doing. There must not be any compromise with sin, none whatever. We often are very careful about staying away from some sins, but not all sins. Paul did not exclude any sin. The farther we can stay away from sin, the better it will be for us, and the more we will be able to glorify the Lord.

Frame makes a good point about these two verses (21 and 22) in his commentary when he said that "the good is one, but the evil many" (ICC, p. 207). He meant that Paul spoke of "good" in verse 21 as singular, but "evil" in verse 22 as having many forms, or appearances, or kinds. The verbs can be translated, hold on, and hold off. Cf. Hendriksen, p. 140.

Both verse 21 and verse 22 emphasize the practical response which is so necessary for all of us. And this means that we need to do what we are told to do in the Word, but to keep ourselves from doing what is forbidden in Scripture.

Let me make one more point before we leave these two important verses.

Paul was emphasizing that we need to learn what good is, and what evil is, not from experiencing evil, but from the Word of God! I remember what one

of my teachers in Seminary said on one occasion when he was teaching us. He said that there are two ways to learn about sin:

- 1) From your Bible.
- 2) Or, by experiencing it.

But then he went on to say that if you learn about sin by experiencing it, you will be trapped by it, and blinded to how wrong it is and what damage it is doing to you. If you learn about sin from your Bible, you will not have your life and your conscience marred by it, and you will really be able to see how really terrible it is. And sin has a way of keeping us away from the Scriptures. And the more we are kept away from the Bible, the more involved we will get in sin.

The Psalmist said,

Thy word have I hid in mine heart,
that I might not sin against thee (Psa. 119:11).

I hope you will always remember these verses. Verses 16, 17, and 18 go together. Also, verses 19 through 22 go together. If we takes these exhortations to heart, we can be sure that we will be a lot happier, and we will be much safer, and much holier.

However, none of this is easy. In fact, it is all really impossible when we realize that Paul was speaking of things that we always must be doing, or not be doing. We can see how right all of this is, but doing it is another thing. I believe this is the reason that Paul concluded this part of the epistle with prayer. Verses 23 and 24 are a prayer. And looking on to the end of the epistle, verse 28 is a prayer.

What a lesson this is for us who teach -- whether we are pastors, or parents, or Sunday School teachers, or whatever ministry we might have with other people. Even as parents, wouldn't we all have to confess that while we may have been long on teaching, we have been short on praying. It is one thing to tell our children what to do, but then we need to pray that they will do it, and that they will trust the Lord to help them to do it. This was one way that Paul had of telling them that they could not do these things in their own strength; they needed the Lord to help them!

Let us look at Paul's prayer in these two verses.

5:23 Dr. Hendriksen, in his commentary, says that Paul used the word "peace" some 40 times in his epistles. And Dr. Hendriksen also said that we cannot doubt but that it is linked with the Hebrew word for peace in the OT. And he is absolutely right about that. But what is the meaning of peace. Most of us know when we are peaceful, but it is sometimes hard for us to come up with a definition of peace.

Peace is what we experience when all of the parts of our being are in harmony with each other. A person who is using his body to sin, has trouble with his conscience, and so he has no peace. Or a person can have a very healthy body, but not be living in fellowship with God. And so he has not peace. But when body, soul, and spirit are right before God, there can be peace.

Think of a person who is without Christ, but under conviction because of his sin. He has not peace. But he trusts Christ as his Savior, and immediately he has peace. His sins are forgiven. He knows that he has full acceptance with God. Everything that has been out of place in his life, is suddenly put back in order, and he has peace. Peace means

wholeness, harmony, a right relationship with God. People without Christ can have no true peace. It is only through Christ that we can become what we need to be, what God wants us to be, and that is what makes for peace. When things are not right between us and God, even as believers, we do not have peace.

God is "the God of peace" because He has established us in peace with Himself through Christ's work on the Cross, but He also is the only One Who can maintain our peace for us. And so Paul addressed in his prayer "the God of peace."

But what is his petition?

It is that "the God of peace" would sanctify them wholly, completely. To be holy is to be pleasing to God. To be holy is more than doing the right thing. A person can do the right thing, but be thoroughly rebellious in doing it. He does right because he is forced to do right. But when our obedience is the expression of what we want to do, of what we are, then our obedience can be pleasing to God.

Paul was not speaking here of sinless perfection, at least not for here and now. Some day we will all be perfectly holy, completely pleasing to the Lord in what we are, what we think, and what we do. But right now we are moving in that direction, but none of us has arrived. However, God is working in all of our lives day by day to sanctify us, to make us holy, to keep us from sin, and to make us obedient to His will. But our understanding of holiness has to include all that we are -- our bodies, our souls, and our spirits. And so Paul prayed that our whole being would be "preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." I have told you repeatedly that every chapter in 1 Thessalonians concludes with a reference to the coming of the Lord. And here it is for chapter 5.

Let me talk about body, soul, and spirit first, and then we will look at what it means that they be "preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Let me introduce you to two words which you will probably run across in your reading of Christian books. They are the words dichotomist and trichotomist. These words are not limited to theology, but theologians use them when describing what they believe about the nature of man. You probably know that di- means two, and that tri- means three. Anything divided into two parts is a dichotomy; anything that is divided into three parts is a trichotomy. In theology, if a man says that he is a dichotomist, it means that he believes that man is body and soul, or body and spirit, but he does not try to make a distinction between soul and spirit. And it is true that in some passages you just have the two mentioned: the material body, and the immaterial part of man. But a trichotomist believes that man is made up of body, soul, and spirit. He believes that man has a body and two immaterial parts of his being. I would take it from this passage that Paul was a trichotomist. And that is one big reason that I am a trichotomist. But let me hasten to add that there are and have been very godly men who are dichotomists. So we are not talking about some who are saved who have one opinion, and others who are not saved who have another opinion, but we are talking about an honest difference that believers have with each other.

Distinguishing between the soul and the spirit is not an easy thing to do, and probably no one really has the complete answer. We all agree as to

what the body is. And we have to recognize that sometimes in the Bible the word soul especially is used for both soul and spirit. For example, the Lord said, "For what shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36). He was saying that a man can be so concerned about the physical that he completely forgets about the spiritual. Man not only has a material part to his being, but he has an immaterial part. It is the immaterial which gives life to the physical.

But how can we distinguish between the soul and the spirit? Let me give you my understanding of the difference.

We all know that the Bible describes a person who does not know the Lord as "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1). He obviously is very much alive. He sees. He speaks. He thinks. He eats. He goes places and does things. How can it be said that he is dead? Well, it seems that it is the soul that gives a person physical life. God breathed into Adam's nostrils the breath of life, "and man became a living soul" (Gen. 2:7). It is man's spirit that is dead. He is incapable of fellowship with God. He is alienated from God. God is not in all his thoughts. But when man is saved, all of that is changed. Both in his spirit, and in his soul, in his ordinary human relationships he is renewed, and God becomes the all-important One in his life.

In what we call the virgin Mary's Magnificat we have a very interesting statement concerning the soul and the spirit. This is how she began in Luke 1:46, 47:

My **soul** doth magnify the Lord,
And my **spirit** hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.

The dichotomist would say that Mary was using poetic language, and that she was using soul and spirit interchangeably. But it seems to me that she was expressing what salvation had done to her. In her soul, in that which made her a living person and aware of all that was going on around her, she magnified the Lord. But also, in her spirit, which had been made alive through faith in the Redeemer, she was rejoicing in God her Saviour.

So I think that when Paul prayed concerning the body and soul and spirit of believers, he was praying that God would be honored in their bodies, in their lives as human beings, and in their fellowship with God. In other words, sanctification encompasses all that we are. The unbeliever is incomplete in his being until his spirit is revived and he becomes a new person in Christ. Paul was talking about all of each person, every part of them. As Luther said, "Through and through" (quoted by Robertson, IV, 38). On this point all trichotomists and all dichotomists agree; Paul was praying for the sanctification of the whole man, inwardly and outwardly.

"Preserved blameless" -- It means to be kept from loss or injury, to be held back, to be prevented from sin, and so be "blameless." It means in the Greek to be without censure. In our relationship with the Lord it would mean to be without His disapproval.

There are many examples of censure in Scripture. God had to censure the nation Israel on many occasions. Moses knew what it was to be censured. And so did David, and the disciples in the ship when they were fearful of losing their lives, and Peter, James, and John in the Garden of Gethsemane. When we are blameable, we are not necessarily judged in some particular way, but we have the Lord's disapproval. If we continue to disobey God, that inevitably will lead to judgment, but Paul prayed that the believers in Thessalonica would avoid even the slightest disapproval

of the Lord. May that be our desire for ourselves as well as our prayer for each other.

What a prayer this was! This explains the nature of Paul's prayers which are recorded for us in Scripture. He was always concerned about the spiritual more than just the merely physical. He prayed and taught that the people of God might be unblamable in holiness before the Lord.

But is such a life possible while we are here on earth in our un-glorified state? It is only possible through the faithfulness of God.

5:24 This does not mean that the Lord takes it completely out of our hands, and makes us holy without any responsibility on our part. Otherwise the commands of this chapter would be meaningless. What Paul meant was that God would enable us to do what He has required of us. He will do it, but He will do it through us. We learn. We pray. We change our ways. But it is always by His grace and through His power.

Cf. Phil. 2:12, 13. Also Heb. 13:20, 21; Phil. 1:6; 1 Cor. 1:9; 10:13; 2 Tim. 2:13.

What blessed assurance this is! Our sanctification, as with all of our salvation, rests solely upon the faithfulness of God. This ought to be our prayer for ourselves, and this is the way we should be praying for each other and for all who know the Lord Jesus Christ. We did not come to Him "on our own." He called us. And He had a purpose in calling us, that we should be holy as He is holy. And so, having called us, we have His promise that He will stay with the work He is doing in our hearts until we stand before God in His very likeness.

THE FIRST EPISTLE OF PAUL TO THE THESSALONIANS

1 Thessalonians 5:25-28

November 22, 1993

Intro: It is fitting that every letter have a conclusion. We do not usually end our letters abruptly. But, if we as believers are writing to other believers (as Paul was), we want conclude in an affectionate way so as to secure a hearing for our letter. And we want to assure those to whom we have written of our genuine interest in them and our complete sincerity in what we have written.

Paul here gave them three requests, and then concluded with a final prayer for them.

5:25 Here we see the humility of the Apostle. He had just written out his prayer for them; before ending his epistle he wanted them to know that he needed their prayers.

He did this same thing, requesting prayer, in several of his other epistles. Cf. Rom. 15:30 where he not only asked for their prayers, but gave them specific things to pray about. He did the same in Eph. 6:19, 20. He spoke of his need for the prayers of the Philippian church in Phil. 1:19. He requested the prayers of the Colossian church in Col. 4:3, 4 in much the same way he did with the Ephesians. Cf. 2 Thess. 3:1, 2. And the book of Hebrews carries this same kind of a request. See Heb. 13:18, 19.

Paul believed in prayer. His epistles indicate that he spent much time in prayer, continually remembering believers in churches he had established, and even in churches that he did not establish. He earnestly believed that the work of the Lord would only prosper through prayer to God. And he sought to enlist as many as he could to pray for him.

Why would he want the saints to pray for him?

One reason was because of the difficulty of the work (as we saw back in verses 12 and 13 of this chapter). Another was because, although he was an apostle, he needed strength to carry on, and he needed the encouragement which comes when prayer is answered. He needed guidance. He needed protection from the Enemy, and from all who were opposed to the Gospel message.

Matthew Henry wrote on this verse,

This great apostle did not think it beneath him to call the Thessalonians brethren (italics mine), nor to request their prayers. Ministers stand in need of their people's prayers; and the more people pray for their ministers, the more good ministers may have from God, and the more benefit people may receive from their ministry (VI, 791, 792).

As I have said, such a request was evidence of Paul's humility. He knew that he was not sufficient in himself for the work the Lord had called him to do. He likewise knew the need of his fellow-servants, Silas and Timothy. And so his request was not, "Brethren, pray for me," but, "Brethren, pray for us."

A response on their part would have been evidence of a sincere interest in their work. And although Paul was working in other places besides Thessalonica, and so they would be seeking the Lord's blessing upon other cities and other churches, it is always a healthy thing for us spiritually to seek God's blessing upon other people beyond the limits of our own ministries.

So, if you are not praying for your pastor and the elders and/or deacons of your church, you ought to be. And we all ought to be praying for the Lord's blessing upon His work in other places. And pray especially for those who seem to be enjoying the Lord's blessing. They are often the ones who are in the greatest danger.

5:26. Paul sent his greetings, and the greetings of his co-workers, by asking the brethren to greet the people with a holy kiss. It was not to be a kiss like Judas gave the Lord, nor like the harlot gave the young man in Prov. 7, but a kiss of true Christian affection. It may have been that he was exhorting the elders to do this with the men, but more likely that the men were to kiss each other much in the same way that they do in the Middle East today. And the women would greet the women in the same way. It was called "an holy kiss" to remind them that they were to be careful to make sure that it was sincere, and that it should be kept "holy" in God's sight. Any attempt on the part of homosexuals to make something of this is a blasphemous perversion of the Word of God.

See the same request in Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12. In 1 Pet. 5:14 Peter called it a kiss of love.

There is no need for us to feel that we need to do this. But we do need to be careful that we maintain a loving relationship with each other.

5:27. Paul's third and final request of the Thessalonian church was that "this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren." It actually went beyond a request; it was a charge, given not just by Paul, but "by the Lord."

Note Paul's change at this point from speaking for Silas and Timothy as well as for himself, to speaking for himself alone. He said, "I charge you by the Lord..."

The change here seems to suggest that there was some trouble in the church at Thessalonica. It is possible that, as Paul finished his second epistle, he was referring to the trouble. See 2 Thess. 3:6-15. Some have referred to them as "idlers." And so they would not have been receptive to what the Apostle was telling them in his epistles.

We can compare them to people today who will not read the Word of God. Or, if they read it, they do not obey it. They have their own agenda. There is no doubt but that Paul was speaking here as an apostle! He wanted them in the Thessalonian church to know that they were under a divine obligation from God to hear the Word, to believe it, and to obey it. And so this charge was in the nature of a solemn command. It is obvious that every believer needed to hear this epistle, and would profit greatly in a positive response to everything that the Apostle Paul had written.

This would make us think that there is nothing more important for any of us than that we are reading the Word, and listening very attentively whenever the Word of God is being taught. How many professing Christians do you suppose there are who never read the Word of God from Sunday to Sunday? And there are always many who come to hear the Word if it is convenient, but they do not feel responsible to the Lord to give the Word the greatest priority in their lives.

Let us note also from this verse that the leaders of the church were

responsible to read the Word of God, to read it publicly, and then to explain its meaning. So pastors and anyone else who ministers in the church has no business doing anything else but reading and explaining the Word of God. This idea that we have to attract people by some other means (music, entertainment of whatever kind), and then give them the Word, is completely foreign to God's will for His Church. If we attract people by the ministry of the Word, then it is more likely that we can keep them by the ministry of the Word. But if we attract them with some kind of a show, the only way we will keep them is by putting on bigger and better shows.

This reading of the Word did not originate in NT times. They did it also in the OT. Cf. Neh. 8:8:

So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly,
and gave the sense,
and caused them (the people) to understand the reading.

Even though we all have our own Bibles, reading the Word needs to be an important part of our services, and we need to listen carefully as it is read and as it is explained. This was the charge that Paul left with the Thessalonian believers.

Now we come to the last verse of this wonderful epistle. And I remind you that it is a prayer!

5:28 "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen." And "you" is plural, so we could translate it, you all, or, y'all! (This is for the benefit of the southerners among us.)

Often when the full Name of our Lord is used, it can be translated like this, which is the case here: The grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, be with you all. It is the grace of our Lord, whose Name is Jesus Christ, which Paul had in mind. Thus there is a special emphasis upon the Deity of our Lord.

All of the true believers in Thessalonica had experienced the grace of God in salvation, or they would not have been a part of God's family. And so Paul was not praying here that they would be saved, but that those who were saved would experience "the grace of our Lord" moment by moment and day by day, in their walk with Him here on earth.

Paul began this epistle speaking about grace, and he concluded it the same way. We are going to see that he did the same thing in 2 Thessalonians. In the beginning of these letters he added "peace" to the "grace," but both came from God and from the Lord, Who is Jesus Christ.

What did Paul have in mind? Sometimes we overlook the expressions that appear most frequently in Scripture, and really can't explain what they mean when we are asked to do so?

Grace always means an unmerited, undeserved blessing of some kind. That is the only basis upon which any of us has been saved. If God gave us what we deserve, we would all be headed for hell. But He chose not to do that. Instead, He decided before the foundation of the world that He would give us something which we do not deserve. And so you see "grace" includes both of those ideas:

- 1) God does not give us what we deserve.
- 2) Instead, He gives us what we do not deserve.

We deserve judgment; He has given us salvation. And God's grace through Christ is sufficient for the chief of sinners. That is why we can encourage any and all to come to Christ. No sinners is so great a sinner but that the grace of God has opened the door of salvation to him.

However, there is another part of the meaning of grace which we do not pay sufficient attention to. For God to save us by His grace means that He exercises omnipotence to do so. He changes our hearts (and nobody can do that for himself or for anyone else). He delivers us from the Devil and from bondage of our sins. He makes us new creatures. And it is called a new creation because God had to exercise the same power in saving us that He used in creating this world. Creation was a mighty display of divine omnipotence!

So grace not only means undeserved blessing, but it means power, it means strength. And this is what Paul had in mind when he prayed, "The grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, be with you all. Amen." He was talking about the strength that we need to do God's will. He was talking about the strength we need to overcome temptation and sin. He was talking about the strength that we need to meet our trials victoriously. He was talking about the strength that we need to serve the Lord faithfully and effectively. He was even speaking about the strength we need to pray and to understand the Word of God. NO CHILD OF GOD, REGARDLESS OF HOW LONG HE HAS KNOWN THE LORD, EVER OUTGROWS HIS NEED FOR GRACE! Our failure to appropriate the grace of our Lord explains why we live on such a low spiritual level, and why our lives are marked with so many failures. And remember that great maturity in the Christian life does not mean greater independence of us; it means greater and greater dependence upon the Lord.

When Paul wrote to the Philippian church and said, "It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13), he was talking about grace! And when he wrote in the fourth chapter of that same epistle,

Not that I speak in respect of want (need):
for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am,
therewith to be content (4:11),

he was speaking about grace. And then when he added in the next verse (12),

I know both how to be abased,
and I know how to abound:
everywhere and in all things I am instructed
both to be full and to be hungry,
both to abound and to suffer need,

he was speaking about grace. And then when he added to that (in verse 13), "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me," he was talking about grace.

Perhaps the classic illustration of Paul's definition of grace for the believer, is found in 2 Cor. 12. In that chapter he told about how the Lord gave him special visions, and that he himself was caught up to the third heaven and saw things he was never allowed to tell anyone. But just because such an experience could have contributed to his pride, God gave him a thorn in the flesh, some physical trouble which he didn't like, and prayed that God would take it away. But God said, "No." However, He said more than that. He said in 2 Cor. 12:9a,

My grace is sufficient for thee:
for my strength is made perfect in weakness.

Did you notice those words which the Lord put together -- "my grace" and

"my strength"? God's grace for us is God's strength for us.

How did Paul respond?

Listen to his words even though you know them so well:

Most gladly will I rather glory in my infirmities,

that the power of Christ may rest upon me (2 Cor. 12:9b).

What was Paul talking about? He was speaking about what the grace of God had done for him.

You have heard me say that every bit of truth that you and I know, we have learned from the Holy Spirit. Let me make a similar statement about the grace of God. Every step of progress that you and I have taken in our Christian lives has been made only by the grace of God. It takes the grace of God to save us. And it takes the grace of God to keep us. And it takes the grace of God to make us what the Lord wants us to be. We could never endure any of our trials, nor could we ever experience victory over any temptation or sin, except by the grace of God.

When you read of the willingness of Abraham to offer up Isaac, remember that that is God's grace. When you follow the life of Joseph, it has grace written all over it. When you read of Daniel continuing to pray when he knew that it would put him in the lion's den, that is the grace of God in action. When you read about Peter preaching on the day of Pentecost, showing such holy boldness, and remember how he denied with oaths before some young ladies that he even knew the Lord, the change was brought about by the grace of God.

In the original text there are just ten words to this prayer. There are only eleven in our KJ translation. The "Amen" is not in some of the MSS, but it is in others. But what a prayer this is! There is no greater prayer that you could pray for me, or that I could pray for you. And I am sure that in the light of Paul's request in verse 25, many of them, knowing how he was praying for them, prayed the same prayer for him.

In 1 Cor. 15:10 Paul gave his testimony to the church at Corinth, and in it he used the word grace three times. Listen to it as I read it:

But by the grace of God I am what I am:

and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain;

but I laboured more abundantly than they all:

yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.

Psalm 23 speaks of the grace of God. Grace is everywhere in the Bible. It is God's grace that has saved us, and it is God's grace that makes us what He wants us to be. When we all get to heaven, then we'll magnify the grace of God as never before.

Don't forget this prayer. Pray it for yourself, and pray it for every child of God you pray for. And pray also that those who do not know the Lord will, by God's grace, understand what God in His grace can do for them.