

UNTIL HE COMES

COMMENTARY ON BOOK OF 1 THESSALONIANS

Church planters encourage growing disciples to endure persecution and walk worthy of their calling in anticipation of the Lord's return.

Paul Apple (revised September 2009)

For each section:

- Thesis statement ... to focus on the big idea
- Analytical outline ... to guide the understanding
- Devotional questions ... to encourage life application
- Representative quotations ... to stimulate deeper insight

1 Thessalonians 3:13 *“so that He may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.”*

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BACKGROUND NOTES

Malick: THE MISSIONARY TEAM OF PAUL, SILVANUS, AND TIMOTHY URGE THE THESSALONIANS ON THE BASIS OF THEIR FORMER WALK OF FAITH, AND GOD'S FAITHFULNESS TO THEM TO ENDURE PERSECUTION WITH A VITAL LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER AND FOR GOD

- I. Introduction: Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy open their letter to the Thessalonians affirming their position in God, and praying for God's grace and peace in their lives 1:1
- II. The Past Work of Faith*Encouragement in their Faith: Paul reminds the Thessalonians of their walk of faith with God and his ministry with them in order to defend the Gospel he taught them and in order to encourage them to persevere despite persecution 1:2--3:13
- III. The Present*Exhortations to Live Their Faith: The missionary team exhorts the Thessalonians to exceed in their sanctification, have a patient hope for the future, remain spiritually alert, honor their leaders, and to keep a vital walk with God knowing that God will enable them 4:1--5:24
- IV. Conclusion: The missionary team, and especially Paul, close their letter by requesting prayer, urging personal expressions of unity, exhorting the Thessalonians to read this letter to all the brethren, and praying that they would experience God's grace 5:25-28

Stedman: The first letter of Paul to the Thessalonians is also the first letter the apostle wrote. It was written to a struggling, yet vigorous church that was only a few months old, made up of Christians who had just come to Christ under Paul's ministry. This is a delightfully revealing letter, showing the heart of the apostle toward these new Christians, and also showing the struggles that were present in the early church.

We sometimes get very distorted conceptions of these early Christians; there's a tendency to regard them as always triumphant, always waging the battle with vigor, and always winning great victories in Christ's name. But they also had very severe problems, some of which are reflected in this letter. It was written about 50 A.D., and may well be the first part of our New Testament to be written. Most scholars feel that the gospels were written about this same time or shortly afterward, though some hold that the gospel of Matthew, and perhaps of Mark, appeared about 43 or 45 A.D. At any rate, this letter is at least one of the earliest Christian writings.

The account of Paul's founding of this church is recorded in the seventeenth chapter of Acts. After he and Silas were thrown into prison in Philippi because of their preaching of the Gospel, an earthquake shook down the prison doors and freed the prisoners. Paul was then freed by the Roman magistrates, and he left Philippi and went to Thessalonica. Many of the places where Paul preached have crumbled into ruin, but Thessalonica is

still a thriving, bustling metropolis. It was then the capital of Macedonia, but it is now in Greece proper, and is called Thessalonike.

From the account in Acts, we learn that Paul had only been there about three weeks when persecution began and he had to leave the city for his own safety. He went down to Athens and from there he sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to see how these Christians were doing. He was very disturbed about them; he felt that perhaps the persecution they were undergoing would drive them from their faith.

He went on to Corinth where he founded a church after several months of difficult labor. After some time, Timothy returned to him at Corinth, bringing word of how the Thessalonians were doing, and of some of the problems they were facing. As we read this little letter through, we can recognize them as the kind of problems that we also face.

For one thing, wherever the Apostle Paul went, he was hounded by a group of Jews who spread the rumor that because he was not one of the original twelve, he was not a genuine apostle. This was not only a problem for Paul, but also for the Thessalonians. Furthermore, the pagans of Thessalonica were severely persecuting the Christians -- threatening them, and taking away their property -- so these early Christians, perhaps only three or four weeks old in the Lord, were called upon to endure hard things for the cause of Christ.

In that city, as in all the Greek cities, sexual promiscuity was common -- was even regarded as a religious right -- and to live a life of chastity was to be regarded as a freak. Therefore, as is the case today, there was great pressure upon these new Christians to fall into line with the common sex practices of their day.

Then the major problem of this church was that the second coming of Jesus Christ was greatly misunderstood. The apostle had evidently told them something, but they were confused about this, which produced another grave problem. Some of them were expecting Christ to come back so imminently that they had actually stopped working and were waiting for him to come. Since they weren't earning a living, somebody had to take care of them, and they were leeches on the rest of the congregation. Also, there were tensions developing between the congregation and the church leaders which needed some admonition to settle, and finally, there were those who were somewhat indifferent to the Holy Spirit's work among them, and to the truth of God as it was being proclaimed in the Scriptures.

Do those problems sound familiar? We can consider ourselves in very similar circumstances as this church at Thessalonica. The letter itself divides simply into two major divisions. In the first three chapters the apostle is just unloading his heart to them concerning his relationship to them, and this is followed by a very practical section with advice on how to behave in the midst of the pressures in which we live.

Keathley: Thessalonica was originally named Therma because of the many hot springs in the surrounding area, but in 315 B.C. it was renamed Thessalonica after the half sister of Alexander the Great. It later became known as Salonika and today it is called Thessaloniki. It is one of the few cities that still exists today from New Testament times and has a booming population of 300,000. The city was conquered by Rome in 168 B.C., and was made the capitol of the entire province of Macedonia. When Paul made his journey to the city, it boasted a population of 200,000 consisting mostly of Greeks though there was a large Roman population with a strong Jewish minority.

Its location also contributed to its importance. It was probably the greatest of the cities along the entire Egnatian Road, a great military highway which connected Rome with the East and which ran through Macedonia and parallel to the Aegean Sea. It had a sheltered harbor which was made into a naval station and equipped with docks by the Romans. Its midway position between the Adriatic and the Hellespont makes it even today a natural outlet for traffic from all points.

This commercial activity had two important results. First, it made Thessalonica a wealthy city. Well-to-do Romans settled there and Jewish merchants were attracted by the commercial advantages of the city (see Acts 17:4). However, the majority of people made their living by manual labor. Macedonian women, though, enjoyed a higher social position and greater privileges than elsewhere in the civilized world. Second, it brought Thessalonica a reputation for evil and licentiousness. The strange mixtures of a seaport city and the rites of the worship of the Cabiri cult caused the Apostle to make a special exhortation for holy living (1 Thess. 4:1-8).

Thessalonica was a free city and enjoyed the autonomy of self-government in all its internal affairs. Although it was the residence of the provincial governor, he exercised no civil authority because the city was ruled by politarchs (cf. Luke's accurate reporting in Acts 16:6). This political privilege was jealously guarded by the people who were extremely sensitive about anything that might result in imperial disfavor. It was because of this that the charge framed against Paul and his companions was one of treason and this was the most dangerous charge that could have been leveled against them in a city like Thessalonica (Acts 17:7).

Today, "it is an important industrial and commercial city in modern Greece and is second to Athens in population. It served as a important Allied base during World War I. In World War II it was captured by the German army, and the Jewish population of about 60,000 persons was deported and exterminated." . . .

The Occasion for the Epistle

From Timothy's report and perhaps also as the result of a letter brought to him from the Thessalonian church, Paul learned about the situation and the needs of the believers at Thessalonica. He learned first of all about the spiritual stamina of the Thessalonian converts in the face of fierce persecution and opposition (1:6; 3:6-10). But he also learned the disturbing news of how the Jews had slandered him accusing him of

teaching error and of false motives. The nature of their slander has been accurately captured by Frame:

Among other things, the Jews had asserted (I Thess. 2:1-12) that in general Paul's religious appeal arose in error, meaning that his gospel was not a divine reality but a human delusion; that it arose in impurity, hinting that the enthusiastic gospel of the Spirit led him into immorality; and that it was influenced by sinister motives, implying that Paul, like the pagan itinerant impostors of religious or philosophical cults ... was working solely for his own selfish advantage. Furthermore and specifically the Jews had alleged that Paul, when he was in Thessalonica, had fallen into cajoling address, had indulged in false pretenses to cover his greed, and had demanded honour from the converts, as was his wont, using his position as an apostle of Christ to tax his credulous hearers. Finally, in proof of their assertions, they pointed to the unquestioned fact that Paul had not returned, the inference being that he did not care for his converts and that he had no intention of returning. The fact that Paul found it expedient to devote three chapters of his first letter to a defense against these attacks is evidence suspicion of some of the converts was aroused and that the danger of their being beguiled away from the faith was imminent.⁶

There was also the report about the confusion that existed on the part of some regarding the return of the Lord and the Day of the Lord. Some wondered how the return of the Lord might affect one or more of the converts who had since died (4:13-18). Due to the intensity of the persecutions, it appears some thought that "the Day of the Lord" had arrived so this issue also had to be addressed (5:1-15). Finally, Paul learned of certain weaknesses in the church that needed to be dealt with. They were under pressure to return to their former lifestyles (3:2-3; 4:1-10), some members were not working in view of the imminency of the return of the Lord (4:11-12; 2 Thess. 3:6ff.), some were not showing the respect that was needed for their leaders, and there was confusion in regard to the public gatherings together (5:19-21).

The Purpose and Theme of the Epistle

The purpose and burden of the Apostle in writing to the Thessalonians can be summarized as follows:

1. To express his thankfulness for what God was doing in the lives of the Thessalonians (1:2-3),
2. To defend himself against a campaign to slander his ministry (2:1-12),
3. To encourage them to stand fast against persecution and pressure to revert to their former pagan life-styles (3:2-3; 4:1-12),
4. To answer a doctrinal question pertaining to the fate of Christians who had died (4:1-13),
5. To answer questions regarding the "Day of the Lord" (5:1-11),
6. And to deal with certain problems that had developed in their corporate life as a church (5:12-13; 19-20).

In the midst of all of this, two major themes arise in the study and reading of 1 and 2 Thessalonians:

The first theme is the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a subject found at the close of every chapter. Concerning Christ's return there is a two-fold emphasis of both a confident expectation along with the call to live in readiness in the light of His imminent coming.

The second theme revolves around the ministry of the local church and its life in the world. In this the Apostle balances the prophetic with the practical. As in other places, the doctrine of the return of Christ for the church is a truth that should transform how we live as individuals and as a corporate body of God's people. . .

Outline Analysis

The outline that follows is derived from 1:3 and three very significant phrases as stressed in the Greek text, "*the work of faith*," "*the labor of love*," and "*the endurance of hope*."⁹ This can be summarized as: The past: the work of faith (1:1–3:13); The present: the labor of love (4:1-4:12); The prospective: the endurance of hope (4:13–5:28). While this exact outline will not be followed in the exposition, it is offered as an alternative overview of the book.

I. The past: the work of faith (1:1–3:13)

A. The commendation of the Thessalonians (1:1-10)

1. The evaluation of Paul (1:1-4)
2. The evidence of life (1:5-7)
3. The explanation of the evidence (1:8-10)

B. The conduct of the Apostle and his co-workers (2:1-12)

1. Their witness (2:1-2)
2. Their word (2:3-7a)
3. Their walk (2:7b-12)

C. The conduct of the Thessalonians (2:13-16)

1. Their reception of the word (2:13)
2. Their response to the word (2:14)
3. The rejection of the word (2:15-16)

D. The concern of the Apostle (2:17-20)

1. His heart for the Thessalonians (2:17)
2. His hindrance by Satan (2:18)
3. His hope in the Thessalonians (2:19-20)

E. The confirmation of the Thessalonians (3:1-10)

1. The sending of Timothy (3:1-5)
2. The report of Timothy (3:6-10)

F. The concluding prayer (3:11-13)

1. The prayer that he might return to the Thessalonians (3:11)
 2. The prayer that the Thessalonians might grow in love (3:12)
 3. The prayer that their hearts might be established in holiness (3:13)
- II. The present: the labor of love (4:1-12)
- A. Their love for God expressed in sanctified living (4:1-8)
 - B. Their love for the brethren, an expression of being God taught (4:9-10)
 - C. Their love for the lost expressed in godly living (4:11-12)
- III. The prospective: the endurance of hope (4:13–5:28)
- A. Concerning the day of Christ: the comfort of His coming (4:13-18)
 1. The resurrection of sleeping saints (4:13-16)
 2. The rapture of living saints (4:17-18)
 - B. Concerning the day of the Lord (5:1-11)
 1. The coming of the day of the Lord (5:1-5)
 2. The conduct of Christians (5:6-10)
 3. The conclusion (5:11)
 - C. Concerning deportment in the congregation (5:12-28)
 1. The concluding prescription (5:12-22)
 2. The concluding petition (5:23-24)
 3. The concluding postscript (5:25-28)

Wil Pounds:

The beginning of the church at Thessalonica is found in Acts 16:6-10; 17:1-10. It was in Macedonia, the kingdom of Alexander the Great, that Paul landed. The city stood on the Thermaic Gulf with its hot springs, and famous harbor. Xerxes, the Persian, had his naval base there when he invaded Europe. In Roman times it was one of the world's great dockyards. In 315 B.C. Cassander had rebuilt the city and renamed it Thessalonica, the name of his wife, who was a daughter of Philip of Macedon and a half-sister of Alexander the Great. It was a free city. It had its own popular assembly and its own magistrates. Its population was around 200,000. Today Thessalonica is called Salonika with 70,000 inhabitants.

The city straddled the *Via Egnatia*, the Egnatian Road, running East and West. Its main street was part of the very road which linked Rome with the East. East and West

converged on Thessalonica; it was said to be "in the lap of the Roman Empire." Trade poured into her from East and West.

If Christianity settled in Thessalonica it was bound to spread East along the Egnatian Road until all Asia was conquered and West until it stormed even the city of Rome.

When Paul arrived in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-10) he preached in the Jewish synagogue for three Sabbaths (v. 2). He had such success that the Jews raised so much trouble that he had to be smuggled out of the city and sent to Berea (17:10-12). Paul left Timothy and Silas behind in his escape. Paul had been in Thessalonica only three weeks.

Paul was anxious to hear what was going on in Thessalonica. Paul was in Corinth when Timothy and Silas arrived from Thessalonica (I Thess. 3:6; Acts 18:5). They had brought abundant supplies from the Macedonian churches to meet Paul's needs (II Cor. 11:9), as the church in Philippi did once and again while Paul was in Thessalonica (Phil. 4:15f).

"Timothy and Silas brought news of serious trouble in the church in Thessalonica. Some of the disciples there had misunderstood Paul's preaching about the second coming of Christ and had quit work and were making a decided disturbance on the subject" (A. T. Robertson).

Paul was against date setting, even though he believed in the imminent return of Christ.

AUTHOR: The Apostle Paul (1:1; 2:18). It is typical Pauline in structure, vocabulary, phraseology and character.

COMPANIONS OF PAUL: Silas (Silvanus), was a Jew (Acts 16:20), leader of the brethren in Jerusalem (15:22, 32, 40; I Pet. 5:12). Timothy was a younger man, a son of a Jewish Christian mother and a Gentile father (Acts. 16:1).

DATE: A.D. 50 to 51 from Corinth. This is probably the first of Paul's writings that has come down to us, and it may be the first New Testament book with the possible exception of the *Gospel of Mark* or the *Epistle of James*.

PURPOSE: Paul writes both of the Thessalonian Epistles to correct gross misapprehension and misrepresentation of his preaching about last things (eschatology). Silas and Timothy have returned from Thessalonica with news of some problems that needed urgent attention.

THEME: The return of Jesus Christ. In *I Thessalonians* every chapter ends with a reference to the second coming (1:10; 2:19-20; 3:11-13; 4:13-18; 5:23, 24).

KEY VERSE: 5:23-24

CONCERNS:

1. Some of the believers had stopped working and abandoned their responsibilities to await the Second Coming with a kind of hysterical expectancy. Paul corrects their misconceptions (4:11).

2. They were worried about those who had died and Christ had not returned. Paul gives them courage and hope in their bereavement (4:13-18).
3. There was a tendency to despise authority (5:12-14).
4. These were converted pagans who had come out of heathen vices, and it was easy for them to fall back into immorality (4:3-8).
5. As all ways there was a small group who slandered Paul and said the only reason he preached was to get what he could out of it (2:5, 9). Some accused him of being a dictator (2:6, 7, 11).
6. There was some division in the church (4:9; 5:13).

Second Thessalonians was written within a few weeks of the first letter. The second letter was written to clear up a misconception about the Second Coming. There were certain signs that would come before Christ's appearance. The two letters would give balance to the thinking about the Second Coming.

SOME KEY WORDS:

COMING—*Parousia*—means "presence" or "arrival" of persons or things (I Cor. 16:17; II Cor. 7:7; Phil. 2:12; II Cor. 10:10). It designated the royal visit of an emperor, king, a governor, ruler or famous person. For such visits special preparations had to be made. Taxes were imposed to present the king with a golden crown. All things must be made ready for the visit of the king. Provinces were dated as a new era of time from the *parousia* of the emperor. It was common to strike new coins to commemorate the visit of a king. The coming of the king brought a new set of values. The word is used to describe the entrance of a new conquering power and the visitation of a god. The day is coming when the King of Kings will come and reign with all of His glory and power. Preparations must be made (I Thess. 3:13; 5:23; I Jn. 2:28). The same Jesus who ascended to heaven will come again to visit the earth in personal presence (Acts 1:11) at the end of the age (Mat. 24:3) in power of glory (Mat. 24:27) to destroy the antichrist and evil (II Thess. 2:8), to raise the righteous dead (I Cor. 15:23), and to gather the redeemed (Mat. 24:3, 27, 37, 39; Jn. 5:28, 29; I Thess. 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; II Thess. 2:1, 8, 9; Jas. 5:7, 8; II Pet. 1:16; 3:4, 12; I Jn. 2:28). *Parousia* is the time when the Lord shall come out of heaven (I Thess. 4:15; 1:10). At that moment the dead who are believers will rise first, and those who are believers and are alive will be changed and be caught up in the air by Jesus Christ.

DAY OF THE LORD — is an Old Testament expression meaning a day when God will personally intervene and bring salvation and judgment. In the New Testament it is related to the Second Coming of Christ (I Cor. 1:8; 5:5; Phil. 1:6, 10; 2:16; II Thess. 2:2). This is not a twenty-four day, but a period of extended time during which the judgments of the Lord Jesus Christ will take place upon the earth. For the believer it is salvation, for the unbelieving world it is a day of judgment and tribulation . . .

OUTLINE OF 1 THESSALONIANS

UNTIL HE COMES

CHURCH PLANTERS ENCOURAGE GROWING DISCIPLES TO ENDURE PERSECUTION AND WALK WORTHY OF THEIR CALLING IN ANTICIPATION OF THE LORD'S RETURN

(A DISCIPLESHIP MODEL FOR CHURCH PLANTERS)

(1:1) OPENING GREETING

I. (1:2 – 3:13) CHURCH PLANTERS PRESENT THEMSELVES AS ROLE MODELS IN BOLDLY PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL IN THE FACE OF PERSECUTION AS THEY ENCOURAGE GROWING DISCIPLES TO WALK WORTHY OF THEIR CALLING

A. (1:1-10) CHANGED LIVES (THE MARK OF FAITHFUL DISCIPLES) SPUR THANKSGIVING BECAUSE THEY CONFIRM GOD'S ELECTION AND EARN THE REPUTATION OF BEING A MODEL WORTH IMITATING

(:1) SIMPLE GREETING

1. (:2-5) CHANGED LIVES SPUR THANKSGIVING BECAUSE THEY CONFIRM GOD'S ELECTION –

3 INSIGHTS REGARDING CHANGED LIVES

a. (:2) The Interconnection of Changed lives –

Changed lives bind believers together in thanksgiving expressed in prayer

b. (:3) The Identification of Changed Lives --

Changed lives can be identified by the fruit of the Holy Spirit

c. (:4-5) The Initiation of Changed Lives –

The initial change in response to the gospel proclamation confirms God's election

2. (:6-10) CHANGED LIVES EARN THE REPUTATION OF BEING A MODEL WORTH IMITATING –

3 ACTIVITIES RELATED TO BECOMING A GOOD EXAMPLE FOR OTHER BELIEVERS

a. (:6) Imitation of Christ and of Christlike Leaders

- b. (:7-8) Reputation – Securing it and Making it Known
- c. (:9-10) Devotion to God – Separation from the World to be Consecrated to God

B. (2:1-12) SUPERNATURAL BOLDNESS IN CHURCH PLANTING VALIDATES AUTHENTIC MINISTRY WHEN BASED ON PURE MOTIVES AND PROPER CONDUCT (THE MARKS OF SPIRIT-FILLED CHURCH PLANTERS)

- 1. (:1-2) SUPERNATURAL BOLDNESS IN CHURCH PLANTING CAN BE IDENTIFIED BY THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE CONTEXT OF PERSECUTION
- 2. (:3-6) PURE MOTIVES IN CHURCH PLANTING SHOULD BE EVIDENT AS WELL -- CHECKLIST OF PURE MOTIVES
 - a. Motivated by Ministry Integrity
 - b. Motivated by Divine Commissioning
 - c. Motivated by Divine Accountability
 - d. Motivated by Personal Unselfishness
- 3. (:7-12) PAUL'S PICTURE OF THREE ROLE MODELS THAT ILLUSTRATE PROPER CONDUCT IN THE MINISTRY – 3 LEADERSHIP PROFILES OF UNSELFISH SERVANT LOVE
 - a. (:7-8) Loving Mother -- Gentleness and Tender Care
 - b. (:9) Hard Worker – Church planters labor long and hard to both provide for physical needs (when necessary) and proclaim the gospel
 - c. (:10-12) Faithful Father – Godly example and discipleship training of a Father with vision

C. (2:13-16) THE DYNAMIC POWER OF GOD'S WORD PRODUCES GODLINESS IN BELIEVERS THAT PROVOKES PERSECUTION – LEADING TO TWO VERY DIFFERENT OUTCOMES:

- ENDURANCE FOR BELIEVERS
- WRATH FOR THE PERSECUTORS
- 1. (:13a) THE PLEASURE OF GOD'S WORKERS – WHY ARE THEY THANKFUL? GOD'S WORKERS REJOICE TO SEE GOD'S WORD EMBRACED AND LIVED OUT

2. (:13b) THE POWER OF GOD'S WORD –
WHAT DOES IT ACCOMPLISH?
GOD'S WORD TRANSFORMS AND ENERGIZES BELIEVERS TO LIVE
CHANGED LIVES
3. (:14-16a) THE PERSEVERANCE OF GOD'S WITNESSES –
WHO IS OPPOSING GOD'S PROGRAM?
AS BELIEVERS IMITATE THE HISTORIC PATTERN OF GODLY LIVING
THEY INEVITABLY FACE SEVERE PERSECUTION
4. (:16b) THE PROVOKING OF GOD'S WRATH –
HOW FAR DOES IT EXTEND?
GOD'S WRATH IS THE INEVITABLE DESTINY FOR ALL THOSE WHO
PERSECUTE HIS FAITHFUL GOSPEL PROCLAIMERS

**D. (2:17 – 3:13) CHURCH PLANTERS FEEL THE BURDEN OF ENCOURAGING
THEIR DISCIPLES TO MATURITY**

1. (2:17-20) PRESSING ON TO MATURITY – FAMILY FELLOWSHIP –
CHURCH PLANTERS (SPIRITUAL LEADERS) DESIRE TO BE WITH
THEIR DISCIPLES
2. (3:1-5) PRESSING ON TO MATURITY – SACRIFICING SECURITY –
CHURCH PLANTERS SACRIFICE THEIR OWN SECURITY TO
ENCOURAGE THEIR DISCIPLES TO PERSEVERE
3. (3:6-8) PRESSING ON TO MATURITY – FEEDING ON FAITHFULNESS
-- CHURCH PLANTERS ARE ENCOURAGED BY FAITHFUL DISCIPLES
4. (3:9-13) PRESSING ON TO MATURITY – PERSEVERING IN PROGRESS
-- CHURCH PLANTERS CONTINUE TO PRAY FOR THEIR DISCIPLES

**II. (4:1 – 5:24) CHURCH PLANTERS CLARIFY SOME QUESTIONS
SURROUNDING THE LORD'S RETURN AS THEY OFFER PRACTICAL
EXHORTATIONS ON HOW TO WALK IN A MANNER THAT PLEASURES GOD**

**A. (4:1-12) GROWING DISCIPLES MUST STRIVE FOR EXCELLENCE IN
PLEASING GOD**

1. (:1-2) OUR PRESENT LEVEL OF OBEDIENCE SHOULD BE THE
FOUNDATION FOR STRIVING FOR EXCELLENCE IN PLEASING GOD
(FOUR GENERAL PRINCIPLES)
2. (:3-12) THREE TARGET AREAS (WHERE WE MUST STRIVE FOR
EXCELLENCE IN PLEASING GOD)
 - a. (:3-8) Sexual Purity
 - b. (:9-10) Brotherly Love

c. (:11-12) Responsible Living

B. (4:13-18) CONVICTION REGARDING GOD'S PROGRAM FOR THE FUTURE GIVES HOPE FOR THE BEREAVED

1. (:13) CONVICTION FREES THE BEREAVED FROM UNMITIGATED GRIEF (EMPHASIS ON KNOWLEDGE)

2. (:14) CONVICTION FOCUSES ON THE REALITY OF THE RESURRECTION AND RETURN OF CHRIST (EMPHASIS ON FAITH)

3. (:15-17) CONVICTION FEEDS ON A KNOWLEDGE OF ESCHATOLOGY = GOD'S PROGRAM FOR THE FUTURE

(:18) CONCLUSION: Ultimately, a Message of Hope = Comfort and Encouragement

C. (5:1-11) CONVICTION REGARDING GOD'S PROGRAM FOR THE FUTURE KEEPS US SPIRITUALLY ALERT

1. (:1-3) TWO DIFFERENT DISCERNMENTS (PERSPECTIVES, EXPECTATIONS) REGARDING GOD'S PROGRAM FOR THE FUTURE (ESPECIALLY: THE COMING OF THE DAY OF THE LORD)

2. (:4-5) TWO DIFFERENT DOMAINS (SPHERES OF EXISTENCE)

3. (:6-7) TWO DIFFERENT DISPOSITIONS (MINDSETS, MENTAL STATES)

4. (:8) TWO DIFFERENT DRESS CODES

5. (:9-10) TWO DIFFERENT DESTINIES

(:11) CONCLUSION TO 4:13 – 5:11

D. (5:12-15) 4 RESPONSIBILITIES FOR MAINTAINING HEALTHY CHURCH RELATIONSHIPS

1. (:12-13a) APPRECIATE YOUR SPIRITUAL LEADERS

2. (:13b) ABIDE IN PEACE WITH ONE ANOTHER

3. (:14) APPROACH ONE ANOTHER IN LOVE AND SENSITIVITY

4. (:15) AGGRESSIVELY LOVE EVEN THOSE WHO HAVE HURT YOU

E. (5:16-18) 3 PERPETUAL PRACTICES TO ENSURE SPIRITUAL VITALITY

1. REJOICE ALWAYS

2. PRAY WITHOUT CEASING
3. GIVE THANKS IN EVERYTHING

F. (5:19-22) PROMOTE THE LIBERTY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT WHILE EXERCISING CAREFUL DISCERNMENT

1. (:19-20) PROMOTE THE LIBERTY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT
2. (:21-22) WHILE EXERCISING CAREFUL DISCERNMENT

(:23-24) BENEDICTION -- ANTICIPATE COMPLETE SANCTIFICATION AT THE LORD'S RETURN BECAUSE OF GOD'S FAITHFULNESS IN PRESERVING HIS SAINTS

1. (:23) ENCOURAGEMENT IN ANTICIPATING COMPLETE SANCTIFICATION
2. (:24) ASSURANCE OF COMPLETE SANCTIFICATION

(:25-28) CLOSING REQUESTS

1. (:25) PRAY FOR THE MISSIONARY TEAM – FOR PERSEVERANCE IN HOLINESS AND THE SPREAD OF THE GOSPEL
2. (:26) MAINTAIN CLOSE FELLOWSHIP (CONTEXT OF LOVE AND HOLINESS) WITH ALL BELIEVERS
3. (:27) COMMUNICATE THE TRUTH
4. (:28) GROW IN GRACE

TEXT: Acts 17:1-9

TITLE: BUILDING ON THE RIGHT FOUNDATION – GETTING OFF ON THE RIGHT FOOT

BIG IDEA:

7 DISTINCTIVES OF AN EFFECTIVE, GOD-HONORING CHURCH PLANT – THE FOUNDING OF THE CHURCH AT THESSALONICA

INTRODUCTION:

Initial message for the starting of a new church – very important ... just as the last words of someone would be; humbling to have the privilege to speak for all of the leaders and share our heart for ministry
(spend most time on vv. 1-4)

Distinctives – not something that makes us weird; areas of core competency – things that must define us – these are things that should characterize every church – but sadly not the case

Church Reformation is a big deal – Chap. 3 from Life in His Body by Gary Inrig – look at the stand a small group of men took to re-introduce believer baptism into the church

Background: the Macedonian Call – **Acts 16:6-10**

- you see the Holy Spirit in charge of Paul's second missionary journey (right around 50 AD.) – forbidding him to go certain places; opening doors in other cases and even giving very explicit calls

We have no such apostolic vision – but God is calling us to preach the gospel somewhere in this greater metropolitan area

Adventures in Philippi – a leading city in Macedonia; Philippian jailor saved; Paul and Silas and Timothy depart – pass through a couple of cities and come to Thessalonica – the chief city of Macedonia – received its name from Cassander, who founded it in 315 BC – after the name of his wife who was a step-sister of Alexander the Great

7 DISTINCTIVES OF AN EFFECTIVE, GOD-HONORING CHURCH PLANT – THE FOUNDING OF THE CHURCH AT THESSALONICA

I. Plurality Partnership – Ministry Team (:1A) – Leadership Style = Humble Servant Love – 1 Thess 1:1, 2 Thess. 1:1 “Paul and Silvanus and Timothy” – 1 Thess 5:12 – multiple pastors

“Now when they” – always speaks in the plural throughout 1 Thess – “our coming to you”
Paul and his companions, **Silas** and **Timothy** – not a one-man show

As great as Paul was ... as gifted ... with all of the authority invested in him as the Apostle to the Gentiles ... still he always went out as a member of a ministry team (**Acts 15:35**); the ultimate servant leader; If circumstances worked out so that he was alone – as he was at Athens – he urged Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible – Acts 17:15

Testimony: Been searching since seminary days to be part of such a ministry partnership; never had the desire to go it alone; know my own weaknesses and limitations; we are a body that is just forming ... but even from the very beginning we need one another; how we model things from the beginning is how things will end up; you cannot start a one-man show and then try to convert

that over to a team ministry model – just won't work; you must have respect and appreciation for one another that is humble and that is genuine; you have to know your own limitations; it must be nothing of ourselves, but all of Christ

Privilege of having support and encouragement of godly wife; not easy for the kids to do a pioneering work – but opportunity to be a blessing to others

Problems of a one man dominated ministry: (Just going to list 5)

- Biggest one: You miss out on the reality of Christ being the Head of His church and the elders being under-shepherds – that is why Christ is called the *Chief Shepherd* ... How could you not think that a title of Senior Pastor takes away from this picture?
- You miss out on the checks and balances that God wants to build into leadership – Your blind spots never get addressed; you become arrogant and think you don't have blind spots; the ministry is all about you
- You think that you are slowed down by having to wait for the agreement of others rather than seeing God as protecting you against presumptuous mistakes
- You make disciples of yourself – they have your strengths and weaknesses – they never move beyond that relationship of being your disciple and you being the Master
- You stifle the ministry of the other men rather than encourage its development

Danger of overreacting – we need **strong leadership**; there must be a distinction so you know who are the recognized leaders; just need a healthy functioning of a godly plurality;

II. Missionary Mindset (:1B) – Outreach Outlook -- Aggressive Faith in Action

1 Thess. 1:8

“had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia” probably only halted for a night at each of these lodging places; 30-40 miles between each city – must have ridden on horses? Probably these other 2 cities did not have a synagogue or were not large enough to target at this time

A. Men on a Mission -- The Apostle Paul and his ministry companions were men on a mission. Motivated by **the Great Commission** –

Not going through life planning where to travel for their next vacation; not concerned with the material comforts of this life

“seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness”

“for to me to live is Christ and to die is gain”

Life is a lot more exciting if we get up in the morning with a mission that motivates us

B. Men on the Move – going where God directed them – Spirit Directed

Not sitting around; not couch potatoes; what if God wants us to leave our home and our community at some point for the spread of the gospel?

Is our heart cry: “Here I am, send me”??

End goal is NOT to plant **one church** – we are called to turn the WORLD upside down – in fact that is what they were accused of doing – but their opponents were thinking in terms of a physical kingdom rather than a spiritual kingdom

We need to be thinking in terms of developing leadership and teams that can be sent out to start other churches –

How will we know that we have a **missionary mindset**?

- look at where our money goes
- look at what we pray for
- look at who we eventually send out and how connected we stay to their ministry
- look at our heart and our compassion for the lost world

III. Opportunistic Orientation -- Metropolitan Strategy (:1C) – Perceptive Discernment **1 Thess 3:1-4 – sending Timothy to check up on the progress and endurance of the church**

Following a Plan, a Strategy

“they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews”

This was the next city after Philippi chosen for an extended period of evangelization

Sometimes Christians act like it is unspiritual to plan and set priorities; you can't do everything; even as a church we have to fill a certain niche – must be strategic in what we do

A. Significance of the City of Thessalonica – Taking advantage of strategic opportunity
Strategically located on the water and on one of the main land highways -- so it was a center for travel and commerce; it linked the rich agricultural plains of the Macedonian interior with the land and sea routes to the east; large city of perhaps 200,000 people – significant politically as well as economically; 100 mile journey from Philippi to Thessalonica

Not that other rural and outlying areas were unimportant – but they would be secondary targets after the more strategic areas had been reached

B. Significance of Targeting the Jewish Synagogue

Prepared audience

Background in OT Scriptures

Used to giving visiting speakers a hearing

Followed the transitional gospel priority -- going first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles

Book of Acts – you see the pattern of concentric circles – start at Jerusalem ... then branch out to Judea ... then make inroads into Gentile areas ... then reach the whole world ...

IV. Biblically Based (:2-3A) – Methodology of Bible Exposition – 1 Thess 1:6-8 – Receive the Word and Proclaim it to others

A. Consistent Methodology – steady diet; keep at it; Preach the Word

“And according to Paul’s custom” Acts 13:43; 18:19 same practice in Antioch, Ephesus

“and for three Sabbaths”

Probably the missionary team stayed longer in the city – but at the minimum they kept up this practice of going to the synagogue for three weeks with a Jewish emphasis :

- Philippian church had time to send money at least twice to Paul during this stay (Phil. 4:15-16)
- Paul stayed long enough to enter into a job situation – supporting himself and his team with manual labor (1 Thess 2:9; 2 Thess 3:7-10)

B. Seeker Methodology -- Seeking After Converts

“he went to them”

The opposite of a Seeker-friendly church – let's get it right – we are the ones called to

seek after the lost – you don't find the blind hollering: "Send the light, Send the light"

People are not going to flock to our little church – we want to pursue the lost and see them won to the Lord and disciplined – We must be the seekers – not just trying to have the Lord's people play musical chairs and move from one church to another – we need to reach the lost

Luke 19:10 "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost"

John 4:23 "for such people (those who worship in spirit and truth) The Father seeks to be His worshippers"

Matt. 22:9 "Go therefore to the main highways, and as many as you find there, invite to the wedding feast"

C. Biblically Based Methodology – in Apologetic Approach and Doctrinal Content

1. Biblically Based in Apologetic Approach

"reasoned with them from the Scriptures"

"explaining and giving evidence"

3 Different Greek words to describe this presentation by Paul to the Jews in the synagogue:

diel exato -- Reasoning Discuss, debate, address, speak; discussion rather than a formal sermon

dianoigwn -- explaining

paratiqemenoj – Proving, giving evidence

Patently entertaining questions and doubts, gentle spirit, not losing control or getting angry

All of the time skillfully using the Scriptures – especially the prophetic passages speaking about the Messiah

Dr. Fullerton illustration: **use the sword** – it is self-authenticating; you do not have to debate its divine origin

You must **appeal to the mind** ... not just some emotional appeal

You must keep hungering and thirsting to know the Scriptures better

2. Biblically Based in Doctrinal Content – **the Sufficiency of the Scriptures**

"from the Scriptures" Do we really believe in the sufficiency of the Word of God

- Biblically based when it comes to preaching and teaching – doctrine is not boring or outdated

- Biblically based when it comes to our music and worship – content is important

- Biblically based when it comes to our counseling – if the psychologists have the answers to behavior problems ... we should have them preaching on Sunday morning

- Biblically based when it comes to the roles in our family and how we manage our relationships

- Biblically based when it comes to our world view and how we relate to society and submit to governing authorities; how we view our work

- Biblically based when it comes to how we confront sin and how we resolve disputes and reconcile with one another

V. Christ Centered (:3) -- Major on the Essentials of the Gospel –

The Sufficiency of the Person of Jesus Christ – Book of Colossians

1 Thess 1:3 – everything revolves around our union with Jesus Christ

A. Focus on Christ on the Cross – the Death of Christ
“that the Christ had to suffer”

Repugnant concept to both the Jews and the Greeks: **1 Cor. 2**
“to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness”
“but the power of God”

B. Focus on Christ risen from the Empty Tomb – the Resurrection of Christ
“and rise again from the dead” **1 Cor. 15**

Everything hinges on the resurrection .. if no resurrection we are still dead in our sins

We must preach the genuine gospel message – believers need this gospel every day

Our union with Christ in His death and resurrection is the key to spiritual victory **Rom. 6**

C. Focus on the Messianic Prophecies – Second Coming is huge theme of 1 Thess.

“This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ”

Is 53; the many Messianic psalms; so many references fulfilled in detail

Look at approach that Christ took on the road to Emmaus after His resurrection

Luke 24:19-27

He is alive; I can serve Him today by faith; He is coming again soon

VI. Divinely Diverse (:4) – Diverse in Race and Gender and Age and Economic Status – Importance of Unity and Brotherhood – 1 Thess. 4:9 Love for the brethren

“And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a large number of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women”

A. Irresistible Grace – Sovereign Salvation of the **Elect** – 1 Thess 1:4-5

Only *“some”* were persuaded

Not persuaded because they were smarter than the others – Sovereign salvation

Expect to find that the way is broad that leads to destruction

Parable of the Sower and the Soils – we will find some good soil if God so wills

B. Knitting members into the Body – *“joined”*

Not joining a social club

Immediate joining – not some long period of probation (will have to think thru membership issues)

Organic unity of the Body of Christ – close, intimate partnership – they might not have been there from the beginning ... but once there ... they are just as much a part of the partnership in the gospel; not second class citizens of the kingdom

Separation from the synagogue – loss of financial revenue – would create jealousy on the part of the Jews – felt threatened by this exodus of some of their leading contributors

C. Ethnic Diversity – beauty of the unity of the body

1. Jews – only some believed; cf. Jason – house where they stayed – this was the Greek name assumed by many Jews names Joshua

2. *Large number of the God-fearing Greeks*

Cf. 20:4 – *Aristarchus* (Jew, Col. 4:10) and *Secundus* (God fearing Greek) probably saved during this time – now joined together in one body, serving Christ together

D. Gender Diversity – Significance of different roles

E. Age Diversity (not stressed here) – Importance of the children and the older folks

F. Economic Diversity – different social status

“*leading women*” – wives of the principal citizens; very impressive

Key Point of Distinction – whether or not you **Fear God**

Not how much money you make; what part of town you live in; what type of job

God does not show partiality ... neither should we

VII. Persevering through Persecution (:5-9) – Submitting to Suffering –

1 Thess 2:1-2; 14-16

Phil. 3:10 “*the fellowship of His sufferings*”

2 Tim. 3:12 “*All who live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution*”

All types of false charges and accusations – very cleverly schemed

Jason and the believers had to post some type of special bond to guarantee that Paul and the missionary team would not cause political trouble ...

But the new believers did not back away from boldly testifying to the gospel

1 Thess 1:7-10; 2:14-16

Who knows what types of obstacles Satan will throw at us; it won't be easy ... that is for sure; we will be tempted to become discouraged and to quit

Plaque up in my study:

DON'T QUIT

When things go wrong as they sometimes will
When the road you're trudging seems all up hill,
When the funds are low, and the debts are high,
And you want to smile, but you have to sigh,
When care is pressing you down a bit,
Rest if you must, but don't you quit.

Life is queer with its twists and turns,
As everyone of us sometimes learns,
And many a failure turns about,
When he might have won had he stuck it out;
Don't give up though the pace seems slow,
You may succeed with another blow.

Success is failure turned inside out,

The silver tint of the clouds of doubt,
And you never can tell how close you are,
It may be near when it seems so far;
So stick to the fight when you're hardest hit,
It's when things seem worse,
That you must not quit.

CONCLUSION:

We can have great confidence:

Matt. 16:18 *"I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it"*

It's not our church ... it is the church of Jesus Christ

There is a lost world out there that is not calling for any rescue but is doomed to the wrath of God unless we go and reach out and proclaim the gospel message that it was necessary for Christ to suffer and die and to be raised from the dead to offer forgiveness of sins and new life and the hope of eternity with God

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Try to match up the fruit of the Holy Spirit with the seven distinctives mentioned above. How do you see them meshing together?
- 2) This list of distinctives is not meant to be exhaustive. What other distinctives would you look for in a church plant?
- 3) What are some weaknesses you have seen in other churches where you need to guard against overreacting and swinging to the opposite end of the spectrum?
- 4) How was the church at Thessalonica able to maintain a positive, thankful spirit in the midst of such opposition and persecution?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

BlaiKlock: The charge was subtly conceived and dangerous. The mention of treason compelled the politarchs to act, and under the circumstances their binding over of the accused on Jason's bond of security was a mild action. It was none the less effective. It seems to imply a guarantee from Jason that Paul would go and not return. Hence 1 Thes. ii. 18. From 1 Thes. i. 13, 14, iii.3, it appears that local persecution continued. Still the church became a centre of evangelism, and included elements of the first audience (1 Thes. i. 8,9). The first two chapters of the first letter to Thessalonica imply a stay of some length, in spite of the brevity of Luke's account.

Constable: Paul evidently spoke in the synagogue only three Sabbath days (cf. 13:5, 14; 14:1), but he seems to have stayed longer in Thessalonica (cf. 1 Thess. 4:1; 2 Thess. 2:5). We know he supported himself there by making tents (1 Thess. 2:9; 2 Thess. 3:7-10), and the Philippians sent two monetary gifts to him there (Phil. 4:15-16). Perhaps he ministered primarily to Jews the first three weeks and then turned to the Gentiles.

Luke described Paul's method of evangelizing in Thessalonica as reasoning (Gr. *dielexato*, cf. v. 17; 18:4, 19; 19:8-9; 24:25) from the Scriptures, explaining (*dianoigon*), giving evidence (proving, *paratithemenos*), and proclaiming (*katangelo*). These terms imply that Paul dealt carefully with his hearers' questions and doubts. He showed that the facts of gospel history confirmed what the Scriptures predicted. His subject was Jesus whom Paul believed was the Christ. His Jewish hearers needed convincing that their Scriptures taught that Messiah would suffer death and rise from the grave (cf. 3:18; 13:30, 34; Luke 24:13-27; 1 Cor. 15:1-4). Paul used the Old Testament to prove that Jesus was the Messiah (Christ). . .

The city officials could not find the missionaries to bring them to trial. Consequently they made Jason and his friends pay a bond guaranteeing that Paul would cause no further trouble but leave town. If trouble continued, Jason would lose his money. If it did not, he would receive it back. Paul did leave town and wrote to the Thessalonians that Satan hindered his return (1 Thess. 2:18). His inability to return may have been the result of this tactic of his enemies. The Christians, however, carried on admirably for which Paul thanked God (1 Thess. 1:7-10; 2:14-16).

Deffinbaugh: Preaching in the synagogues was an effective means of reaching Gentiles. In nearly every synagogue there were Gentile “God-seekers” or “proselytes” of one kind or another. In Paphos, on Cyprus, was Sergius Paulus, the proconsul (13:6ff.). In Philippi, it was Lydia (16:14ff.). In chapter 17, we learn of a number of Gentiles who were saved through Paul’s preaching in the synagogues of Thessalonica and Berea (17:4, 12). These Gentile “God-seekers” had already come to the point of looking for salvation from a Jewish Messiah, and they also had some knowledge of the Old Testament. These converts would not need as much instruction as raw pagans, and thus they were potential leaders in the churches which were formed as a result of the evangelism of Paul and Barnabas and Silas and others. . .

To insure that no further violence would occur, a pledge or a bond was secured from Jason. It is possible that it was either implied or clearly stated that Paul would be sent out of town as a part of the agreement. At least this was the immediate result of Jason’s release “on bond.” Paul and Silas left by night for Berea. The ministry of these men in Thessalonica was cut short, from a human point of view, thus “forcing” Paul to minister to these saints “by mail” (1 and 2 Thessalonians), so that in the providence of God we could profit from Paul’s teaching and exhortation, even as they did. How often reversals and setbacks, from a human point of view, prove to be advances from a divine and eternal perspective!

Stedman: Among them, Luke is careful to point out, was a group of the leading women of the city. You find that emphasis in several places in this book. The gospel had a particular appeal to women, especially to women of the upper classes who were prominent citizens of these Greek cities. There is a reason for that. These were educated women and were therefore instructed in the philosophies of Greece. But they had found that these Greek philosophies were dead and empty, offering nothing for the heart, nothing for the spirit within. They instructed the mind but did nothing for the soul. And further, they were philosophies full of voluptuous and degrading

practices which left these women devastated and filled with self-loathing if they gave in to them. So they had turned from their philosophies to Judaism. But in Judaism they found themselves burdened with difficult and cumbersome regulations which again left them empty. Then the gospel came with the glad good news that, in Jesus Christ, there is neither male nor female, bond nor free, black nor white, nor any other distinction, that all the distinctions men make were broken down, all the middle walls of partition removed. These women responded joyously! They found a liberating, fulfilling, and satisfying glory about the gospel and they responded to the grace of God in Jesus Christ, inviting the Lord Jesus to enter their hearts.

TEXT: 1 THESSALONIANS 1: 1-5

TITLE: *WORD OF COMMENDATION: CHANGED LIVES*

INTRODUCTION:

Christianity is about the power of the gospel to **change lives**. The death and resurrection of Christ are the keys to the gospel message and the keys to unleashing the power of God in our lives. Jesus died to deliver us from our sins and introduce us to a new life of holiness. We have been made a new creation and we are now growing to become more like Jesus Christ. The good news is that we died with Jesus Christ. And *“As Christ was raised from the dead . . . so we too might walk in newness of life”* (Rom. 6:4). That is radical truth . . . life transforming reality. How do we know whether we are really a genuine believer or not??

Classic Peanuts on Saturday: Charlie Brown talking with Lucie – phonies or “realies”



Fake Christians . . . Hypocritical Christians . . . merely Professing Christians are deceived when they imagine that they have some form of personal relationship with Jesus Christ but without a **Changed Life**. Yet many evangelicals today teach such a powerless gospel. They expect very little in the way of the fruit of the Holy Spirit from those in their church. Sadly Christ will one day reject these satanic counterfeits and expose them as being outside of the kingdom of God. No fruit . . . No root / No changed life . . . No Union with Jesus Christ – it’s that simple.

It’s sad to see many genuine believers sit under the teaching of the bible for many years and yet grow so little in their faith and in their character. Why is that? Too much fascination with doctrinal truth and too little heart application and exercise of spiritual ministry. Christ did not produce armchair disciples. We should be here this morning because we want to be changed even more. Hopefully we can look back and see how God has been working in our life; but we are not satisfied. We have not arrived. We want to see more spiritual fruit. We want to be equipped for ministry. We find ourselves challenged as we try to live for Christ and witness to others during the week; we need to be built up and transformed.

The preaching of the gospel at Thessalonica by Paul and Silas and Timothy produced changed lives. Paul starts off this epistle of 1 Thessalonians with a **Word of Commendation** – assuring them that they have demonstrated themselves to be genuine believers by the fruit of their changed lives. They have responded admirably to the truth of God in a context of great pressure and persecution.

BIG IDEA:

CHANGED LIVES (THE MARK OF FAITHFUL DISCIPLES) SPUR THANKSGIVING BECAUSE THEY CONFIRM GOD'S ELECTION (AND OUR FAITH)

SIMPLE GREETING (:1) ... THEN 3 INSIGHTS REGARDING CHANGED LIVES

(:1-5) Today: Changed Lives Confirm God’s Election

(:6-10) Next Week: Changed Lives Earn the Reputation of Being a Model Worth Imitating

(:1) SIMPLE GREETING

A. Author and Co-Laborers – Examples of Changed Lives and Partners in the Gospel Ministry

They have individually responded to the gospel and jointly labored in ministry to bring that same gospel message to Thessalonica

- **dependence upon God**
- **need for one another**

1. Author – “*Paul*”

No secret how Jesus Christ intervened in the life of Saul the persecutor to turn him around literally on the road to Damascus; calling him to be the apostle to the Gentiles; to suffer great things for the sake of the gospel; church planter expert – laid out the model for others to follow – we talked about that model last week from Acts 17:1-9 as we looked at **7 Distinctives of an Effective, Godly Church Plant** – (get message from website)

Not insisting on any special status or distinction here

2. Co-Laborers – presented as partners in the gospel ministry

“*Silvanus (Latinized form of Silas -- same person) and Timothy*” – not quite as dramatic testimonies – but requiring the same power and grace on the part of God

a. **Silas** – well known in the Jerusalem church

- Paul chose him as his missionary companion for the 2nd missionary journey when he had his falling out with Barnabas over whether they should take John Mark (**Acts 15:36-40**) – so he was no slouch spiritually – very gifted – called a prophet

- You probably get to know one another fairly well when you share a prison cell in Philippi – **Acts 16:22-25** – singing duets with Paul from prison

b. **Timothy** – father was a Greek and mother a devout Christian Jew (Acts 16:1)

well spoken of by the brethren

- **Phil. 2:19-22** quite an endorsement from Paul

- he had just returned to Paul at Corinth after checking on the status of the believers at Thessalonica

B. Recipients

1. Identified as to their Nature

“*to the church*” – refers to the people ... not the building

Ekklesia – called out assembly

Addresses the epistle to all of the saints, not just the leaders

2. Identified as to their Physical Location – simpler times back then – complex today

“*of the Thessalonians*” – talking on Thurs about picking a name for this church;

3. Identified as to their Spiritual Location

“*In God the Father*” – writing to a group of young believers

“*and the Lord Jesus Christ*” – on the same level as God the Father

Great picture of the Trinity as you see the Holy Spirit referenced in vs.5

Ryrie: The oneness of the Father and Son as well as the oneness of believers with the Godhead is affirmed.

Stott: Living in, rooted in, drawing their life from ...

C. Salutation

“Grace to you and peace”

Ryrie: Peace to us today means the absence of war; but in the Old Testament it meant harmony between man and God and the resultant wholeness and prosperity of the soul. As used here it of course has that Old Testament flavor with the Christian additive that the harmony was made possible through the death of Christ.

3 INSIGHTS REGARDING CHANGED LIVES:

I. (:2) THE INTERCONNECTION OF CHANGED LIVES – CHANGED LIVES BIND BELIEVERS TOGETHER IN THANKSGIVING EXPRESSED IN PRAYER

In his introduction to this epistle, the missionary team wants to express their **bond of connectivity** with the believers back in Thessalonica – what type of glue is holding them together; it is not out of sight, out of mind; the body of Christ mentality

A. Dominant Tone of Thanksgiving

“We give thanks to God always for all of you”

- the entire missionary team feels this way – united in this
- all the time – regardless of circumstances
- for all of you – despite your individual quirks

Check ourselves – Do we need an attitude adjustment? Some Christians walk around all down in the mouth; minister to others and feed an attitude of thanksgiving to God for His working

3 Motivations for a Consistent pattern of Thanksgiving:

- **Anticipating Future Reward** – **1 Thess 2:19-20** *“For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? For you are our glory and joy.”* That’s why our present circumstances should never compromise our tone of thanksgiving to God; we live in light of eternity

- **Antidote for Anxiety** – Key to experiencing the peace of God – cf. **Phil. 4:6-7** *“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”* Context of fellowship in the gospel despite being in prison in Rome; despite relationship conflicts that need to be dealt with in the church between Euodia and Syntyche

- **Appropriate in every situation** -- Do you want to know what the will of God is for your life = Thanksgiving – **1 Thess 5:18** *“In everything give thanks, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”* – Paul exemplified this; asks these young believers to follow his example – in context of persecution

Opposite = spirit of grumbling and complaining and lack of contentment and covetousness

What will bind us together is being thankful for one another = key to unity

B. Persistent Pattern of Prayer

“making mention of you in our prayers”

- Specific Intercession for their needs
- How are we doing in our prayers this past week?
- What types of things and people are we making mention of before the throne of grace?

What will bind us together is praying for one another = key to unity

II. (:3) THE IDENTIFICATION OF CHANGED LIVES – CHANGED LIVES CAN BE IDENTIFIED BY THE FRUIT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

(Note the parallelism between vs. 3 and vv. 9-10)

A. The Fruit of Changed Lives = Evident to the Missionary Team --

“constantly bearing in mind your . . .”

These prayers were not mindless babble; not some incoherent language; offering up specific thanksgiving; making particular petition; focused and concentrated – not daydreaming

Christianity engages the mind

Should be evident whether or not someone is following after Christ – can’t always tell ... but that should be the normal expectation; Timothy had been sent back for just that purpose – to see how they were doing and bring a report

B. The Fruit of Changed Lives = Only Produced by the Holy Spirit

Brand Awareness – it will always look like this

A strange thing about death is that it leads to lack of identification. The body gradually decomposes. Pretty soon one pile of ashes is indistinguishable from the next. All traces of identity have disappeared. Life is just the opposite. As life develops and matures it leads to more distinct identification. Lots of babies look very similar ... but as you mature your features become more distinct. The same in the spiritual realm. As the spiritual life matures it becomes more and more identifiable. The common thread is the fruit of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. But the manifestations are very different. God allows us to tap our creativity in designing ways to please Him through godly character exercised in ministry towards others.

Cf. the Caterpillar brand – a lot invested so that people will be able to identify what is genuinely associated with Caterpillar and what is not – words like quality, strength, reliability, technological innovation

Whole group of people at a major corporation like Caterpillar dedicated to protecting and advancing the brand

Your advertising and campaigns center around this brand awareness

God wants to protect His Brand – He wants it to be recognizable

Satan wants to counterfeit it

Living for Jesus involves hard work; great effort to the point of exhaustion; disciplined life; managing priorities; effectiveness use of all that God has entrusted to you:

Time is precious – cannot be wasted

Gifts and abilities are precious – cannot be wasted

Money and material possessions are valuable – cannot be wasted

3 Distinctives of the Christian Brand: (Gal 5:22-23 – fruit of the Spirit)

Active Faith, Active Love, Active Hope

1. *Work of Faith* – work produced by faith

John 14:12 “*He who believes in Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go to the Father*”

Study the **Book of James** to see what genuine faith looks like in action

What are we trusting God to accomplish? What effort are we expending in that direction because we believe God is at work? How are we stepping out in faith?

We need a facility in which to meet – we have to go after it – investigate ... ask questions ... see what door God will open

2. *Labor of Love* – labor motivated by love

Study the **Book of 1 John** to see what loving the brethren looks like in action

How are we practically showing love to one another? Someone is in the hospital .. who is taking care of them and going to see them; someone is out of work ... are we sensitive that their needs are being met

3. *Steadfastness of Hope*

in our Lord Jesus Christ

in the presence of our God and Father

Study the **Book of 1 Peter** to see what it means to maintain a steadfast Hope and live in light of eternity despite the pressures of a world that would like to quench your Hope

How solid is our hope or are we living on shaky ground?

Piper: Those are the two kinds of texts you find in the Bible concerning endurance. [SHALL passages and MUST passages] The one kind assures us that we SHALL endure because we are saved. The other kind urges us to endure so that we will be saved. Endurance is a gift and endurance is a duty. And these are not in conflict. When dealing with a holy and sovereign God these are not contradictions. We MUST endure to the end for he is holy; and we SHALL endure to the end, for he is sovereign.

* * * * *

(:9-10) (PARALLEL) Evident to Other Believers -- “*For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you . . .*”

1. *Turned to God from idols*

2. *To serve a living and true God*

3. *To wait for His Son from heaven*

Whom He raised from the dead

That is Jesus

Who delivers us from the wrath to come

* * * * *

2 phases of changed lives:

- the initial change in response to the gospel proclamation = conversion
- the ongoing change in modeling the truth = sanctification and discipleship

III. (:4-5) THE INITIATION OF CHANGED LIVES – THE INITIAL CHANGE IN RESPONSE TO THE GOSPEL PROCLAMATION CONFIRMS GOD’S ELECTION

- What produces changed lives
- What is the effect of changed lives

“*Knowing . . .*” look at all of the references in this section to the mind – what we know is important . . . as long as we act on it

A. The Subjects of Election

a. *Brethren* – family identity – Paul uses this intimate expression 21 times in 1&2 Thess -- Who begat who into the family? God caused us to be born again into His family – “*born again by the will of God*” – not by our will

John 1:12-13 “*But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God*”

Ultimately, we are not in God’s family because we chose Him but because He first chose us. We want to experience that sense of brotherhood and sisterhood in our church

b. *Beloved by God* – Initiated by the Love God set on His – we cannot explain His rationale – **1 John 4:10** “*In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the Propitiation for our sins*”

4:19 “*We love because He first loved us*”

Isn’t it great to be loved by God?

B. The Explanation of Election (“His choice of you”)

in what sense and on what basis did God choose us?

4 Perspectives to help us understand the Doctrine of Election:

- **Background of Election** = Election of the nation of Israel – **Deut. 7:6-9** – chosen out of the world to be a holy people dedicated to obeying God and enjoying His favor and faithfulness

- Basics of Election

- a deliberate Sovereign choice by God independent of any merit or worth on the part of man
- involves choosing specific individuals and not choosing others
- took place in the beginning before the foundation of the world
- renders our eternal salvation secure
- does not compromise the balancing principle of human responsibility or of the free offer of the gospel to all men
- is consistent with the justice of God

- Bias against Election = “That isn’t fair” – answered by **Romans 9**

Does everyone have equal opportunity to believe and equal access to God’s working in their life so it all hinges on their decision? Does God treat everyone the same?

Has led to some false views of election

- Election based on God’s Foreknowledge – looked ahead and saw who would believe
1 Pet. 1:1-2 “*who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father*”
Don’t deny the causative relationship – We come to faith in Christ because we are the elect ... not the other way around
- Election based on God just choosing Christ – we become in Christ by our choice of Faith

- Beauty of Election = the only way any of us would have ever come to know the Lord Jesus; You must understand Election from a foundation of believing in the doctrine of Total Depravity we were enemies in need of reconciliation with the Almighty God of the universe; we were dead and unable to respond; we were lost and unable to find our way; we were blind and unable to see; we were in bondage and unable to escape

2 Pet. 1:10 “*Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble*”

MacArthur: Though God is certain who His elect are and has given them an eternally secure salvation ... the Christian might not always have assurance of his salvation. Security is the Holy Spirit revealed fact that salvation is forever. Assurance is one’s confidence that he possesses that eternal salvation. In other words, the believer who pursues the spiritual qualities mentioned above guarantees to himself by spiritual fruit that he was called.

C. The Efficacy of Election – The Fourfold Testimony That Converted the Elect

1. Proclamation of the Genuine Gospel Message – “*for our gospel did not come to you in word only*” – But not only in Words

- Assumed that it did come in Word – not just in lifestyle or by way of example;
- It is good to give out solid tracts; to distribute Gideon bibles ...
- The words are important ... but they are not everything

The Next 3 = all involve the working of the Holy Spirit through the proclaimers

1. God's Power at work (cf. **Rom.1:16-18**)

- “*but also in power*” -- not timidity but boldness in both delivery and effect
- No power in the messengers – we are just earthen vessels

2 Cor. 4:7 “*But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves.*”

Are we convinced of the power of the Gospel?

Psychology doesn’t offer the power to change lives – heard a presentation years back from a Towson psychiatrist – he admitted how hard it was to change people’s attitudes and behavior – even if they wanted help – I liked his **joke about psychologists**:

“Have you heard how many psychologists it takes to change a light bulb? Only one, but the light bulb must really want to change.”

2. God's Presence at work – in the person of the Holy Spirit

“and in the Holy Spirit” – very special kind of power

Have we abandoned the power of the Holy Spirit to the charismatic movement?

They expect the presence of God to manifest Himself – they expect great things – maybe not always the right type of manifestations – but what is our expectation?

3. God's Preachers at work – God's instruments

“and with full conviction” – much assurance; much confidence; certainty
the confidence of the missionary team in their preaching

Rom. 10 – Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God – requires preachers!

Is. 55:11 *“So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.”*

Transition: The changed lives of the gospel proclaimers are consistent with God's election (their motives, manner of ministry, etc.)

“just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake”

Transparent in their character and conduct – important since they were under attack for their motives and methods – taking this opportunity to defend themselves

Very important verse for church planters –

- Do we have lives that are consistent with the Christian Brand: Faith, Love, Hope –
- Are we involved directly in the lives of the people so that they really know what type of person we are?
- Have we proven ourselves as we have interacted with them or have we proven to be inconsistent?
- Are we living unselfishly – for the sake of the flock; or selfishly – for our own interests?

Stott: No church can spread the gospel with any degree of integrity, let alone credibility, unless it has been visibly changed by the gospel it preaches. We need to look like what we are talking about. It is not enough to receive the gospel and pass it on; we must embody it in our common life of faith, love, joy, peace, righteousness and hope.

CONCLUSION:

Changed lives is what a relationship with Jesus Christ is all about.

When God reaches out to minister to people and they don't respond in genuine repentance and faith and their lives are not transformed that grieves the heart of God.

Is 5 – the song of the vineyard – what more could God do?? The problem is not with God or with the need for more revelation. The problem is the hardness of our heart.

But when people like the believers at Thessalonica respond to the gospel, it is a cause for great Thanksgiving to the glory of God!

CHANGED LIVES SPUR THANKSGIVING BECAUSE THEY CONFIRM GOD'S ELECTION

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How could this relatively young group of believers have progressed in the faith so quickly that Paul could commend them so highly? From whatever point I am in my spiritual life, how quickly can I grow if I am truly a disciple of Christ in every respect?
- 2) Why did Paul put such a heavy emphasis on God's election and yet always carefully balance that precious truth with references to human responsibility? Do I shrink away from proclaiming either side of this dynamic or become unbalanced in some type of soapbox diatribe? How can I know whether I am truly one of the elect?
- 3) Who have been the key examples that God has used in my life to impact my growth? How faithful have I been to reproduce their example and become imitators of them and of the Lord? Am I discouraged by suffering or do I find the joy of the Holy Spirit to be my strength?
- 4) What type of impact am I having on the spiritual growth of others?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Life Application Commentary: This is a short introduction compared to Paul's other letters. Here he did not distinguish himself from these co-workers, even though he was an apostle and they were not... This probably indicates that the relationship between Paul and the Thessalonians was strong and that they were not doubting his apostleship.

Stott: To whatever denomination or tradition we may belong, the doctrine of election causes us difficulties and questions. To be sure, it is a truth which runs through Scripture, beginning with God's call of Abraham ... Moreover, the topic of election is nearly always introduced for a practical purpose, in order to foster assurance (not presumption), holiness (not moral apathy), humility (not pride) and witness (not lazy selfishness). But still no explanation of God's election is given except God's love. (Deut. 7:7-8) . . .

Here, then, is Paul's threefold delineation of the church. It is a community beloved and chosen by God in a past eternity, rooted in God and drawing its life from him, and exhibiting this life of God in a faith which works, a love which labors and a hope which endures. What stands out of Paul's vision of the church is its God-centeredness. He does not think of it as a human institution, but as the divine society. No wonder he could be confident in its stability!

MacArthur: A sure evidence of the Thessalonians' election was that they submitted to a new Master. Salvation meant a decisive break with pagan religion and a redirecting of one's whole life. The Thessalonians abandoned all polytheism and embraced only God and the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul expressed this change as their having *turned to God from idols*. *Turned* is from the verb *epistrepho*, which is used in the New Testament to indicate the fact that in the sinner's conversion there is a turning in the absolute opposite direction (Acts 9:35; 11:21; 26:18, 20; 2 Cor. 3:16; cf. Luke 1:16; James 5:20). Such conversion entails repentance, a turning from idols and in faith submitting to the Savior alone (Acts 20:21). Such turning is far more than merely

changing one's belief about who Christ is – it is a complete reversal of allegiance, from idols to serve a living and true God.

Hiebert: In looking back over this summary statement of the remarkable testimony concerning the Thessalonians, one is impressed with the richness of its compressed theology about God, His Son, and the Christian life. Concerning God it indicates that He is a living person, is truly God, has a Son, raised Him from the dead, is the proper recipient of Christian service, and has wrath against sin. Concerning Jesus Christ it indicates His dual nature as the God-man, His death and resurrection, by implication His ascension, His expected return from heaven, and His delivering of believers from wrath. Concerning the Christian life it teaches the need for conversion as a definite break with past evil, that Christian living is characteristically a life of serving God, and that the Christian has the living hope of deliverance from the wrath of judgment through the returning Christ.

Piper: Regarding how it is that hope produces endurance ...

Let us probe the connection between hope and endurance by asking a very crucial and practical question: are Christians supposed to endure in the path of obedience in order to inherit the blessings of heaven; or are Christians supposed to endure because the blessings of heaven are certainly and infallibly theirs? . . .

The SHALLS of scripture do three things.

1) They turn us away from all self-reliance and boasting (1 Corinthians 4:7) and direct us to the sovereign power of God. "He will cause us to endure!"

2) The SHALLS of Scripture turn us away from all legalism -- the thought that we could ever earn the heavenly reward. It was bought by Christ. It is a free gift and cannot be earned. Endurance is not a way of paying for salvation. It is a way of experiencing grace (1 Peter 4:10-11; Galatians 15:10) and living by faith (Galatians 2:20).

3) The shalls of Scripture give confidence and peace to the broken and contrite who cast themselves on Jesus for forgiveness and help.

The MUSTS of Scripture do three things.

1) They remind us that the miracle of conversion is not a legal fiction. You can't be converted to Christ and have everything stay the way it was. There MUST be a change -- a change that endures. There must be the "work of faith, the labor of love and the endurance of hope." "Those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh" (Galatians 5:24).

2) The MUSTS of Scripture direct our attention to the exceedingly great value of the reward of heaven. If we must endure, and if endurance comes from hope, then I must get my heart free from the love of the world and set it on the value of the things above so that my hope in God will be kindled and I will have the power to endure in obedience to Christ.

3) The MUSTS of Scripture provide us with a way of testing whether we have any right to claim the SHALLS for ourselves. To whom do the SHALLS of Scripture belong? They belong to those who are broken by the musts of Scripture and who fly to Christ for forgiveness and help.

So the SHALLS of Scripture give the Christian life its peace and security and stability, and the MUSTS of Scripture give the Christian life its urgency and earnestness and mission. The

SHALLS base the Christian life on the sovereign grace and power of God. The MUSTS remind us of the necessity to depend on this grace and power.

So in the end both the SHALLS and the MUSTS of Scripture point us to the same thing: they point us away from ourselves to the sovereign grace and power of God. The SHALLS do it directly with promises of grace. The MUSTS do it indirectly by commanding us to do things we can't do without grace.

And so when you read in Scripture that God SHALL cause you to endure (Jeremiah 32:40), the aim is that, with all peace and joy, you would set your hope on the sovereign grace of God, and in that hope find the strength to endure. And when you read in Scripture that you MUST endure (Luke 21:19), the aim is the same: that, with all urgency and earnestness, you would set your hope on the sovereign grace of God and in that hope find the strength to endure.

The SHALLS of Scripture are sweet and reassuring calls to hope in God. The MUSTS of Scripture are urgent and earnest calls to hope in God.

The MUSTS are not telling us to endure in our own strength. And the SHALLS are not telling us that we don't have to endure. Both the SHALLS and the MUSTS are telling us: HOPE IN GOD! HOPE IN GOD! HOPE IN GOD! For this is the great source of power to endure in the path of obedience.

If you put your hope in the sovereign grace and power of God and not in your own strength, or in the approval of others or in money or in fleeting pleasures or in status, then when the limelight shifts off your ministry and your life, and the praise of man is gone, and the glamour of self-denial evaporates and all the supports of men crumble, then you SHALL endure -- with the endurance of hope.

Mayhue: Characteristics of the Thessalonian Church

1. Committed Church
they labored long and hard on Christ's behalf
2. Submitted Church
imitated the faith of their spiritual father and his associates ... even in much tribulation
3. Reproducing Church
4. Repentant Church
had turned from the false to the true God in their salvation
5. Serving Church
committed to serve God rather than Mammon
6. Patient Church
were looking for the blessed hope
7. Accepting Church
responded to the power of God's Word
8. Persecuted Church
9. Staunch Church
"standing firm" – stood their ground without compromise
10. God-Pleasing Church
11. Loving-the-brethren Church
12. Praying Church

TEXT: 1 THESSALONIANS 1: 6-10

TITLE: GODLY ROLE MODELS: AN EXAMPLE WORTH FOLLOWING

BIG IDEA:

CHANGED LIVES EARN THE REPUTATION OF BEING A MODEL WORTH IMITATING

INTRODUCTION:

What types of **role models** have you chosen to follow in your life? We all have been impacted by a wide range of different people. Some of the examples have been good and helpful; others have been dangerous and harmful. We know that “*bad company corrupts good morals*” (1 Cor. 15:33) and yet sometimes we are not all that careful about who we hang with. The value of our college fellowship group – excellent role models to challenge us to live for Christ.

“*He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.*” **Prov. 13:20**

Note that the **Pharisees** – despite all of the “truth” that they set forth from the OT Scriptures were explicitly identified as the type of role model we should reject: **Matt. 23:1-5**

“*therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds*”

Some public figures shy away from the responsibility of being regarded as a role model. They don’t want any accountability in their lives; but the fact is people are watching and people are imitating. (Arena of sports, music, entertainment, politics, etc.)

A **good reputation** is a valuable asset. “*A good name is to be more desired than great wealth*” (**Prov. 22:1**). Not easy to earn ... very easy to have destroyed; that is why the Lord speaks so strongly against bearing false witness; against making false accusations; against slandering our brother. Our reputation should gain us a hearing to proclaim the gospel to others.

- our reputation in the work force

 - When we are laid off, we respond very differently from the world

- our reputation in the community – Where do people turn for help?

- our reputation in our family – our kids should be our greatest evangelistic asset

This good reputation that the believers from Thessalonica had earned was sufficient evidence that they were truly the **elect of God**. They weren’t phonies ... they were realies (like we talked about last week).

CHANGED LIVES EARN THE REPUTATION OF BEING A MODEL WORTH IMITATING

3 ACTIVITIES RELATED TO BECOMING A GOOD EXAMPLE FOR OTHER BELIEVERS:

I. (:6) Imitation of Christ and of Christlike leaders

II. (:7-8) Reputation – securing it and making it known

III. (:9-10) Devotion to God – separation from the world to be consecrated to God

I. (:6) IMITATION -- GODLY IMITATION PRODUCES CHANGED LIVES

A. The Process of Godly Imitation – What is involved in imitating someone?

“You also became imitators”

Not just a bunch of monkeys – “monkey see, monkey do” in some type of rote fashion

Keathley: Our word *imitate* may lead to the wrong impression. Christian imitation has nothing to do with outward conformity where someone merely copies the actions, mannerisms, or speech of another. The Greek word is *mimetes* from *mimeomai*, “to imitate, emulate, use as a model.” The main idea here is to follow someone as an ideal model or example, but, as the New Testament context makes clear, this is not merely a matter of external conformity, but change from the inside out through receiving and following the spiritual truths of the faith as seen in the life of the model.

Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery

More is caught than taught

You must pursue the spiritual disciplines that over time will help you to grow and mature; understanding that ultimately inward transformation is the work of the Holy Spirit by God’s grace – but not apart from our efforts and dedication

Look at how many people want to take some type of shortcut to spiritual maturity

B. The People Worthy of Godly Imitation

1. Visibly = Apostolic church planting team – Paul, Silas, Timothy – “*of us*”
Their spiritual parents in the Lord

These were not some spiritual big shots that you could never get close to; they were intimately involved in both public preaching and teaching and one-on-one discipleship (2 Thess. 3:7; Heb. 13:7)

2. Ultimately = Lord Jesus Christ – “*and of the Lord*”

Study the process by which Christ trained His disciples – not just some type of academic course of study; not just reading books and writing papers; but following Christ around; seeing how He ministered to people; on the job training for spiritual ministry

C. The Particulars of Godly Imitation – must be interpreted through the grid of the Word of God – that divine revelation that instructs us regarding how to live

“having received the word” (John 1:12 – the Word Incarnate as well)

-- must go to the only authoritative source for our rule of conduct – defines for us the parameter of what is worth imitating and what is not

-- must not only listen but respond and apply the Word so that we live it out

- back to the 4 types of soil – we must be that good soil where the seed

takes root and produces godly fruit that remains even when the pressure comes

-- trying to understand some of my Catholic friends; they receive the writings of the church fathers on a par with the Word of God in terms of informing them of the particulars worthy of imitation; interesting argument: the church established the canon (which books are viewed as Scripture), therefore the church is a higher authority in some sense ... very dangerous

D. The Pressure Cooker Environment in which Godly Imitation Flourishes

“in much tribulation” – affliction, intense pressure, confining pressure
(John 16:33)

That squeezing pressure that builds up in your chest
Not talking here so much about just the normal hardships of life – health problems, financial pressures, dealing with job changes, etc.
Talking more about blatant persecution for their identification with Jesus Christ; the missionary team had come under fire in Thessalonica and been forced to leave the city; but the believers who remained faced some tough times

The Lord loves to turn the heat up on His disciples to purify them and intensify the rate and quality of their development. Satan grossly miscalculates when he imagines that attacking believers will ruin them or distract them from a walk of faith. Hard times drive us closer to a walk of dependence upon the Lord.
When we have to pray for the provision of our daily bread like Jesus and His disciples did, we will be much more focused in our prayers.

Phil. 3:10 – fellowship in His sufferings

E. The Persevering Power of Godly Imitation – very different from self effort or relying on any worldly resources or human strength

“with the joy of the Holy Spirit”

Cf. joy of Paul and Silas in prison in Philippi

“A joyful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit dries up the bones.” **Prov. 17:22**
A little different than the Reader’s Digest rendition: “Laughter is the best medicine

Zeisler: There are few things that are clearer evidence of God at work in a thorough and heartfelt way than for people to be joyful in the midst of being hassled, hurt, set upon and denied their rights.

Should be seen on our countenance – Jon Williams is a tremendous inspiration in this regard

If you imitate well . . . others will imitate you – cycle of imitation, reproduction, discipleship

TRANSITION: *“so that you became an example”*

II. (:7-8) REPUTATION -- CHANGED LIVES PRODUCE THE REPUTATION OF A MODEL WORTH FOLLOWING

A. The Scope of the Reputation

“so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia”

“not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place”

Hyperbole used here – but the point is that their reputation was very widespread – Paul was seeking to introduce the gospel throughout this whole geographic area; what an encouragement to the other believers to hear such a good report of this band of Christian disciples

B. The Securing of the Reputation

You could be the best model in the world for people to follow – but if no one even knows you exist, you won't have much impact; there must be some **visibility** to your testimony

1. Proclamation of the Truth – Preaching the word of the Lord
“the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you”

Trumpet blast; roar of thunder – very loud and impressive; gets your attention

Keathley: The term “sounded forth” or “echoed” is the Greek *execheo*, “to cause to resound, sound or ring forth.” It seems that the Apostle saw the Thessalonians as **amplifiers** who first received the gospel message but then sent it reverberating on its way with increased power and scope much like an echo in the mountains. . . The meaning is, that their conversion and its circumstances were so noted, that they carried the gospel through the province as if by the ringing peal of a trumpet.

Cf. **internet ministry** – far-reaching; who knows the ultimate results; 500 unique people a day; most of these are bible teachers of some form who are preparing to teach others – in far outlying areas

2. Practice of the Truth – Personal Relationship with the Living God
“your faith toward God has gone forth”

When people get to know us, do our lives back up our proclamation of the truth? Are we characterized by faith and love and hope? By holiness and gentleness and self control? By joy and thanksgiving? By prayer and dependence upon God and waiting for His soon return?

C. The Sufficiency of the Reputation

“so that we have no need to say anything”

Paul's work was done in the sense that he did not need to convince the believers about the reality of the Spirit's work in this assembly at Thessalonica – still he did commend them in very specific ways – such as for their example of sacrificial giving

(2 Cor. 8:1-8) – the way you manage your money is good test of maturity

III. (:9-10) DEVOTION -- CHANGED LIVES EXHIBIT THREE KEY DISTINCTIVES

Context: A Good Report -- Their Initial Dramatic Conversion and Response to the Apostolic Proclamation

“For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you”

Entrance, access

It’s nice when people give a good report about the changed lives of other believers

A. “work of faith” – Dramatic Conversion – Repentance + Faith

“how you turned to God from idols” – Background = pagan Gentiles largely
Nobody drifts into God’s family; nobody just does a slight course alteration and ends up in glory; God must do a decisive work of conversion to turn us completely around so that we head down the narrow path instead of the broad way
We must be transformed from being enemies to being friends
We must recognize our sinfulness for what it is and hate it like God hates it and turn our back on it

Roper: men are obliged to have faith in something. They must depend upon something or somebody. Man is never really independent. The option is never faith or nonfaith. The question is: what is the object of faith? We are either trusting in idols or we are trusting in God. These are the only two options. . .
the problem with an idol is that it always tends to disappoint us. If it becomes the sole source of our support it tends to break down. It cannot bear our full weight. This is why we get so frustrated and bitter and resentful at times. The things in which we trusted most have let us down

Are there any idols that we have been allowing to hang around and distract us from our devotion to God?

Opposite: Don’t shrink back into apostasy – Book of Hebrews

B. “labor of love” – Dedication to Ministry – whole-hearted service to God *“to serve a living and true God”* Present Tense – ongoing action

Every other religion is about dead idols and false gods
Truth trumps everything; truth floats my boat

Joshua 3:10 *“By this you shall know that the living God is among you”*

Zeisler: That is a strong word. It is not love that occasionally does partial and insignificant work, love that occasionally ventures out of its shell and paints a building or fixes a tire or does something easy and inexpensive. Love that labors is love that puts itself in the harness; love that is committed to seeing people served even when it is

expensive, even when it hurts. Laboring love remains, continues to serve, continues to bear the brunt, and works hard at loving.

What are you doing with your life?

Do we truly enjoy serving God and serving others?

Transition: that is why **the Resurrection of Christ** is so key

C. “*steadfastness of hope*” – **Desire for the Return of Our Savior**

“*and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come.*” Pres. Tense – ongoing action

Don’t give up or become discouraged or disillusioned

Keathley: the word “*wait*,” the Greek *anameno*, which comes from *ana*, “up, upward,” and *meno*, “to remain, abide.” It means “to remain in a place and/or a state of mind, with expectancy concerning a future event—to await, to wait for.” Our phrase, “wait up for” catches the meaning nicely. Think of a parent who, in anticipation of a son or daughter’s arrival, waits up eagerly and expectantly. *Anameno* means to expect, with the added notion of waiting patiently and confidently, but not necessarily in a passive way.

Paul is going to need to **correct these believers** regarding how they are to wait for the Lord’s return. Even though it is imminent – could come at any time – that does not mean we should quit our jobs, forget our earthly responsibilities and sit on top of some mountain gazing upwards.

Others attack me ... but Jesus is coming

The world is so unfair ... but Jesus is coming

“*Yes, I am coming quickly*” – Rev. 22:20

Zeisler: Hope in our lives has a lot to do with what our final priorities are. What we hope for is the bottom line commitment.

Rich Christology in this verse

Focus is on the **Object of our Hope = Jesus Christ – 5 Truths about Christ**

1. Divine -- Deity of Christ – “*His Son*”

Understanding of the Trinity – relationship among the 3 persons of Godhead

2. Transcendent -- Location of Christ – “*from heaven*” – in control; at peace

Where is Jesus now? In heaven, at right hand of God the Father

Acts 1:9-11 – Ascension into heaven from which He will return; but we are not to sit around waiting

as you read through the gospel of John – Jesus constantly identifies Himself as the one who came down from heaven to reveal the Father and

who was then going to return to heaven

3. Living, Victorious Savior – “*whom He raised from the dead*”
Testimony of the empty tomb – Easter fast approaching
All people are accountable to the risen Lord; judgment committed to Him
4. Fully Man – “*that is Jesus*” – Historical person
5. Future Rescuer – “*who delivers us from the wrath to come*”
Return of Christ is certain
What is this “*wrath to come*”? [advisor in seminary – thesis]
 - a) Eternal wrath and separation from God in hell (John 3:36; Rom. 1:18)
 - b) Temporal wrath of Tribulation Period (Jer. 30:4-7; Rev. 7:14)Difficult to say which is in view here – definitely (a); maybe (b)
2 Thess 1:5-12 is important context here

Every chapter in 1 Thess ends with a reference to the return of Jesus Christ

Hiebert: "In 1 Thessalonians 1:10 the Thessalonian believers are pictured as waiting for the return of Christ. The clear implication is that they had a hope of His imminent return. If they had been taught that the great tribulation, in whole or in part, must first run its course, it is difficult to see how they could be described as expectantly awaiting Christ's return. Then they should rather have been described as bracing themselves for the great tribulation and the painful events connected with it."

Bible Knowledge Commentary:

The wrath of God will be poured out on unrighteous people because of their failure to trust in Christ ([John 3:36](#); [Rom. 1:18](#)). This happens at many times and in many ways, the great white throne judgment being the most awful occasion ([Rev. 20:11-15](#)). But the “time of trouble for Jacob” ([Jer. 30:4-7](#)), also called “the Great Tribulation” ([Rev. 7:14](#)), will be a period in history during which God’s wrath will be poured out on the earth as never before (cf. [Rev. 6-19](#)).

Was Paul thinking of a specific time in which God’s wrath would be poured out ([1 Thes. 1:10](#)), or was he referring to the outpouring of God’s wrath on unbelievers in a more general sense? Paul, the Thessalonian believers, and Christians today will escape all aspects of God’s wrath, general and specific, including the Tribulation period. The clear implication of this verse is that Paul hoped in the Lord’s imminent return. Otherwise Paul would have told his readers to prepare for the Tribulation.

CONCLUSION:

These believers took on the distinctives we talked about from Acts 17 about the founding of the church
- plurality partnership

- missionary mindset
- opportunistic orientation
- biblically based
- Christ centered
- divinely diverse
- persevering through persecution – steadfast in their hope

- IMITATION – Imitate good models
- REPUTATION – Earn a good reputation / be a good role model to others
- DEVOTION – Devote yourselves completely to God

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Where else do you find this combination of tribulation and joy?
- 2) What believers have been models for your spiritual growth in specific ways?
- 3) What idols have you been delivered from by the Lord Jesus?
- 4) Why does Paul finish each chapter in 1 Thessalonians with an emphasis on the return of Jesus Christ?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

MacArthur: A sure evidence of the Thessalonians' election was that they submitted to a new Master. Salvation meant a decisive break with pagan religion and a redirecting of one's whole life. The Thessalonians abandoned all polytheism and embraced only God and the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul expressed this change as their having *turned to God from idols*. *Turned* is from the verb *epistrepho*, which is used in the New Testament to indicate the fact that in the sinner's conversion there is a turning in the absolute opposite direction (Acts 9:35; 11:21; 26:18, 20; 2 Cor. 3:16; cf. Luke 1:16; James 5:20). Such conversion entails repentance, a turning from idols and in faith submitting to the Savior alone (Acts 20:21). Such turning is far more than merely changing one's belief about who Christ is – it is a complete reversal of allegiance, from idols to serve a living and true God.

Hiebert: In looking back over this summary statement of the remarkable testimony concerning the Thessalonians, one is impressed with the richness of its compressed theology about God, His Son, and the Christian life. Concerning God it indicates that He is a living person, is truly God, has a Son, raised Him from the dead, is the proper recipient of Christian service, and has wrath against sin. Concerning Jesus Christ it

indicates His dual nature as the God-man, His death and resurrection, by implication His ascension, His expected return from heaven, and His delivering of believers from wrath. Concerning the Christian life it teaches the need for conversion as a definite break with past evil, that Christian living is characteristically a life of serving God, and that the Christian has the living hope of deliverance from the wrath of judgment through the returning Christ.

Thomas: The notion of imitating God and Christ applies especially to *holiness* (1 Peter 1:15, 16), *love* (Matt 5:43-48; Luke 6:36; John 13:34; 15:12) and *suffering* (Matt 16:24, 25; Mark 10:38, 39; Luke 14:27; John 15:18-20; 1 Peter 2:18-21) – three areas touched upon later in Thessalonians: holiness in 3:13; 4:3, 7; love in 3:12; 4:9, 10; and suffering in 3:2-4).

Lenski: The Thessalonians came into contact with the model, Christ, through the model copies of Christ, Paul and his companions. If they had not been attracted by the latter they could not have known the former, the chief attraction. So it is the reflection of Christ in us that today induces others to become Christlike.

Zeisler: Example is really too soft a word. What they became was a pattern, a model church; they became descriptive of the way God ought to operate in a group of people in an urban setting. Secondly, Paul says, they became, as it were, a volcano that erupted God's Word across the whole map. They were a center for a ministry of the gospel that advanced everywhere, so that, apparently, Paul had the experience of going to a town, declaring God's Word, and having people say, "Yes, we've heard what happened in Thessalonica. We've heard what God has done in that place." So Paul says he had no need to say anything because the eruption of truth and its rippling effect across the map had taken place from this one city. They had a minimum amount of time they didn't have any chance to train the people before they were run out of town; the church was faced with tribulation and hassle and severe opposition. They had none of the kinds of advantages that ought to have made them grow and succeed, and yet they became a pattern church for those around them, and became a center of ministry that crossed the map and advanced everywhere. . .

We are given this great description of a missionary enterprise in a wicked city, and yet we are not told how it was accomplished. What we are told is that the people through whom God worked were people who believed him, who took his message seriously. Our tendency is to get caught up applying the gospel somewhere else, advancing it into the darkness for unbelievers, and short-circuiting the process by which we get changed. I think if 1 Thessalonians doesn't say anything else, it says that. These were remarkable people because of what God did in them by the way they embraced his truth. We need to be people who, as we consider the world around us, as we long to see wicked men put out of high places and the men of Christ revered, will take the first step and say, "Lord, what about me? Where may I believe this more? How may I give over the things I've held back? Where have I failed to have my faith work and my love labor and my hope remain steadfast?"

Keathley: The biblical plan and order of modeling and following is as follows:

- (1) With Christ and the Heavenly Father as their own personal model ([John 15:13](#); [1 Pet. 2:21](#); [Eph. 5:1](#)), mature Christian leaders need to recognize they have a vital responsibility to model the reality and character of Christ to those they teach and minister to ([1 Tim. 4:12](#); [Tit. 2:7](#); [1 Pet. 5:3](#)).
- (2) They may even encourage others to imitate or follow their example as long as they take heed to their own walk ([1 Tim. 4:12-16](#)) and are sure they are seeking to follow the example of the Savior themselves ([1 Cor. 4:16](#); [11:1](#); [Phil. 3:17](#); [2 Thess. 3:9](#)).
- (3) The ultimate goal of the leader must always be to help others to become imitators of Christ Himself. At first, disciples became imitators of their spiritual parents or teachers, the normal and natural pattern for spiritual growth, but teacher and student alike must recognize that the ultimate goal is to become like the Savior who is our perfect model and objective ([1 Pet. 2:21](#)). Since Paul's objective was to be like Christ, he could encourage his disciples to imitate his walk, but always with the goal in mind of imitating the character of Christ (cf. [1 Cor. 11:1](#)).
- (4) The basic order or process is: (a) Leaders are to imitate Christ ([1 Cor. 11:1](#)) that they might be models for others ([1 Pet. 5:3](#)); (b) new converts and the flock as a whole are to imitate their leaders, assuming of course their leaders are following Christ ([Heb. 13:7](#)); (c) other churches are to recognize their responsibility to be a model of godliness or Christ-likeness as the Thessalonians were to the believers in Macedonia and Achaia ([1 Thess. 1:7](#)); (d) all are to become imitators of God who is revealed to us in Christ ([Eph. 5:1](#)).

Following the example of others has nothing to do with imitating the style or charismatic personalities of certain Christian leaders. What we are to model for others and imitate in others is Christian character as illustrated in the fruit of the Spirit ([Gal. 5:22-23](#)) or in Paul's attitude and behavior as it pertained to some of the doubtful issues like eating meat offered to idols. Paul's pattern was that of love, putting the needs of others above himself as Christ did for us. It is really this Paul had in mind contextually in [1 Corinthians 11:1](#) when he said, "Be imitators of me as I am of Christ" (for the immediate context see [1 Cor. 10:31](#)). The same principle is seen in the context of [2 Thessalonians 3:9](#) as it pertained to working to support oneself and one's family (see 3:6-15).

MacArthur: So, true faith is evident not only in production, affection, continuation, presentation but in transformation. **Dr. Robert Thomas** who teaches in our seminary has written an outstanding commentary on 1 Thessalonians and in it he says this, "The notion of imitating God and Christ applies especially to three things...**holiness, love and suffering.**" Those are the three ways in which we are like Christ.

First Peter 1 makes it very, very clear, verse 15, "Like the holy One who called you, be holy yourself." So if we're like Christ, we're pursuing holiness instead of unholiness.

Secondly he says is love. Jesus said, "If you are characterized by love, all men will

know you are My disciples." Paul says, "He shed His love abroad in our hearts." John says, "If we're true Christians, we manifest the love of God."

The third thing Dr. Thomas said was that if you're to be a little copy of Jesus Christ, it involves holiness and love and suffering...suffering. He says in verse 14 of chapter 2, "You were imitators of the churches of God in Jesus Christ that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings." Same as who? The people in Judea and the same as the Lord Jesus, verse 15, who was killed by the Jews.

So, if I'm to be like Christ it means like Him I pursue holiness, like Him my life is dominated by love, like Him I'm willing to suffer for righteousness sake. That's what Christ's likeness is...holiness, love, suffering.

TEXT: 1 THESSALONIANS 2:1-6

TITLE: BOLDNESS IN CHURCH PLANTING

BIG IDEA:

SUPERNATURAL BOLDNESS IN CHURCH PLANTING VALIDATES AUTHENTIC MINISTRY WHEN BASED ON PURE MOTIVES AND PROPER CONDUCT (THE MARKS OF SPIRIT-FILLED CHURCH PLANTERS)

INTRODUCTION:

As we reach the end of our first month of attempting to plant a church and as we study the NT model for church planting from the Book of 1 Thessalonians, we need to ask ourselves if we are too tentative. What is impressive from studying Paul and Silas and Timothy is their confidence and boldness in going about their mission. They had a very clear sense of what needed to be accomplished. They were able to focus the majority of their efforts on the proclamation of the gospel and reaching out to witness to the unsaved. They were not overly consumed with organizational details or the conduct and structure of their meetings. They wanted to establish contact with people who needed to hear the truth of God's wonderful plan of salvation. They allowed the organizational details to develop as needed but they did not create an empty shell and then try to fill it.

They were especially characterized by a **Supernatural Boldness** – something that was not drummed up from their own inner courage or manufactured from some type of positive thinking mantra. But a boldness that the Holy Spirit produced within them that stood the test of whatever type of opposition and persecution came their way. Paul apparently faced attacks from false teachers who had crept into the church and were out for their own selfish gain rather than humbly serving for the glory of God. He describes here the character of his ministry and stresses his own integrity of **motives** (look at that this week) and **conduct** (look at 3 different role models of conduct next week from vv.6-10) to show that his ministry was commended by God and authentic. So this is a two week message.

SUPERNATURAL BOLDNESS IN CHURCH PLANTING VALIDATES AUTHENTIC MINISTRY WHEN BASED ON PURE MOTIVES AND PROPER CONDUCT (THE MARKS OF SPIRIT-FILLED CHURCH PLANTERS)

I. (:1-2) SUPERNATURAL BOLDNESS IN CHURCH PLANTING CAN BE IDENTIFIED

Illustration: Just as you use a highlighter pen to make something important stand out, God uses persecution to highlight the true character of a godly ministry. Persecution highlights supernatural boldness instead of hindering it.

Why is Boldness so essential?

Piper: It was Paul's boldness in evangelizing that kept his life from being in vain. And it will be our boldness that keeps our lives from being bland and tasteless and empty and weak and insignificant in the end . . .

So my answer to the first question (Why is boldness necessary?) is that it keeps our lives from being in vain. It makes our lives effective and fruitful and significant. It brings change into

people's lives and leads them on toward courage in Christ. And nothing is more significant than leading people toward Christ and his Kingdom.

A. Impressive Church Planting Ministry in Thessalonica --

Converts Can Recognize Supernatural Boldness in Proclaiming the Gospel (Paul appeals to the experiential knowledge of the Thess. converts)

3 Parts to Paul's Argument here:

1. Emphasizes their **first-hand knowledge of the facts**

("you yourselves know")

they do not need Paul or anyone else to point out the details of what had transpired; there should be no revisionist history; let the historical account speak for itself; can't be disputed; they should have been able to refute Paul's detractors without any help from Paul

2. Appeals to them as "*brethren*" -- equal family members – How did this come about? They need to remember who led them into this privileged family relationship; they needed to value the bonds of fellowship created by the Holy Spirit

3. Focuses attention on the **Power and Earnestness** of the Church Plant

("our coming to you was not in vain") not empty or hollow or ineffective

Context is looking at the character of their ministry efforts;

They were truly Channels Only – with the Holy Spirit working through them;

Look at who had taken the initiation to minister and had borne all of the hardship –

It would not be proper for them to now entertain the attacks of false teachers – unless something was wrong with Paul's motives or conduct

Look at how powerfully they ministered the gospel in trying circumstances

Look at the fruit of changed lives (earlier messages) that only God could have produced

Is God actively at work in our lives and in what we are trying to accomplish as a church?

B. Perseverance Despite Persecution is the Key

1. At Philippi

"but after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know"

We find it difficult if people are criticizing us or saying things that we feel are not justified; or attacking our motives or character ... Paul faced these attacks constantly ... and on top of that had all of the physical abuse and suffering and the constant threat of death; nothing distracted him from his mission as the Apostle to the Gentiles; nothing made him quit or think that it wasn't worth it

Don't be surprised by suffering and mistreatment ... don't seek to avoid it at all costs

2. At Thessalonica ("*amid much opposition*") – driven out of the city and pursued to Berea where the same troublemakers came after them

MacArthur: *Suffered* refers primarily to the physical abuse, whereas *mistreated* refers to public disgrace, or even legal abuse – they were unjustly judged and made prisoners when they had committed no crime. In the first century, *hubrizo* (*mistreated*) meant to treat shamefully, insultingly, or outrageously in public – all with intent to humiliate.

MacArthur: The Greek word translated *opposition* is *agon* (“struggle,” “conflict,” “fight”), from which the English word *agonize* derives. It referred to an agonizing life and death struggle. In the ministry, there is always pressure to mitigate the message, to be inoffensive to sinners, to make the gospel acceptable to them. But such a compromise had no place in Paul’s strategy. Instead, he had full confidence in God’s power to overcome all opposition and achieve His redemptive purpose. The servant of God preaches the true, unmitigated message God has laid out in His Word, not some other message. He does so for the sake of truth, not for personal popularity. And when opposition comes, he trusts in the power of God and stays obedient to his calling.

C. Aggressive Proclamation Despite Continued Opposition

Study Paul’s missionary activities throughout the Book of Acts – you see the consistent thread of one major activity dominating his time and energy – the proclamation of the gospel

Doesn’t mean that he was unconcerned with the social ills and injustices of his day . . .

Doesn’t mean that he didn’t have any family members or relatives that he loved . . .

But he remained focused on proclaiming the gospel message

1. Supernatural Boldness (not just natural courage)

"we had the boldness in our God..."

What does Supernatural Boldness look like? Naturally we might be cowards ...

We need to learn how to rely on the Lord; strengthen ourselves in the Lord

Consciousness of the presence and favor of God

Paul wanted others to pray for him in this area of boldness – **Eph 6:19-20**

2. Verbal Proclamation to the Unsaved (not just unspoken example)

"to speak to you"

3. Stewardship of the True Gospel (not adulterated)

"the gospel of God"

Maybe we need some training to improve our skill in this ...

But don’t wait until you know everything ... step out and testify to what you

know; God can use what you say ... we have been given a stewardship;

We will be held accountable

REVIEW: I. (:1-2) SUPERNATURAL BOLDNESS IN CHURCH PLANTING CAN BE IDENTIFIED

Transition: "For" (beginning of vs. 3) -- Used here to introduce explanatory confirmation. It is important to see how verses 3-12 relate to the main idea of supernatural boldness introduced in vs.1-2.

II. (:3-6) PURE MOTIVES IN CHURCH PLANTING SHOULD BE EVIDENT AS WELL

Someone might argue that we can never judge someone’s motives – that is true ... yet Paul constantly argues that from his speech and his conduct and his approach to ministry and how he treats people you should be able to make some level of determination that his motives are pure –

Good fruit cannot come from a rotten source – yet this must be balanced with the truth that still it is God that examines our hearts; we can even deceive ourselves

How about the opposite case: can someone do or say something that is bad and yet still have good motives? I think yes – they can have a blind-spot ... but then someone needs to come alongside and help the person see that blind-spot so they can change their conduct. They will have to examine their own motives on the issue; but the conduct still needs to be addressed. Just because someone says their motives are pure ... that does not mean that we cannot address wrong behavior.

In Paul's case, he has a good conscience that he has pursued the ministry from **pure motives**.

SUPERNATURAL BOLDNESS IN CHURCH PLANTING VALIDATES AUTHENTIC MINISTRY WHEN BASED ON PURE MOTIVES AND PROPER CONDUCT (THE MARKS OF SPIRIT-FILLED CHURCH PLANTERS)

CHECKLIST OF PURE MOTIVES – 4 PURE MOTIVES OF BOLD CHURCH PLANTERS

A. #1 – **Motivated by Ministry Integrity** – Transparency -- 3 Negatives -- Not:

1. "*from error*" – root = “wandering, roaming”

source of Paul's message was not the product of deception or illusion

Look at all of the cults that have sprung up with very sincerely motivated leaders.

The problem is that they have a zeal that is *not in accordance with knowledge*

(Rom. 10:2)

The first boundary for Ministry Integrity must be the Truth – the church is called to be the *pillar and foundation of the truth*; we must stand for truth

2. "*from impurity*" -- not associated with sexual impurity

(many of the religions of the day had sexual rituals);

Very easy for women to put emotional dependence upon a male leader in a way that leads to inappropriate conduct. Very easy for spiritual leaders to take advantage of the emotions of people who are in stressful situations.

possibly a reference to integrity of motivation as well

3. "*by way of deceit*" -- not using tricky or crafty methods – I hate this tactic –

Catching fish with bait; deliberate attempt to mislead; all types of schemes and rackets;

Call it playing politics or packaging things up to manipulate people and accomplish your agenda; not being honest and open to tell everyone the whole story; Satan is a master of using this tactic of deceit to his advantage; you find out that you have been tricked in one area – you should question whether you are being told the whole truth in other areas

B. #2 – **Motivated by Divine Commissioning** –

*“but just as we have been **approved** by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak”*

dedokimasmeqa

perf pass -- test, examine, interpret, discern, discover, approve, prove, demonstrate

genuine, pass the test

they realized God had taken the initiative to equip them and send them out to minister and proclaim the gospel

Certainly **all believers** have been entrusted with the gospel to some degree and have been authorized by Jesus Christ to give the highest priority to participation in the Great Commission;

But what **additional** type of approval should be involved in the recognition of spiritual leaders? Key: it is the Holy Spirit who makes someone a leader; church was only recognizing what the Holy Spirit had already done – Need to be approved by God – regardless of any human laying on of hands, etc.

2 Cor. 10:17-18 “*But he who boasts is to boast in the Lord. For it is not he who commends himself that is **approved**, but he whom the Lord commends.*”

2 Timothy 2:15 “*Be diligent to present yourself **approved** to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth.*”

I have spent all of my adult life in this pursuit – have the testimony of many

Paul’s case – commissioning prophesied at the time of his conversion! **Acts 9:15** Lord speaking to Ananias

“he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles ... for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake.”

Don’t know exactly how the Lord communicated this calling to Paul

Look at split with Barnabas – **Acts 15:39-40**

We do not have an ideal situation – not sent out by our former church --

How can we tell today that we have been “*approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel*”?

Best way is to be examined in light of the qualifications for elders – but who should conduct this examination? Examined in past circumstances ... what value does that still have?

Important to be serving in the area where God has sovereignly gifted you

Luke 10:2 – not a spirit of just volunteerism – but pray that the Lord of the Harvest would send out the laborers that He has approved into His harvest

Human ordination councils – cf. illustration of Episcopal Church –

If we were to leave we would come under the traditional authority of the Anglican Community; what about for independent, autonomous churches??

Difficulty if you are doing something of a reformation nature -- for example, a group of senior pastors are not likely to give their blessing to someone who wants to teach and model that the NT does not want us to make such a distinction among the elders

Ordination: gives you confidence and helps your perseverance

Key: we must have a good conscience about God wanting us to lead this ministry

But this commissioning is not just some one time event that you can point back to and say “Don’t question me or what I do ... I was ordained by God and called to this ministry” ...

No ... there is an ongoing process of accountability to God that is equally important

C. #3 – Motivated by Divine Accountability -- One Main Contrast -- Our Primary Orientation
“not as pleasing men but God, who examines our hearts”

Not just doing what is pleasing to God ... but doing it from a motivation that you want to please God

Problems with ministers who are “**man-pleasers**”:

- wrongly influenced by others
- show favoritism
- compromise in various areas – your message, your methods

Prov. 29:25 “*the fear of man brings a snare*”

Prov. 28:21 “*To show partiality is not good, because for a piece of bread a man will transgress.*”

James 2:1 “*My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism.*”

Matt. 10:28 “*And do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell*”

Are we allowing God to examine our hearts and our motives?

How does God do this? Accountability among the leadership team

D. #4 – **Motivated by Personal Unselfishness** – Three more Negatives:
Not all about ME

1. not with “*flattering speech*” -- manipulating people; telling them what they want to hear; making them feel good rather than providing the conviction of sin that will point them to the Savior for forgiveness and deliverance

You can use flattering speech **towards others** ... you can also use it **towards yourself** – not facing the harsh reality of who you really are

Proverbs warns against **Flattery**:

26:28 “*A lying tongue hates those it crushes, and a flattering mouth works ruin.*”
Equivalent to lying – not just some small offense

28:23 “*He who rebukes a man will afterward find more favor than he who flatters with the tongue.*”

Contrasted with giving rebuke where necessary – Who likes to deliver that message?

29:5 “*A man who flatters his neighbor is spreading a net for his steps.*”
You are not helping someone; you are setting them up for a harder fall

Flattery really is nothing more than a **bribe** to try to get someone on your side or try to get favorable treatment from them

The false promises of a politician to marshal support and votes

17:23 “A wicked man receives a bribe from the bosom to pervert the ways of justice.”

Jude 16 “These are grumblers, finding fault, following after their own lusts; they speak arrogantly, flattering people for the sake of gaining an advantage.”

2. not with a "pretext for greed"

giving a reason which is plausible in itself, but which is not the real reason in order to disguise your own covetousness

“Son of Man came not to be ministered unto but to minister and to give His life a ransom for many”

Not: What am I going to get out of this? How will I benefit?

Sometimes in ministry there can be a lot of money floating around; the potential for greed and covetousness. That is why financial accountability is so important for Christian organizations. Leaders can structure things to feather their own nests and pursue financial gain rather than sacrificially ministering to the flock. That is not to say that those who labor hard in preaching and teaching are not worthy of double honor ... they are. But the motive of those ministering must not be to accumulate wealth for themselves. That is why one of the requirements for elders is he must be “free from the love of money.” It should sicken us to see the extravagant lifestyle of some of the more famous TV personalities. If questioned, they have all sorts of excuses and rationalizations ... but their conduct is nothing more than “a pretext for greed.” When leaders make decisions they must be careful to examine their motives and make sure that they are not being influenced by greed. Certainly no one could charge Paul with being in the ministry for the money. That is why in some contexts – like when he was at Thessalonica – he thought it important to support himself and set a superior example for the believers ... even though he had the right to be paid full time in the gospel ministry.

[Illustration of J C]

"God is witness" -- where it is impossible for men to discern, Paul appeals to the judgment of God regarding our inner motives

3. not "seeking glory from men"

a) not from you Thessalonians

b) not from others elsewhere who would be observing me

This last warning is very broad and targets the pride of powerful leaders who have a strong desire to build up a loyal base of personal recognition and honor that will feed their egos and bolster their insecurities.

There are many ways in which this tendency can evidence itself:

- they are very concerned with receiving the recognition and honor they feel is due them
- we talked about money and greed just above – they want to make sure they are being adequately compensated for their ministry – it is not enough to rely on how the Lord will reward them in eternity
- they are concerned with titles that show proper respect

- they flaunt their academic credentials and want recognition on that basis
- they want the chief seats in the banquet hall and the preeminence on every occasion
- they want to make sure they get credit for all that they have accomplished

This selfish ambition is nothing more than *“the boastful pride of life”* that John condemns as worldliness in 1 John 2:16. This is the empire building that takes place all of the time in the Gentile world of leadership – whether in business or in politics. It is all about Status and Recognition.

CONCLUSION: Gentle, Nurturing Approach to Ministry – Not Overly Authoritative

“even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority”

Paul had unique apostolic authority – but did not overuse it – constantly took the tone of appeal and encouragement; not afraid to use his authority when necessary; cf. church discipline against stubborn rebellion

Were Silas and Timothy viewed as apostles of the church at Antioch??

Cannot function as a Diotrefes – 3 John 9

Cannot lord it over the flock – as the form of Gentile leadership in business or politics

Insecurity -- makes you unapproachable, defensive, unable to take constructive criticism

Model for plurality of elder leadership ... the authority resides in the corporate exercise of the elders; not one elder exercising authority over other elders

SUPERNATURAL BOLDNESS IN CHURCH PLANTING VALIDATES AUTHENTIC MINISTRY WHEN BASED ON PURE MOTIVES AND PROPER CONDUCT (THE MARKS OF SPIRIT-FILLED CHURCH PLANTERS)

Next Week: Proper Conduct

III. (:7-12) PAUL’S PICTURE OF THREE ROLE MODELS THAT ILLUSTRATE PROPER CONDUCT IN THE MINISTRY

- A. (:7-8) Gentleness and Tender Care of a **Loving Mother**
- B. (:9) Hard Work and Self-Sufficiency of an **Unselfish Sacrificial Laborer**
- C. (:10-12) Godliness and Positive Training of a **Father with Vision**

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What type of personal charges must Paul have been facing to respond in this manner? Which hurt him more, the physical persecution he experienced in Philippi or the attacks on his character and motives?
- 2) How do I rate in this area of boldness in proclaiming the gospel? What do I find to be the biggest impediments to boldness?
- 3) What types of rights did Paul and his missionary team set aside in order to sacrificially minister to these believers? What types of rights have I been willing to set aside?

4) What aspects of ministry integrity are reflected in this passage?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Piper: So at least these two things have to happen inside if we are to be bold: we have to get free from the need of human acceptance and praise, and we have to get free from the need for the comforts and securities that money can buy. If we are free, we will be bold.

And the way to freedom is get your acceptance from God and get your praise from God, and to get your comforts and security from God. Verse 4 points to the key: *"Just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men but God."*

Paul had his approval from God. He did not need human approval. He had his future in God. So no human threats could stop his courage.

We need boldness because without it our lives will be lived in vain. And our boldness comes from God because only his approval can break the power of craving for human approval, and only his security and comfort can break the fear of losing human security and comfort.

Stedman: Whatever Became of Integrity?

First, he says, he did not preach out of "error or uncleanness." In other words, he did not come peddling some particular private revelation. Today, we are confronted with a parade of gurus, prophets, seers, avatars and others, peddling their peculiar forms of doctrine. The Hare Krishnas confront you in airports; the Moonies, under the leadership of Sun Myung Moon, who claims to be the Messiah, boldly peddle their doctrine across the country and around the world. On the surface they appear to be bold and courageous. They seem to be driven by conviction -- and perhaps they are in some degree -- but it is wrong conviction. But Paul did not come to Thessalonica peddling any private doctrine. It was the truth of God, confirmed by the prophets and by Jesus Christ himself.

Nor did he come inviting people to sexual license, encouraging them to indulge themselves, to throw over all moral bonds and do whatever they liked. That is how some attract a big following today. Think of Jim Jones and what he did in San Francisco. The Bhagwan commune in Oregon indulged in sexual orgies and people flocked there, attracted by that kind of degenerate teaching. But this was never part of the apostle's doctrine.

Also guile, flattery, and greed played no part in his preaching. I appreciate his words along that line, when so many teachers on television today are appealing to our ego, to the macho instinct in us. Many of you have seen a certain fellow on television who wears a crazy hat, smokes a cigar, orders people around and demands that they send him money. He appears to be bold and uncompromising, but he manifests every indication of sheer ego and disguises it by an attempt to be a teacher of the Word. What he is teaching has a degree of truth to it, but it is mixed with a great deal of error. I can name people right around here who have succumbed to that kind of an appeal.

Others offer a promise of prosperity. If you follow them, they say, you will become rich. This

was not Paul's doctrine, either. "We did not come with a cloak for greed," he says. What a true description that is of much that we hear on television today!

. . . three marks of a faithful shepherd, courage, a loving, gentle heart, and a faithful spirit . . .

Zeisler: There is a formula that is repeated twice in the following verses. Two things stand out that made Paul and his friends bold in opposition. First, we are told that they were clear and unshakable in their confidence in the message they had. Second, the thing that motivated them to go out into the world on a mission was the desire to give rather than to receive. I think Paul is suggesting here that if these two things are true of us-- if we are certain of our message, and are motivated to give—then we will be the kind of people who can bear up under opposition.

MacArthur: In spite of the purity of Paul's life and the transforming power of his message (sufficient and convincing proof of his legitimacy as an apostle of Jesus Christ), the enemies of the gospel were having some success in convincing the Thessalonians that Paul and his companions were men of wicked intentions, nothing more than self-seeking frauds like so many other "spiritual teachers" of that time. Therefore, as distasteful as it was for Paul to have to defend himself, he answered his detractors directly and concisely for the sake of the truth. . .

This passage sets forth five key qualities of fail-proof spiritual leadership: **tenacity**, because the leader trusts totally in the power of God; **integrity**, because the leader is fully committed to the truth of God; **authority**, because the leader is commissioned by the will of God; **accountability**, because the leader knows the omniscient God examines his heart; and **humility**, because the leader is consumed with the glory of God. If he has these qualities, he will be well on his way to exercising fail proof spiritual leadership.

Hiebert: In refuting these enemy accusations Paul uses the method of simply letting the record speak for itself. The facts were still fresh in the memory of the readers. In thus repeatedly asking them to recall what they witnessed he is letting them judge if the evidence fits in with the charges being made against them. It was a masterly defense. It proved that the facts needed for their vindication were a matter of common knowledge. Nothing had been concealed from them. The readers needed no new and hitherto unknown information to bolster their new faith. When evaluated in the light of the known truth the malicious charges being made against them could not survive.

Such a defense is the best proof of the purity of a preacher's life. That Paul himself advocates this test is a strong witness to the integrity of his character and work. The missionaries had left their converts the memory of true Christian character and unselfish Christian service. To the consciousness of that fact they appealed as a safeguard to the readers.

TEXT: 1 THESSALONIANS 2:7-8

TITLE: INTEGRITY OF SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP –
LEADERSHIP PROFILE – THE UNSELFISH SERVANT LOVE OF A MOM

(2:1-12) BIG IDEA:

SUPERNATURAL BOLDNESS IN CHURCH PLANTING VALIDATES AUTHENTIC MINISTRY WHEN BASED ON PURE MOTIVES AND PROPER CONDUCT (THE MARKS OF SPIRIT-FILLED CHURCH PLANTERS)

INTRODUCTION:

Ideally, our spiritual leaders should be the **best role models** in our life. It makes sense. They are supposedly chosen on the basis of **character traits** that exhibit **Christ-like behavior**. The qualifications listed for elders (passages like **1 Tim. 3**) are just a more specific refinement of the overall **fruit of the Holy Spirit** listed in **Galatians 5**. What should “*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control*” look like in the life of a pastor?

Certainly all of us would love to be personally discipled by Jesus Christ Himself. We would then have the perfect role model with proper balance – the Incarnate God – full of “*grace and truth*.” Undershepherds should be the visible extension of the heart and discipling methodology of the Great Shepherd Himself. The missionary team that had come into Thessalonica to plant a church made it their ambition to be just such excellent role models for the young believers. Yet as Paul sends this letter back to the church, charlatans – imposters have already infiltrated the assembly to disparage his ministry. Paul needs to make a defense of the character of his ministry.

By way of commendation, Paul pointed them to their own **changed lives** – evidence of the power of the gospel at work and mirroring the changed lives of the missionaries:

1:5 Paul reminds them “*just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake*” -- totally transparent; totally unselfish

The missionary team provided an **example** worth following ... and now the new believers at Thessalonica had turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God in such a way that they had become **model** Christians themselves.

Last week we saw the Apostle Paul defend his **pure motives** and contrast those motives with those of the opposition.

2:1 our coming to you was not empty of the Holy Spirit and of power and passion but rather we had supernatural boldness that enabled us to carry out the Great Commission – we faithfully proclaimed the genuine gospel of God in spite of great opposition

He pointed out **4 pure motives** of bold church planters in particular:

- ministry integrity
- divine commissioning
- divine accountability
- **personal unselfishness** –

this is the key point that he wants to expand upon as he moves from a consideration of a pastor’s motives (which might be somewhat hidden and uncertain) to the trump card of his defense – the very transparent look at his conduct. The way in which he had conducted himself is a matter of

historical record. The fact that his approach to ministry was *gentle and nurturing* rather than **authoritative and domineering**; the fact that his approach to ministry was completely unselfish rather than all about promoting himself – these things could not be disputed. And these things set him apart from his detractors who obviously did not have the same track record of blameless ministry conduct.

Transition statement (v.6): “*even though as apostles we might have asserted our authority*” – touched on that only briefly last week

Not characterized by domineering insensitivity; did not continually lobby for the privileges due to them; not trying to force things; not a demanding person with all types of burdensome requirements

We have all seen examples of people abusing power in different realms – in the business world, in politics, as an athletic coach – but it is especially blameworthy as a spiritual leader; Not saying that there is not a need for firmness and toughness on the part of leaders ... It is a matter of context and balance; when it comes to nurturing immature believers and guiding them to grow up into Christ, **Gentleness** and **Tenderness** must be liberally applied.

Some pastors miss this point. They are so busy asserting their authority and making sure everyone follows their program that they are blind to the fact that the over-emphasis on their personal giftedness has actually stunted the growth of their vulnerable flock. The sheep end up traumatized and dependent on them instead of trained for ministry and dependent on the Chief Shepherd.

Paul understood the type of leadership that Christ wants to see exercised – and it is exactly opposite what the unsaved world exhibits

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ASIDE: JUDGES 8:22-23; 9:7-15 -- THE PETER PRINCIPLE

Elevating leaders from a productive position of fruitfulness using their God-appointed gifts to an unproductive, domineering higher level that opens the door to abuse of power

Illustrated from the OT theocracy in the time of the Judges; applied to NT church leadership

OT Principle: The Invisible God wants to rule over His chosen people as a theocracy rather than appointing a visible king who will end up lording it over the people

NT Application: The Invisible Christ wants His chosen church to submit to His Headship as the Chief Shepherd with authority at the local level delegated to a plural group of godly undershepherds rather than elevating someone to the unbiblical position of senior pastor who might lord it over the flock or deflect the dependence and preeminence away from Christ

A. Godly example of **Gideon** – “*I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the Lord shall rule over you.*”

B. Ungodly example of **Abimelech** exposed by **Jotham** – Seeking the Preeminence like Diotrephes

- the olive tree -- “*fatness*”
- the fig tree – “*sweetness and good fruit*”
- the fruitful vine – “*new wine which cheers God and men*”

- the worthless bramble -- “*come and take refuge in my shade*”
Unproductive mission = “*to wave over the other trees*”

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Luke 22:24-27 – Humble, Servant leadership – talking about political leadership here – how does it work at 1600 Pennsylvania Ave? or for other nations?? Even the best of Gentile leaders have that tendency to lord it over and be domineering and over-authoritative as the club to push their agenda

In the church that type of leadership should be *anathema*: **3 John 9** – look at Diotrephes – he created divisions in the church by pushing people out and not welcoming their legitimate ministry

Leadership will function somewhere along this spectrum ... from **Servanthood** to **Domineering**

Paul points to his model as being the one to follow and the one that validates his ministry
(2:7-12) 3 ROLE MODELS OF UNSELFISH SERVANT LOVE THAT PICTURE PROPER CONDUCT IN THE MINISTRY

A. (:7-8) **Mother** – only have time for this one today – we have some great role models in our midst – we need to study their behavior and learn lessons from them; you children need to appreciate the unselfish love of your Mom – you can never show her enough appreciation for all that she has done and continues to do for you

B. (:9) **Worker**

C. (:10-12) **Father**

I. (:7-8) MOTHER -- GENTLENESS AND TENDER CARE OF A LOVING MOTHER – FOUR LEADERSHIP TRAITS -- INSIGHTS FROM MOM:

A. Gentle Demeanor (outward behavior, conduct) vs. **Harsh Treatment**

“*But we proved to be gentle among you*”

Look at the **contrast** to coming in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full confidence (1:5) Apparently you can do all of that and still be gentle in tone and demeanor rather than overbearing

Surprising to start off with something that just does not sound like strong leadership –

Remember **the Goal** = to raise spiritual infants to maturity – this is not a cattle drive where you are cracking the whip and herding some dumb animals

Textual problem -- **nhpioi** – “baby, infant” (Gal. 4:3; Eph. 4:14) – many excellent manuscripts

Humility would be emphasis or childish simplicity

But would be a mixed metaphor with the next phrase

hpion – “gentle, kind” (NASV) -- fits the context better

only NT usage -- **2 Timothy 2:24** And the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be **kind** to all, able to teach, patient when wronged,

Without going into a lengthy explanation, it should be noted that this text is what is referred to as a "first class textual problem". The Nestle-Aland is normally favored for accuracy but in this case it has the word nepios which means babe while the **Textus Receptus** has epios meaning gentle. Most authorities favor the most accurate interpretation as gentle and even the NAS translates it "gentle" even though the corresponding Nestle-Aland text (which is the source of the NAS translation) has the word for babe! If you would like a more technical explanation see (Hiebert, D. Edmond: 1 & 2 Thessalonians: BMH Book. 1996)

Vines: frequently used by Greek writers as characterizing a nurse with trying children or a teacher with refractory scholars, or of parents towards their children

[Different Greek words – concept of gentleness]

"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am **gentle and humble** in heart."

Matthew 11:29

Proverbs 15:1 A **gentle** answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger.

Matthew 5:5 "Blessed are the **gentle**, for they shall inherit the earth.

Matthew 11:29 "Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am **gentle** and humble in heart; and YOU SHALL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS.

1 Timothy 3:3 not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but **gentle**, uncontentious, free from the love of money. (Titus 3:2)

James 3:17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, **gentle**, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.

1 Peter 2:18 Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and **gentle**, but also to those who are unreasonable.

How approachable is a Mother? Children are not intimidated by their mother; they don't fear harshness or coldness or aloofness; they expect to be treated with gentleness and compassion and tenderness; they are not afraid of asking questions or seeking clarification – Mom is not going to bite their head off

"among you" = "in the midst of you" -- note how the shepherds are found among the flock where their lives can be observed; not just some unknown lecturer or professor whom you never get to know personally;

Gentleness requires intimacy – close personal communion

Cf. the Lord – **Luke 22:24-27** "I am among you as the one who serves"

This is a good barometer of Christian leadership – do any of the elders build up barriers of professional distance?

I learned a lot of valuable lessons at Grace Theological Seminary .. but I remember one lecture that didn't sit well with me. We were studying the practical aspects of pastoring a flock – and the Senior Pastor who taught it explained that a pastor should never make close friends with members of the congregation – based on his model of senior pastors being in a special class – try to find that shepherding principle in the Scriptures – **Professional Distance** – like a counselor would have with a patient

Church designed to look like a family – roles of leadership described here in terms of mothering and fathering – not shipping the children off to storage in some daycare center

It would have been easy for Paul not to have been gentle; Do you know who I am? How can you question my authority or my interpretation? I do not owe you any explanation; I am the great Apostle Paul; personally commissioned by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself; invested with all authority; your response should be “How high do you want me to jump”

Paul didn't steamroll over anyone; he didn't use his intellect or training or background to blow people away and make them feel inferior; he was supremely approachable
He didn't try to lay unrealistic expectations on people; he was sensitive to their level of maturity and their needs; he was never pushy and overbearing

B. Godly Nurturing -- Tender Care vs. Aloof Indifference

“as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children”

[would make a great **Mother's Day** lesson]

Amazing emphasis that Paul chooses here – talking about what type of leadership we should see in the church and points first of all to a Nursing Mother – not what would have been expected in Jewish or Greek culture at the time; look at how Paul exalts the role of women; how can people say he is chauvinistic or that he puts down women??

7 Lessons we can learn from Paul's Godly Nurturing of these converts as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children:

1. This analogy of Motherhood is a **Perfect Model** because it is a Universal Model – everybody has equal access to this model; we all have a Mother; we all can see the role of a Mom played out every day; nothing too complicated or abstract about this example – some mothers are better examples than others ... but we all can agree on the type of behavior that is appropriate for a mother

What type of tender care does a nursing mother provide for her infants?

2. **Privilege** of having **your own children** to care for (“*Her*” is emphatic here) – you especially know this if you had difficulty having children or had to wait a long time; not a burden to care for them; something you are excited about doing; God gives us 9 months to prepare ourselves and get ready for the responsibility of beginning to raise each child

3. Providing Proper Nourishment is Essential

Trophos means a nurse, but here refers to the nursing mother herself

The diet of the Mom will become the diet of the nursing baby (in a little more palatable form); how tragic when we see disease and drugs and alcohol passed on to innocent children who are dependent on Mom for their nourishment; the mother has to be very careful regarding what she eats and drinks;

the pure milk of the Word is what is needed

Ephes 5:29 *“for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church”*

4. Prepared to Respond 24/7 – on call all of the time

Model of leadership for some is more like a business executive; very schedule driven; using the best time management principles; every 15 minute segment of time accounted for; no room for interruptions in the schedule; mother's mindset must be very flexible; she is always available when needed; very much interruption driven; not that she cannot plan out her day – but things

don't always go as planned; Effective mothering is very inconvenient – that is part of the sacrifice

5. **Protecting the Helpless is key** – *cherish, comfort* – 1 word in the Greek “*tenderly cares for*”

Literally: “*to warm with body heat*” – used of birds covering their young with their feathers to warm and protect them; you don't expose babies to things they can't handle

Matthew 23:37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks **under her wings**, and you were unwilling.

Ruth 2:12 Boaz to Ruth: “*May the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge, bless you for it.*”

Paul was always careful to protect the flock – Remember his final charge to the elders at Ephesus – **Acts 20:28** “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” – he left the city under great pressure – not because he was a coward, but to protect them

6. The Mother is **Perceptive regarding the needs** of the little ones – Sensitive to how they are feeling and what needs to be done to help them

The Mom knows when something is bothering the baby; wants the baby to be comfortable and cared for; wakes up when the baby cries out during the night

7. **Preciousness of Each One** -- Treats each one as unique and special – my song I would sing to Julie each night when I tucked her in – “*Precious, that's what you are to me ...*” If pastors would treat each church member as precious – they would drop everything to pursue the one that is in danger or is lost or wandering; they certainly would never write one off and be dismissive – “He was a bad egg anyway ... we didn't need him here” – is that how a mother treats a wayward child?

C. Genuine Affection vs. Hypocritical Flattery

“*Having thus a fond affection for you*” Pres. Middle Participle

Yearn for, long for; only NT usage; rare word of uncertain derivation; a constant yearning for

Stedman: Literally, it means “*a yearning, a longing for you.*” I sometimes feel this myself especially when I am talking to a young person. I feel my heart longing to help them, to bless them, to teach them, to lead them, to fulfill them. That is how parents feel about their children. There is a yearning after them, an affectionate desire to see them blossom and go in the right direction. That is characteristic of those who seek to minister to others.

Love for people is key; you want to see them succeed; parents invest everything in trying to guide their children along the path of success

You want to be with them; to spend time with them; it hurts when you are apart; mothers hate to see their children locate in distant places; Apostle Paul was always making plans to go back and revisit these dear believers

Transition: “*because you had become very dear to us*”

agaphtoi.

30 NT references – beloved brethren (common combination of words)

Term of address and endearment

D. Giving Mentality – Sacrificial Love vs. Selfish Exploitation

“we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives”

1. Cheerful, willing service – not grudgingly or of necessity – *well-pleased*
Nobody twisted Paul’s arm to be passionate and zealous to serve Christ
21 NT usages; 13 refer to God’s good pleasure and free choice –
“This is my beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased”
What was the motivation of the imposters?? Trying to gain some advantage for themselves; because they were full of themselves rather than full of a genuine affection for others
2. It is all about Giving – *to impart to you*
“Share” is metadidomi, and expresses “the giving of something by which the giver retains a part and the receiver has a part so that they both share in the matter.”
Expecting nothing in return; and for quite awhile, receiving nothing in return;
Interesting to see how gifts from your children progress over the years ... that very Special unrecognizable finger painting ... Jenny just took me out to the Brazilian steak house
Exhausting ... especially when you get so little positive reinforcement
2 Cor 12:14,15 – similar imagery
3. Offering the Gospel without charge or without strings attached -- *the gospel of God*
 - the genuine gospel – no adulteration or compromise
 - the powerful gospel – not watered down
 - had been entrusted with it as a stewardship from God
 - watch out for just the “Hired Gun” – like in the Old West – a mercenary

John 10:11-18 *“I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep.”*

4. Successful ministry starts with giving up *our lives* for others – everything else follows from that
word = psyches = souls– conveys more than just their physical lives; in the depths of their being they cared (**Thomas**)
 - this is what taking up the cross daily is all about
 - this looks back at the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross for us
 - our lives our not our own – we were bought with a price
 - No sacrifice too great for our children

Piper: When you share your soul you let a person in to see what is really there. You do not conceal your true feelings about things. A shared soul is a shared passion or a shared fear or a

shared guilt or a shared longing or a shared joy. Where the gospel flourishes people share their own souls -- their joy and guilt and fear and longing and passion.

CONCLUSION:

What should mothers expect from their children as they mature?

What should the missionary team expect from their converts as they grow up in the Lord?

- Love and Affection in return
- Loyalty and Respect – but not blind loyalty – Paul always put boundaries on the way in which they were to imitate him – only as I imitate the Lord
- Support when needed – old age – who is responsible to care for Mom and Dad?
- Sharing one’s heart – that intimacy of communication – Moms are great for being able to draw out what the child is thinking; best times are those debriefing times when the child has a lot to report

If you want to follow a spiritual leader who imitates Paul as he imitated Christ ... then follow someone who is gentle and tender and nurturing and unselfish; who genuinely loves you and sacrificially imparts to you both the truth of God’s Word and his own life as well

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After Easter we will pick up with the other 2 Role Models – each is packed with leadership lessons – more of the manly emphasis

II. (:9) WORKER -- HARD WORK AND SELF-SUFFICIENCY OF AN UNSELFISH SACRIFICIAL LABORER

III. (:10-12) FATHER – GODLY EXAMPLE AND NURTURING DISCIPLESHIP OF A FATHER WITH VISION

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) When you look at the tender care your Mother provided for you, what lessons can you draw about spiritual leadership?
- 2) What are some wrong ways that a leader can assert his authority and be harmful instead of helpful?
- 3) Why do some women not want to have children? How would you evaluate those reasons?
- 4) How would you characterize the type of fond affection a mother has for each of her children?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Stott: It is a lovely thing that a man as tough and masculine as the apostle Paul should have used this feminine metaphor. Some Christian leaders become both self-centered and autocratic. The more their authority is challenged, the more they assert it. We all need to cultivate more, in our

pastoral ministry, of the gentleness, love and self-sacrifice of a mother.

Piper:

WHERE THE GOSPEL FLOURISHES PEOPLE SHARE THEIR OWN SOULS.

Let's ask three brief questions:

1. What is it to share your own soul?
2. How does the gospel cause this to happen?
3. Why is it important for us to do this?

MacArthur: Paul may have had in mind Moses' portrayal of himself as a nursing mother to Israel (cf. Nu 11:12). He used the same tender picture with the Corinthians (cf. 2Co 12:14,15) and the Galatians (cf. Gal 4:19). Paul's affection for the Thessalonians was like that felt by a mother willing to sacrifice her life for her child as was Christ who was willing to give up His own life for those who would be born again into the family of God (cf. Mt 20:28).

Zeisler: Tenderness, gentleness, support, love- babies need this beyond question. But so do those who are young in Christ. If we are serving as a model in this respect, we need to be people who are there to bind up hurts, to calm fears, and to put our arms around people; not to reject and be cold and harsh and hateful when someone stumbles, but to be there to hold them close and communicate to them the tender, gentle love of the Lord.

Guzik: Paul didn't seek glory from men because his needs for security and acceptance were met primarily in Jesus. This meant that he didn't spend his life trying to seek and earn the acceptance of man. He ministered from an understanding of his identity in Jesus.

MacArthur: And when you think about the fact that a tiny baby is a helpless, lonely, confused, vulnerable life exposed potentially to hunger, thirst, fear, needing constant love and care, direction, instruction for survival and growth, the potential for a debilitating kind of experience is very high. That is simply why God created a family and that's why God designed a mother. And there is no substitute for that. It is essential to the well-being of children that there be a mother. It is also God's perfect plan and design that there be a father. And there is in that the perfect balance of gentle nurturing care and loving example and authority. Mothering and fathering is God's design for the raising of children. And I believe when God created the church He created the church very much like a family. And the church is not to be taken care of by surrogate mothers and fathers. Those in spiritual leadership are not to view the church with the indifference and with the independence that surrogate caretakers view little children in a day care center. They are not to deal with those in the church as if they were groups but they are to love them as individuals. They are not only to herd them around but they are to love them and nurture them personally. They are not just to command them but also to disciple them. The church is to be a family. And just like a family has to have a mother and a father to have the perfect balance of leadership, so spiritual leaders in the church must mother and father the church. That is precisely what is on the heart of the Apostle Paul in our passage. . .

And Paul says as we moved among you we were kind to you. We didn't come to abuse you. We didn't come to take from you. We didn't come to exploit you. We didn't come to manipulate you. We moved among you with kindness. This is the spiritual leader caring for his people, being concerned about their well being, sensitive to their personal needs. It implies acceptance of all of them. It implies respect. It implies compassion. It implies tolerance of imperfections. It implies patience. It implies tender heartedness. It implies loyalty. We weren't abusive to you.

We weren't domineering over you. We were gentle. We were kind to you. . .

And Paul is saying that's a picture of a spiritual leader's responsibility to have a longing for a tender relationship with his people, a yearning, a motherly compulsion. That should be in the heart of the spiritual leader. And Paul says it was, verse 8, so we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our lives. When we came to you it wasn't just duty, it wasn't just delegated authority, it wasn't just responsibility, it was passion. We had a fond affection for you so we were well pleased. That term "well pleased" means we were eager, we were zealous. And it was generated by our affection. You're not a burden, you're a joy. In fact, in verse 20 of this chapter he says you are our glory and joy. . .

There are many women, they don't want to have a baby because they're afraid it might affect their figure, they're afraid it might affect their life style, they're afraid it might affect their career. You want to know something? It will affect all of that. You'll give away your life for that little life. But God said a woman finds her place in this world, if God is so gracious to grant her that privilege, in bearing children and raising them to love to love the Lord. Gladly then does a woman give her life for her child. And so Paul says like a mother we were so well pleased to give you not only the truth we gave you but to give you our lives...our lives. Not only were we like a nursing mother pulling you to our breast and dispensing you the life- saving milk of the Word, but we also would give you our lives, time, energy, everything.

<http://www.biblebb.com/files/MAC/52-5.HTM>

Wiersbe: As an apostle, Paul was a man of authority; but he always used his authority in love. The babes in Christ sensed his tender loving care as he nurtured them. He was indeed like a loving mother who cared for her children. It takes time and energy to care for children. Paul did not turn his converts over to baby-sitters; he made sacrifices and cared for them himself. He did not tell them to "read a book" as a substitute for his own personal ministry ...A nursing mother imparts her own life to the child. This is exactly what Paul wrote in 1Thessalonians 2:8. You cannot be a nursing mother and turn your baby over to someone else. That baby must be in your arms, next to your heart. The nursing mother eats the food and transforms it into milk for the baby. The mature Christian feeds on the Word of God and then shares its nourishment with the younger believers so they can grow (see notes 1 Peter 2:1 ; 2:2; 2:3). A nursing child can become ill through reaction to something the mother has eaten. The Christian who is feeding others must be careful not to feed on the wrong things himself... if we do not nurse the new Christians on the milk of the Word, they can never mature to appreciate the meat of the Word.

TEXT: 1 THESSALONIANS 2:9

TITLE: INTEGRITY OF SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP –
LEADERSHIP PROFILE – THE UNSELFISH SERVANT LOVE OF A WORKER

BIG IDEA:

**(2:7-12) 3 ROLE MODELS OF UNSELFISH SERVANT LOVE THAT PICTURE
PROPER CONDUCT IN THE MINISTRY**

INTRODUCTION:

Importance of spiritual leaders providing the **proper role model** so that we can say as the Apostle Paul did: Imitate me as I imitate Jesus Christ.

LAST WEEK:

**I. (:7-8) MOTHER -- GENTLENESS AND TENDER CARE OF A LOVING MOTHER –
FOUR LEADERSHIP TRAITS -- INSIGHTS FROM MOM:**

- A. Gentle Demeanor**
- B. Godly Nurturing**
- C. Genuine Affection**
- D. Giving Mentality**

TODAY: Looking verse 9; could be taken with the portrait of a Mother; certainly she works hard from sun up to sun down; but I think it speaks more to the physical labor of the job context so I have separated this out as a third leadership profile . . . with the picture of a Father reserved for next week

I always find it interesting **how TV portrays a pastor** – not exactly as a strong man or a hard worker.

**II. (:9) WORKER – CHURCH PLANTERS LABOR LONG AND HARD TO BOTH
PROVIDE FOR PHYSICAL NEEDS (WHEN NECESSARY) AND PROCLAIM THE
GOSPEL OF GOD**

A. Model: Laboring Long and Hard – Difficult and Exhausting

1. Transparent Testimony – the Accountability and Integrity of the Model

“For you recall, brethren,”

Paul is not involved in **revisionist history** – don’t you hate it when people look back on the past and repackage things to try to paint themselves in a good light – rather than being honest and straightforward with the facts...

Paul doesn’t have to resort to any imaginative gymnastics ... he has the facts of history on his side as he defends the integrity of his ministry

So important that we act with integrity so that we have this type of transparent testimony – are there some things that we would rather have swept under the rug or not remembered by those to whom we have ministered? God’s recall is perfect and always in accordance with the facts – no sense trying to fool God

2. Hard Work – Difficult and Exhausting

“*our labor and hardship*” – both in their job situation and in their ministry -- it is all wrapped up here in a total life package; not compartmentalized as if one is just secular and the other is super spiritual ... trying to please God in everything and be productive for his glory

“*Our*” – everything that Paul is testifying here is true of the entire missionary team of Paul, Timothy and Silas – It wasn’t that Paul acted a certain way as the head honcho and the others were just insignificant helpers; they worked together as a team

Robert Thomas: *Toil* translated *labor* in 1:3 emphasizes the fatigue they incurred in expending themselves, while “*hardship*” (*mochthon*) highlights external difficulties encountered in the process.

Opposite of a life of comfort; a life of entertainment; a life of pleasing self

What should characterize a servant? **Hard work** – doing those difficult things that he is required to do – working with his whole heart to please his master – not just putting on a show some of the time

What did the Israelites complain about during their period of servitude under the Egyptians? The work was too hard and exhausting

Understand that not all hard work must be manual labor

- Certainly advantages to some of the trades – easier to slip into and out of time commitments and adjust your schedule to mesh with your ministry objectives

- But most jobs in today’s world do not fit that category and may involve more mental work than physical work – still the same principle applies of working hard

Two main supporting passages:

2 Cor. 11:23-29

2 Thess. 3:6-10

They had such a conviction regarding the soon return of Christ that many of them had quit their jobs – they figured that they should just be involved in spiritual pursuits ... Paul teaching them that they were living irresponsibly; Our problem today is just the opposite: we live like we don’t even believe that Christ is coming back and we allow our jobs to consume us

3. Long Hours – Difficult and Exhausting

“*how working night and day*” **Acts 20:31**

Look at how we are influenced by the perspective of work of our entertainment-oriented culture

- work is a bad word – something to be avoided at all costs

- or work is an idol that we bow down to and serve as the highest priority in our life

- the goal is to get by doing as little as possible so that we can have the most time available to feed our appetites and pursue our special pleasures

- we know nothing of working six days and resting on the seventh Let’s maximize our vacation days and our personal days and our sick days and our holidays ... let’s plan now for a comfortable and relaxing retirement ...

Children – now is the time in your life when you are developing your own **work ethic** – how are you going to approach work?

Theology of Work: need to understand some basic principles:

- Part of man being made in the image of God
 - Look at the work of God in Creation – worked six days; rested on seventh
 - Look at the work of Adam and Eve in the Garden before the Fall
 - Not all designed to accomplish the same type of work
- The Fall brought a curse: Burdensome level of difficulty and frustration
 - Now the environment no longer cooperates with our objectives but makes it tough for us
 - Now the worker must endure toil, sweat, pain, hardship, difficulty, frustration
 - Our needs are no longer met by just plucking the fruit growing in the Garden of Eden
- Purposes of Work
 - Negatively:
 - Not an end in itself – look at what we learn in Ecclesiastes about work
 - Not what ultimately defines us
 - Not unimportant – cf. charge to the irresponsible Thessalonian believers
 - Positively:
 - Provide Responsibly for physical needs of our family and dependents
 - widows, relatives 1 Thess 4:11-12
 - Be a good testimony to a watching world; opportunities to impact others for Christ
 - Be productive as a good steward in using all of the creativity and talents that God has entrusted to us
 - Principle: if a man won't work, neither let him eat
 - Provide Generously for the physical needs of others
 - Contribute to the work of the Lord and the mission of the Church
 - local church support
 - missionary outreach
 - parachurch groups
 - Pay taxes as a responsible citizen to support the government

Thomas Jefferson was upset when our country went from a 12-hour to a 10-hour working day. He said they would have too much idle time. But in Paul's day, it was working 12-14 hours a day; plus he also taught both publicly and privately for long hours

Concept of a **Calling** to a particular Career:

Do we see the Apostle Paul arguing for some type of **calling to full-time Christian ministry** Where he would consider himself a failure if he went back to making tents for a certain period of time? Certainly he could make a strong argument for being paid full-time:

- the Christian church is just starting up – imperative that the leadership be trained, etc.
- who is better gifted and equipped than Paul to spend his time in the ministry
- how can he justify wasting time in secular pursuits?
- do you find it strange that Christ worked full-time as a carpenter until about the age of 30??? Did he feel that He was above manual labor or working at a trade?

Acts 18:3 – tentmaking trade of Apostle Paul

We need to **investigate more carefully** that Puritan belief that one's profession = a divine calling = where you get the word *vocation* – a calling; One person has been called to be a lawyer; another to be a teacher; another an engineer; Notice how that expression is always used with the

jobs that society tends to value more highly You don't hear people talking about a calling to clean offices or to be sanitation engineers What about someone who has worked in four different career fields ... does God keep changing their calling? Are they sinful in not having ever discovered their one and only genuine calling? Have they missed the vocational boat??

- I have a divine calling that is consistent with the general spiritual blessings provided to all members of the body of Christ;
- and I have a divine calling that is consistent with the specific giftedness that dictates my role in furthering the Great Commission and the growth of the kingdom of God.
This calling relates to my function Not primarily to whether I should be paid full-time or not. Sometimes it might make sense for me to sell Caterpillar tractors. Sometimes it might make sense for me to be doing something else. But my calling from God remains the same. The general part of that calling comes down in verse 12.

1 Cor. 9 -- key passage; explanation of laying aside his right to financial support in the ministry

2 Cor. 11:7ff – willing to take remuneration from established churches; but not when it would open him to criticism and hurt the preaching of the gospel

B. Motivation: Unselfishness – Self Sufficiency – not burdening others

“so as not to be a burden to any of you”

laboring with their hands for their own support so as not to be a burden and to provide a good example; desire to be a blessing instead of a burden

Contrast with the motivation from the false teachers – wanted the financial support; wanted the life of comfort and freedom from physical cares; wanted to be supported by the hard work of others

Problem: thinking we deserve better and more support and perks and benefits --

Different Circumstances dictated different approaches for the Apostle Paul

- nothing wrong with receiving financial support from the Philippians
- in fact the rule rather than the exception would seem to be that those elders who labor especially hard and skillfully and effectively in preaching and teaching should be supported, along with itinerant missionaries and evangelists involved in church planting
- but Paul found advantages at times to laying aside his right to support and offering the gospel ministry without charge as he did here to the Thessalonians

Often we are perpetuating the wrong image: that hard physical work and the gospel ministry are mutually exclusive

C. Main Mission: never lose sight of the number one objective = Great Commission

"we proclaimed to you the gospel of God"

If your work situation detracts from accomplishing the main task, you need to see how you can make the necessary adjustments

Proclaiming the gospel is hard work as well – can be exhausting; requires much work in prayer; requires time consuming personal follow-up and interaction; patient answering of questions; engaging in the whole process of discipleship

III. (:10-12) FATHER – GODLY EXAMPLE AND POSITIVE TRAINING OF A FATHER WITH VISION [Next week]

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Are there any parts of our role model that we need to change so that others could rightly imitate us in this area of working hard at our job and in the ministry?
- 2) Do we complain or push back regarding the difficulty and hardship of our labor and toil or do we labor whole-heartedly for the Lord with a thankful heart?
- 3) Are we secretly laboring for the praise of men or for the obtaining of some type of benefit to ourselves or are we sincerely unselfish in not wanting to weigh others down or be a burden to others?
- 4) Are we focused on the main task at hand? Do we understand our role in the progress of the church and the fulfillment of the Great Commission?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Keathley: Paul’s accusers had accused him and his partners in ministry of greed saying they were mere peddlers of some new teaching for the purpose of financial gain. So the Apostle reminds them of the facts which they well knew. Also, remember there is a general biblical principle that a father works to support his family. Though the church at Philippi had sent some financial help, Paul, who was a tentmaker, worked to pay for his own needs. Since there were no paid teachers in Palestine, it was necessary that a rabbi learn a trade to support himself and his family. Paul had done just this.

According to the Lord’s teaching and Paul’s, ministers of the gospel had the right to be supported for their work in preaching and teaching, but Paul had forfeited that right when planting new ministries. The following are a few of some possible reasons: (a) As a protection against the wrong impressions and false accusations of being religious peddlers. (b) We can’t expect people to support a work before they had become converts and had learned the grace principles of proportionate giving. (c) To give the new work time to get on its feet. Remember, later they did receive gifts from the Macedonian believers.

MacArthur: And yet there were some detractors who apparently had come along and said to these Thessalonian Christians, now that Paul, Silas and Timothy had left town, Paul is no different than the rest of the charlatans and fakers and religious frauds of the world. All he wants

is your money, your possessions. He wants to abuse you, to manipulate you. He wants power. He wants control over you. He may even want sexual favors from your women. He is a deceiver. He's like all of the rest of the fakers on every corner and in every agoura or marketplace who are deceiving and beguiling the unwitting victims, capturing their bodies, their minds, their money, their possessions for himself. He's just another one of them.

TEXT: 1 THESSALONIANS 2:10 -12

*TITLE: INTEGRITY OF SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP –
LEADERSHIP PROFILE – THE UNSELFISH SERVANT LOVE OF A FATHER*

BIG IDEA:

**(2:7-12) 3 ROLE MODELS OF UNSELFISH SERVANT LOVE THAT PICTURE
PROPER CONDUCT IN THE MINISTRY**

INTRODUCTION:

Father's Day comes early for us. We already had our Mother's Day message ... now Paul is going to point to the analogy of a father's role to teach us more about the **Integrity of Spiritual Leadership**. How can you distinguish faithful leaders from the charlatans or even from the ineffective? How did the **unselfish servant love of a father** play itself out in the conduct of the missionary team at Thessalonica?

BEFORE EASTER:

I. (:7-8) MOTHER -- GENTLENESS AND TENDER CARE OF A LOVING MOTHER

TWO WEEKS AGO:

**II. (:9) WORKER -- CHURCH PLANTERS LABOR LONG AND HARD TO BOTH
PROVIDE FOR PHYSICAL NEEDS (WHEN NECESSARY) AND PROCLAIM THE
GOSPEL OF GOD**

A. Model

B. Motivation

C. Main Mission

TODAY: Final Role Model: Change the order up today: Model – including a look at some wrong models / Main Mission / Motivation

**III. (:10-12) FATHER – GODLY EXAMPLE AND DISCIPLESHIP TRAINING OF A
FATHER WITH VISION**

A. Model: Godly Conduct – Godly Example

“You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers.”

1. Transparent Testimony – the Accountability and Integrity of the Model

“You are witnesses, and so is God”

2. Irreproachable Integrity

a. Devoutly – Passionately pursuing God

b. Uprightly – Doing the right thing in relationship to the new converts

c. Blamelessly – None of the charges of Paul's accusers could stick

MacArthur: A father's responsibility is to set the standard of integrity in the family. That's a spiritual leader's responsibility. . .

before God devout, before God and man upright, before man blameless. That's a spiritual father. That's how we behave toward you believers.

3. Directed Discipleship – Faith Focused – Effective Example

“we behaved toward you believers”

Missionary team were all excellent role models for these new believers; not just in their preaching but in their practice of the truth

Wrong Models of Shepherding like a Father

1. Abusive Father – some pastors can be abusive – **Exploited sheep**

- a. Physically abusive – look at Roman Catholic priests and problems of child abuse -- shocking
- b. Emotionally abusive – more common – how you treat people
- c. Financially abusive – Remember Paul's example – Acts 20:33-35

Luke 11:11 [context of father desiring to answer prayer and give good gifts]

“Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a scorpion, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?”

Instead: **sacrifice yourself** for the good of the flock; more interested in giving than Receiving

2. Authoritarian Father – too domineering, too controlling – **Exasperated Sheep** – Very common

Not recognizing that his mission is to guide his child towards independence and maturity

Talked a lot about this danger already

Ephes 6:4 *"Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."*

Instead: exercise leadership from a loving, **servant heart**

3. Administrative Father – tries to delegate all of his nurturing responsibilities – **Exhausted Sheep** -- Herded Sheep – Manipulated Sheep

Doesn't want to be bothered with the details of shepherding; leaves that to others;

Like a business CEO – we admire many churches that model this

Everything built around time management principles and a schedule – depending on how important you are, determines how much face time you get with the pastor

Lots of programs; pushing sheep into ministry slots; but no intimate relationship;

Unrealistic expectations – pushing the sheep, whipping them

Psalms 103:13-14 *"As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust."*

Instead: roll up your sleeves and get your hands dirty with **hands-on shepherding**; sharing your life with your disciples

4. Absentee Father – neglectful, no quality time or personal investment in the child –
Or an Indulgent father – just let the children alone; let them do whatever they want;
Excluded Sheep – Exiled Sheep -- Abandoned Sheep – Ignored Sheep
Consumed by other priorities – work, pleasure, traveling, etc.
Maybe actually ran off and disappeared

1 Kings 1:6 (Living Bible) *“Now his father, King David, had never disciplined him [Adonijah] at any time – not so much as by a single scolding!”*

Instead: **spend both quantity and quality time** with your growing believers – both public and private ministry; both group settings and one-on-one training

B. Main Mission: Discipleship Training – Positive, Encouraging, Directive --

1. **Three Descriptions with a Common Focus = Exhorting, Encouraging, Imploring (Types of Appeals)**

“just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring”

All Present tense – ongoing, continuous effort needed and applied

Not something done remotely or impersonally; *para* – with, alongside

Not trying to parse these out as 3 different activities – synonyms to convey the force of the discipling activity – involves personal concern and emotion – not just an academic lecture

- a. Exhorting – directed towards following the proper course of action
urge one to pursue some course of action; forward looking
parakaleo cf. 2:3 *“our exhortation”* – bringing Word of God to bear on the situation
- b. Encouraging – directed towards perseverance
compound: with + counsel, advice
- c. Imploring / Demanding / Charging

Keathley: It means “summon to witness,” “to bear witness,” and then “to solemnly charge, adjure, beseech.” In view of the aim stated in verse 12, the emphasis here is on a solemn charge though it could also contain an element of personal witness as a motive for following the charge. This word has more of an authoritative emphasis than the two preceding words.

Drew Worthen: All three words denote a more forceful approach in directing them God-ward. F.F. Bruce says, “this verb has lost its original force of invoking witnesses. It has a more authoritative nuance than the two preceding verbs.” This is why Vincent says, “The verb means to conjure or appeal to by something sacred.”

2. **Two Fundamental Approaches = Impartiality and Loving, Personal Attention**

“each one of you as a father would his own children”

- a. Impartiality – No Favoritism

b. Loving, Personal Attention

C. Motivation: Goal Oriented -- Mature Converts who would please God = His overriding Ambition and **Vision**

"so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory."

Father should have a **vision** for what type of conduct and future he has in mind for his children. As they mature, what is the standard they need to measure up to?

Cf. royalty – They king expects his young prince to act in a manner worthy of the royal family – not to disappoint or embarrass

We certainly do not want to be a poor testimony or an embarrassment as a Christian
Important that the Father can visualize the end product he is shooting for in his children – what should maturity look like? Talking about Christlikeness;

We have received an extremely high calling – one of privilege and great expectation We in no way measure up on our own; but by the grace of God we can walk by faith; we can be filled with the Holy Spirit and exhibit the fruit of the Spirit which is Christlikeness ...

We are destined to be co-heirs with Christ, members of the royal family, reigning with Him in glory ... this is our calling How are we measuring up?

"walk worthy" –

Col. 1:10 *"of the Lord"*

Eph. 4:1 *"of the calling with which you were called"*

Eph. 1:27 *"of the gospel"*

Keathley: We have been qualified to be a part of His kingdom by grace through the finished work of the Savior. However, we can walk and conduct ourselves in a way that will honor Him and that is in keeping with His character and purposes.

"Who calls you into His own kingdom and glory" expresses the reason and motive.

"Who calls you" is a **present tense**. Not Who has called you, but Who calls you. It points to a continuous work of God through the ministry of the church using the Word and walking by the Spirit. God, who had called them to salvation, a finished transaction (cf. 2 Thess. 2:13-14), is still calling believers to His kingdom and glory, i.e., to a continued pursuit of a life of obedience and holiness under the rule of God, one that will result in rewards in the kingdom and glory. Entrance into heaven is assured, but rewards and position there are the result of faithful living (2 Tim. 2:11-13; 2 Pet. 1:9-11).

Finally, note the phrase, *"His own kingdom and glory."* This strongly reminds us that there are other kingdoms and other kinds of glory that are competing for our allegiance and that of our spiritual children. So we must not only be alert to these false influences but take precautions to guard against their influences on our spiritual children in Christ. . .

If we are not faithful we will find ourselves pampering mothers or absentee fathers who wonder why our babes in Christ never grew up but instead became prodigal children in pursuit of the

world rather than God's kingdom and glory.

Review: Having worked our way through the text, let's try to summarize what we have learned about the leadership role of a father as it pertains to the overall **Discipling Process** –

4 Key Responsibilities of the Father in the Discipling Process:

1. Provides Direction / leadership / headship / vision – **Where are we headed?**

Just talked about the Vision of a Father; Son will pattern his conduct after the example of his father – **John 5:19** – true of Christ – *“the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner”*

2. Provides Doctrine / Instruction / Teaching – **What is the plan to get there?**

Cannot delegate all of this to the Mother or to outside teachers – like Sunday School and youth groups; must take the responsibility himself; exhorting, encouraging, imploring – Teaching, reinforcing, reminding and teaching again – but all the time modeling the same truths ... more is caught than taught

3. Provides Discipline / Correction / Nurturing – **How do we stay on track or recover?**

Tough Love; requires making tough decisions and sticking to them; setting the boundaries and the penalties and consequences for crossing those boundaries; mother will tenderly tend to cut the child some slack; the father needs to provide the sternness that makes the child take sin seriously; that develops the sense of the fear of the Lord in the child

Heb. 12:6-11

Cf. example of the Prodigal Son – the Discipling Father – how could he let his son go off like that? Longing to welcome him back on to the path of righteousness

4. Provides Distinction – What is special about this child; what commends this child? **What does the Father think of our progress?**

Father commends Christ at baptism: Matt. 3:17 *“This is my beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased”*

At Transfiguration Matt. 17:5

Speaks audibly one more time as Christ prepares to go to the Cross – John 12:28 *“I have both glorified it [the Father's name] and will glorify it again”*

The Apostle Paul wanted the disciples at Thessalonica to look back at the church planting team and notice that Paul and his missionary team faithfully modeled this type of leadership profile in their labor of **fatherly love** throughout the discipleship process

CONCLUSION:

Role of a father never ends – even when your children move out – you still continue in that relationship of caring for them

George Strait: Love Without End –

And he said, "Let me tell you a secret about a father's love,
A secret that my daddy said was just between us."

He said, "Daddies don't just love their children every now and then.

It's a love without end, amen, it's a love without end, amen."

A father might be called on to make some tough decisions regarding discipline ... but he always has in view the end result of the discipling process.

Integrity in the ministry is essential to protect the integrity of our message. These 3 role models should characterize our conduct – nursing mothers, hard workers and godly fathers – Paul was able to motivate Christian conduct not by means of his authority but by means of his relationship to his young disciples – he genuinely and personally cared for each one of them and they knew that and responded to his exhortations

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Think back on the role your own father played in your development. What are some of the positive qualities and activities that you can remember?
- 2) What spiritual leader in your life has functioned the most like a father to you? What characteristics of his ministry come to mind?
- 3) How does this role model extend way beyond a lecturing/teaching/preaching role?
- 4) Are you careful to maintain the type of Christian testimony that won't bring shame or embarrassment upon the cause of Christ?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

MacArthur: The word "exhorting" means to come along side, to move someone in a specific line of conduct. The Holy Spirit is called the paraklete, it's the same word, parakaleo, the one who comes alongside to move us in a specific course of conduct. A father gets alongside his child and moves that child in a specific course of conduct. Now whatever it takes it takes to do that, strong exhortation. Hey, I have preached some of my most passionate sermons to one child. You come alongside and you exhort that child in that path of conduct that you believe is right. That's instruction...personal instruction.

Then he says not only did we do that fatherly task, but also not only exhorting but encouraging. Now we move from instruction to motivation. The father's role also is to come alongside, to encourage the emotion and the will to act in that course. Here is the specific course of conduct, I'm moving you in that direction and encouraging you to keep moving because of your own will, your own choice because the way is hard. Exhortation says this is the way to walk. Encouragement says I know it's tough but keep doing it, right? Keep doing it.

And then he says there's a third thing I do as a father, imploring each one of you. You know what verb that is? Marturomai, witness...you say, "What do you mean? A father is supposed to witness to his son?" Yeah, you know what he's supposed to say? "Hey, son, can I tell you something? I'm a personal witness to the fact that if you keep doing that this is what's going to happen. So you don't need to fall into the same hole I've been in." You know how your kids hate that when you say to them...Look, when I was a boy...ah, man, not this again...I would never have...I'll tell you what, I learned when I was a kid, don't do that because...ah, come on, dad,

everybody has got to learn... No they don't. You have a responsibility to a solemn charge, you are summoned as a witness to witness to the fact that any deviation from the prescribed course of conduct has very serious ramifications. That's the lesson. So you say, "Son, daughter, here's the course of conduct. I know the way is hard but keep doing it. And just to encourage you a little further, if you don't do it the consequence is severe." And that's where discipline comes in. And you do it with each one, that's the personal touch. . .

The difference between the mothering and the fathering is the mother wants to provide what is needed in the moment. The father wants to produce the product at the end. That's the balance. The mother wants to cherish and nurture and love and hold and affirm. And the father comes along and says that's all wonderful but we want to be sure at the end that he's living according to God's standards. . .

So, spiritual leader is a balance. He has a tender side, a mothering side and he has a strong courageous side in which he demands the highest and lives by the highest and uncompromising life. That's the balance. The mother comes along with her tender love and the father comes along exhorting to the conduct God requires, motivating the heart to respond, solemnly showing the consequence of failure. And then he lives the life that he demands of his children. Beautiful balance God has designed.

And spiritual leaders must be that. It's not enough to just be compassionate and tender and caring. There's got to be that uncompromising pure life that sets the standard to live by. And there's got to be the courage of conviction that comes alongside someone and exhorts and encourages and implores and demands that you live in a worthy way of the God who has called you to such glory. That's leadership by God's design. On the one hand a concern for the person, on the other hand a concern for the process. On the one hand a concern for kindness, on the other hand a concern for control. On the one hand a concern for affection, on the other hand a concern for authority. On the one hand embracing, on the other hand exhorting. On the one hand cherishing, on the other hand challenging. And where there is that balance God can work in a glorious way. Where there is that tender considerate gentle mothering brought alongside a holy righteous blameless exemplary life where there's teaching and commanding and persuading with fatherly authority, you have a leader who stands head and shoulders above. You have a Paul and because you have a Paul you have a Thessalonian church.

David Silversides: Our Entering In

The peddlers of man-made philosophy were very different – concerned for their own material gain

“blameless” – didn't see himself as sinless; but defending his character and conduct (1 Sam. 12:2 Samuel declares his ministry integrity); exemplary in behavior

“devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly” -- doing the right thing in the right manner;

This entering in was with a fatherly authority – didn't bully them, but exhorted them – presenting godly motives and incentives so that they would want to do what is right; charged or testified with authority – doing what is right, doing it gladly and doing it out of reverence for God; Effectual calling – (not just outward call addressed to all) Word of God accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit; 2 Thess. 2:13;

Application:

- the necessity of faith in the ministry; willingness to sacrifice for the sake of the gospel
- how foolish for Christian ministers to imagine that they can escape unjust reproach; look at how the Apostle Paul behaved in such an exemplary manner and yet still came under severe

attack; he gave them the gospel at peril of his own safety; worked on their behalf night and day;

Mark Clarke: So, spiritual leader is a balance. He has a tender side, a mothering side and he has a strong courageous side in which he demands the highest and lives by the highest and uncompromising life. That's the balance. The mother comes along with her tender love and the father comes along exhorting to the conduct God requires, motivating the heart to respond, solemnly showing the consequence of failure. And then he lives the life that he demands of his children. Beautiful balance God has designed.

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Zeisler: But the ministry of the model Paul gives, also needs to partake of the role of a father. I think what he suggests about the father here is that he is the one who sets direction, who guides and implores his child to grow up, to reach for goals that he hasn't reached before, not to be content to stay a child, immature, weak and uncertain, but to grow to the point where he can make his own decisions and charge off on his own. That is what the father should do. He should exhort, encourage and implore by his statements, and then by his example (1 Thess 2:10) to get the child to try out new ventures and to grow up. That's where Paul finally ends up (2:12), "so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory." The child is finally at the point where he is walking on his own. The two, taken together, comprise the commitment to give, that ought to be true of Christian models, of Christian disciplers, and Christian leaders. "We never came to get something. We came to give something." That is probably stated most cogently in 2:8: "Having thus a fond affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel but also our own lives, because you have become very dear to us."

TEXT: 1 THESSALONIANS 2:13-16

TITLE: GODLINESS ALWAYS STIRS UP PERSECUTION --
GODLINESS . . . PERSECUTION . . . PERSEVERANCE

BIG IDEA:

THE DYNAMIC POWER OF GOD'S WORD PRODUCES GODLINESS IN BELIEVERS THAT PROVOKES PERSECUTION -- LEADING TO TWO VERY DIFFERENT OUTCOMES:

- ENDURANCE FOR BELIEVERS
- WRATH FOR THE PERSECUTORS

INTRODUCTION:

How have you been persecuted this past week? What do you know about being persecuted by unbelievers because of your proclamation of the gospel and your godly living? How have you shared in the sufferings of Christ and thus come to a fuller experience of the power of His resurrection working in and through you?

Church historians report that more Christians have been persecuted for their faith in this past century than in all the prior centuries of church history combined. That is remarkable to consider – especially since it seems so foreign from our experience.

Check out the current news on the web – just google “Persecution of Christians” and select the most recent articles.

* * * *

Baroness Cox, founder of the Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust (HART), said at the Baptist Assembly on Saturday that there were at least **250 million Christians** suffering around the world because of their faith. . . including Christians in North Korea, Armenia, Sudan and Burma.
<http://www.christiantoday.com/article/uk.christians.urged.to.stand.by.persecuted.brothers.and.sisters/23263.htm>

* * * *

What is happening this past week in Egypt?

The Egyptian government is using swine flu as an excuse to launch another round of persecution against its minority Christian population. Even though the World Health Organization reports no swine flu in any African nation, the Egyptian government ordered the destruction of the entire pig population in a nation where only Christians raise pigs because Muslims consider pork unclean.

Earlier this week, according to various news organizations, about 1,000 Christian pig farmers armed with stones and bottles faced off against about 200 police officers armed with tear gas and accompanied by armored vehicles. The Christians lost.

http://www.postchronicle.com/commentary/article_212229215.shtml

* * * *

What is happening recently in India?

The prelates of India are hoping that a visit from the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom will bring justice more quickly to persecuted Christians in Orissa. Archbishop Stanislaus Fernandez of Gandhinagar, secretary of the India episcopal conference, spoke with AsiaNews about the visit next month, saying he hopes it will "speed up the path to justice for the Christians of Kandhamal."

The commission prepares an annual report on the status of religious freedom in nations around the world. While in India, they plan to focus on the state of Orissa in the east, the site of heightened persecution against Christians, and the state of Gujarat in the west, where Muslim faithful were persecuted in 2002. Both situations involved Hindu extremists.

In Orissa, ongoing Hindu-Christian tensions flared into a wave of violence at the end of last August, after extremists blamed the slaying of a Hindu leader on Christians. Dozens of Christians, including a priest, were killed and thousands fled their homes. Thousands of them are still living in displacement camps.

<http://www.catholic.net/index.php?option=zenit&id=25781>

* * * *

What is happening recently in Iraq?

Since the U.S.-led Iraq war in 2003, more than 200 Christians have been killed, dozens of churches have been bombed, and more than half the Iraqi Christian population have left the country.

<http://christianpost.com/Intl/Persecution/2009/05/iraqi-christians-too-scared-to-reveal-whole-truth-on-violence-06/>

The film "Facing Extinction: Christians of Iraq" is about the persecution, torture and murder of the 1 million Christians in Iraq.

<http://www.toacorn.com/news/2009/0507/faith/067.html>

* * * *

What is happening recently in Nigeria?

Nigeria has been plagued by religious violence since 1999 when Sharia law was introduced in the northern part of the country. Since then, the Christian minority in northern Nigeria has been more severely persecuted by Islamic extremists. Muslim radicals have been killing Christians, burning down churches, and forcing Christians to flee their homes.

<http://www.persecution.org/suffering/ICCnews/newsdetail.php?newscode=10003&title=us-panel-says-nigeria-among-worst-violators-of-religious-freedom>

* * * *

What is happening this week in Somalia?

Open Doors estimates there is about 4,000 Christians out of a population of about 10 million people in the predominantly Muslim country. Most of the Christians in the

country are from a Muslim background, Dykstra said, and because of their conversion these Christians face the double threat of being targets of random acts of violence as well as religious extremists.

Somalia is ranked No. 5 this year in Open Doors' World Watch List of countries with the worst records of Christian persecution. Somalia is ranked below North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Afghanistan, respectively.

<http://christianpost.com/Intl/Persecution/2009/05/somalia-lawless-like-wild-west-says-ministry-05/>

* * * *

Check out **Persecution.com** – the official website of the Voice of the Martyrs

The **Apostle Paul** was very familiar with persecution. It was part of his every day experience. Before salvation, Saul had led the charge against believers. Then the Lord called Him with this charge to Ananias:

“he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake.”

Acts 9:15-16

I. (:13a) THE PLEASURE OF GOD’S WORKERS – WHY ARE THEY THANKFUL?

GOD’S WORKERS REJOICE TO SEE GOD’S WORD EMBRACED AND LIVED OUT

A. Grounds for Thanksgiving -- Foundation of Integrity in Ministry

“For this reason” – could look backwards or forwards; not a big issue --

Building on the foundation of **purity of motives and conduct** presented in vv.1-12; Paul is developing another **reason for thanksgiving** on the part of the missionary team Paul’s epistles are masterpieces of tight integration; each thought and its development flowing into the next; building blocks that continue to reach back to the foundation as well as progress to new heights

Importance of conducting the ministry in a manner which properly builds on the foundation laid by Jesus Christ and the pattern established by Paul himself, the wise Master Builder (2 Cor. 3)

B. Tone of Thanksgiving Continued from Opening Greeting (in **1:2**)

“we also constantly thank God”

There it related to the changed lives of the new believers at Thessalonica; Paul picks up that thread of thanksgiving and continues to develop it; The missionary team has risked everything to bring the gospel to these Gentiles and now looks back in satisfaction with much thanksgiving for the results they have seen thus far; not taking the credit for themselves but recognizing that any legitimate fruit . . . fruit that stands the test of persecution and suffering . . . can only have come from God Paul will continue this thread of thanksgiving for the new believers in **3:9**

C. Focus of Thanksgiving – Reception, Response and Recognition of the Word of God

1. Reception of the Word of God from the Missionary Team

*“that when you **received** from us the word of God’s message,”*

“The word of hearing” – has to hit the ear first; objective truth

Emphasizing the source ... not message about God ... but from God

Paul was simply an ambassador, a messenger – sent to deliver the goods;

So exciting to get a good reception; to find that good soil that receives

the seed; they didn’t fumble the gospel or stumble over it or reject it

2. Response to the Word of God – Personal Appropriation – embracing the

Word and living it out – must settle in the heart

*“you **accepted it**”* – subjective application; moving from the head to the heart; required the work of the Holy Spirit to open up the eyes of their understanding; to soften their hearts; to make them alive spiritually

3. Recognition of the Divine Source of the Missionary Message

“not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God.”

Christ made a big deal that He was the divine logos come down from heaven – He made a case for His Deity by arguing that His source was from God –

Gospel of **John 3:31-36**

No human preacher or organization can add any weight or validity to the word of God; its authority is inherent

We cannot have too high a view of the Word of God; do we treasure it? Are we quick to obey it and make it the supreme authority in our lives ... or do we think that we know better in some areas ... or do we choose to ignore the voice of God in some areas?

MacArthur: Not just another human message. Not another philosopher, another teacher, another religious leader, not another speaker, not another orator, not more rhetoric, not human wisdom, human opinion, carnal viewpoint, you heard it as it was, not the word of man, but the Word of God.

Guzik: Today, some people like to say that there is a word of God, but that we can't be sure of what He says. When we appeal to the Bible, they like to reply "That's just your interpretation." There are certainly some places where the word of God is hard to precisely interpret. But if we can't know what God has spoken, then He may as well not have spoken at all. . . God's word works, it doesn't only bring information or produce feelings. There is power in the word of God to change lives.

Human messages abound:

LET THE WHOLE WORLD KNOW

Everybody seems to have a cause for which to speak.

Loudly from the rooftops they proclaim the thing they seek.
Often for a needless cause and often to deceive.
Should not we who know the Lord declare what we believe?

What gives us pleasure? What makes us thankful to God??

II. (:13b) THE POWER OF GOD'S WORD – WHAT DOES IT ACCOMPLISH? GOD'S WORD TRANSFORMS AND ENERGIZES BELIEVERS TO LIVE CHANGED LIVES

A. The Dynamic Power of the Word of God

“which also performs its work” (word for dynamite)

Word of God is never unemployed ... always working and accomplishing what God wants

Word of God compared to

- a seed – **Mark 4:26, 27** – bears its life and power within itself; leads to fruit

- like rain and snow – what do they accomplish – **Is. 55:10-11**

“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there without watering the earth and making it bear and sprout, and furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.” We are people of the Word; we are a church that orients our ministry around the Word of God – that is what God uses to produce His fruit

- a sword

Heb. 4:12 *“For the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”*

Eph. 6:17

- a fire and a hammer

Jer 23:29 *“Is not my word like fire . . . and like a hammer which shatters a rock?”*

- light – **Ps. 119:105**

B. The Dimension of Faith – Produced by the Word and Essential for Obeying the Word

“in you who believe”

Heb. 4:2 *“For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard”*

Rom. 10:17 *“Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God”*

Are we committed to the Power of God’s Word? Are we tempted to look elsewhere for power? Do we doubt God’s commitment to fulfill His promises and remain faithful? The Apostle Paul was excited to see God’s dynamic and powerful Word at work in the lives of these converts – that gave him the energy to continue to preach the Word – in season and out ... when he felt like it and when he didn’t

III. (:14-16a) THE PERSEVERANCE OF GOD’S WITNESSES – WHO IS OPPOSING GOD’S PROGRAM? AS BELIEVERS IMITATE THE HISTORIC PATTERN OF GODLY LIVING THEY INEVITABLY FACE SEVERE PERSECUTION

A. (:14a) Conformity to the Historical Pattern of Godliness

Conversion leading to changed lives and growth in godly living
(emphasis is on imitation in the area of persevering thru persecution)

Distinct from the surrounding culture of darkness and wickedness

“For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea”

practices of saved Jews are the same as those of the saved Gentiles
different cultures; same fruit of the Spirit; same pattern of the churches;
different music, different dress, different manner of greeting one another;
same love; same joy; same peace; same gospel message; same persecution
same perseverance

B. (:14b-15a) Consistent, Historical Pattern of Severe Persecution:

1. Suffering of the Thessalonian believers at the hands of their own countrymen
“for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen”

Phil. 3:10 *“that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death”*

Robert L. Thomas: Deliberate imitation of sufferings for sufferings’ sake is an unworthy Christian objective, but imitation of a Christian life style is legitimate and desirable. Persecution inevitably arises from the outside when a Christian patterns his life after the Lord.

2. Suffering of the Judean churches at the hands of the Jews
“even as they did from the Jews”

3. Suffering of God’s Messengers at the hands of the Jews
the Lord Jesus and the prophets and the Missionary Team
“who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out.”

Parable of the Vineyard Owner – **Mark 12:1-12**

C. (:15b-16a) Characterization of the Persecutors = Opposed to God's Program

1. Religious Charlatans

"They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men."

2. Proudful Obstructionists -- Hindering the Spread of the Gospel to the Gentiles

"hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved"

Matt 23:13 *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in."*

Calvin: "Behold," says he, "the virtues for which they deserve praise among the good and pious! — they killed their own prophets and at last the Son of God, they have persecuted me his servant, they wage war with God, they are detested by the whole world, they are hostile to the salvation of the Gentiles; in fine, they are destined to everlasting destruction."

MacArthur: this is precisely what they claim...we are pleasing to God...would be their claim. We are pleasing to God. And what Paul says...they are not pleasing to God. Simply turns the words around in their own mouth. They were more than just not pleasing, they were hostile to all men and to God. There was a basic hostility there. Tacitus, the Roman historian, writes, "Toward every people they feel only hate and enmity." They had a hostility in them, but it most directly and primarily was directed at hindering the Apostles from preaching the gospel to the Gentiles so they could be saved. It wasn't that they were racially prejudiced, that's not Paul's point. They were religiously prejudiced. They didn't want the gospel which they resented being preached to anyone. Hostile to God's purposes. Hostile to everybody, says Paul. And it shows up because they tried to keep everybody in their sins by not letting the gospel be preached to them, although they didn't realize that was the implication. They're hostile to all men, not that they hated all men, but that they prevent us from giving them the gospel. They're interfering with gospel preaching. Boy, that is a dangerous thing...a dangerous thing.

All types of different persecution; we are called to a life of perseverance – but God has a timetable for the end of our trials and the reversal of our fortunes; the destiny of our persecutors has also been ordained

IV. (:16b) THE PROVOKING OF GOD'S WRATH – HOW FAR DOES IT EXTEND?

GOD'S WRATH IS THE INEVITABLE DESTINY FOR ALL THOSE WHO PERSECUTE HIS FAITHFUL GOSPEL PROCLAIMERS

A. Heaping Sin Upon Sin

“with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins”

God pictured as exercising forbearance up to a point;

But there is a limit at which time wrath is poured out to the fullest extent

Gen. 15:16 *“for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete”* – Joshua 10 for the judgment that fell upon them

It might look like the wicked prosper ... but God has His appointed timetable

B. Harvesting the Full Brunt of God’s Wrath

“But wrath has come upon them to the utmost.”

No need to take vengeance into our own hands

- destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD only the foretaste
(epistle written 51 AD)
- Great Tribulation period -- Time of Jacob’s trouble
- eternal wrath

Robert L Thomas: If the wrath is yet future, why does Paul speak of it as happening in the past? The best explanation of the aorist tense of the verb comes from comparing the only other NT combinations of “*come upon*” – Matt 12:28; Luke 11:20 – where Jesus speaks of the kingdom’s arrival in comparable terminology. The unique force of this verb connotes “arrival upon the threshold of fulfillment and accessible experience, not the entrance into that experience” (**K. W. Clark**)

CONCLUSION:

I. (:13a) THE PLEASURE OF GOD’S WORKERS –

Let’s give thanks for the testimony of changed lives; the fruit of God’s working

II. (:13b) THE POWER OF GOD’S WORD –

Let’s trust in the power of God’s Word to accomplish His purposes and produce Christlike character

III. (:14-16a) THE PERSEVERANCE OF GOD’S WITNESSES –

Let’s persevere through whatever persecution may come our way – no matter who might be the ones attacking us

IV. (:16b) THE PROVOKING OF GOD’S WRATH –

Let’s be encouraged by God’s promises of future glory but have a heart of compassion for those who are still under God’s coming wrath

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) How confident are we in the power of God’s Word to perform its effectual work in changing our life?

2) What churches today have the type of reputation that we would like to imitate some of their practices? When it comes to this area of following the example of others, what

do we have to guard against?

3) How does the liberal media persecute godliness today? Why is it that Christians in the United States don't face more persecution than they do?

4) How can unbelievers be so oblivious to the reality of the wrath of God resting upon them and about to be executed against them?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Hiebert: It has been asked why Paul cited the example of the Judean churches to his Gentile converts. Calvin replied that thus Paul counteracted a serious temptation which might assail the Thessalonians. The Jews at Thessalonica were insinuating that the new faith which Paul's converts had accepted must be a false religion since the Jews, the only people who worshiped the true God, were constrained to oppose it. To remove any doubts they might have had, Paul reminded his readers that the first churches, started in Judea, had been made to suffer by the Jews who thus showed themselves "the determined enemies of God and of all sound doctrine."

Calvin's surmise may be correct, but as Lunemann remarks, "such a design of the apostle is indicated by nothing, and its supposition is entirely superfluous." He thinks that Paul selected the Judean churches because their courageous sufferings made them pertinent examples of steadfastness to the younger Christian communities.

More natural is the explanation that Paul points out the suffering of these early Judean churches to the Thessalonians to show them that from the beginning, Christians have been suffering for their faith, so they were not alone in being persecuted. Those who receive the Word of God and are united with the true people of God will always be hated by unbelieving men and be made to suffer for their belief.

MacArthur: Knowing that the Jews' hateful attitude had not changed but rather had intensified since their original hostility in the early days at Thessalonica, Paul made a strong statement about their spiritual condition. His statement consists of three reasons they are a people to be sad for: they rejected God's Word, they hindered the saints, and they faced punishment in suffering. These three are in direct contrast to the reasons Paul was joyful over the Thessalonians.

Stott: How is it possible, however, to reconcile the horizons of 1 Thessalonians (which predicts, even declares, God's judgment) and of Romans 11 (which affirms the continuing validity of God's covenant and the assurance of Israel's salvation)? Are not the warning of judgment and the promise of salvation equally irrevocable and therefore contradictory? Perhaps the solution to this problem is to be found in the difference of Paul's terminology between God's wrath upon "the Jews" individually (1Thess. 2:14) and his salvation of "Israel" collectively.

Morris: Fundamental to Paul's preaching was the conviction that what he spoke was not his own message but God's. He rejected human wisdom, and thought little of mere eloquence (1 Cor. 2:1ff). He was content to pass on, in the manner of a herald, what God had given him. There were philosophical points of view which were at variance with the stark simplicity of the preaching of the cross. The pressure to accommodate his message to the demands of the "modern thought-world" of the day must have been great. But Paul rejected all this. His drive and forcefulness came not from some thought that he was abreast of contemporary trends in philosophy or religion or science, but the deep-seated conviction that he was simply God's mouthpiece, and that what he spoke was the veritable word of God.

Stedman: Illustration of the Power of the Word of God to change lives:

Most of us are familiar with the story of The Mutiny on the Bounty. In the nineteenth century, mutineers took over the ship, set their captain adrift in a lifeboat, and ended up finally on the island of Picturing in the South Pacific. But we do not often hear much about what happened to them after they landed. They were rather rough, tough, godless sailors for the most part. Together with the wives they had taken with them from the island of Tahiti, they spent their days on Picturing drinking, gambling, carousing and fighting with one another. Soon the fighting led to battle, and they killed each other off until the colony was reduced to a handful of people. Among them was a man named Alexander Smith. Rummaging through his trunk one day, he found a Bible that his mother had put there. He began to read it, and soon it changed his life. Then he read to the surviving mutineers, and it changed their lives. When that island was rediscovered some years later, it had become a model community. There was no jail because they had no crime. They loved God and they loved each other. The book had totally changed their lives and their society!

Stedman: Reasons why the Gospel Arouses Violent Opposition:

1) First, it is clear from the Scriptures that the gospel ignores all human achievement. God is totally unimpressed with degrees, awards, position, tenure, wealth, or any other trappings of power. Everybody must come to him the same simple way -- by admitting they cannot help themselves and by accepting salvation as a gift from the hand of God through Jesus Christ. As the old hymn puts it, "Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to Thee cross I cling." Religious achievements, a good belief system, or good moral behavior do not impress God. There is only one way to approach him, and that is through Jesus Christ. Jesus himself declared, "No one can come to the Father but by me," {cf, John 14:6}. You may believe in God, but you will never know him as Father unless you come by Jesus. Other religions find this claim to be offensive.

2) The second reason the gospel arouses violent opposition is that it exposes human pride. There is a terrible evil in all of us which we try to hide. I find it in myself. I am stubborn at times, and I excuse myself on the grounds that people need to be stubborn occasionally. Besides, I am half Scot and the Scots are known for stubbornness. But that is nothing but pride, an independent spirit that says, "I don't need any help. I can make it on my own." We are all guilty of this in varying degrees, but we keep it under control for fear of recrimination or out of a desire not to be known as prideful or

stubborn. But if the restraints are removed, that pride will suddenly break out in the most terrible form of viciousness and vindictiveness.

3) A third reason why the gospel arouses opposition is because it forgives blatant sinners; those who richly deserve death and hell in the eyes of the world. The Pharisees were very offended because Jesus received adulterers, prostitutes, swindlers and outcasts, while they themselves, respectable moral people, were excluded. That is why they finally killed Jesus. Many oppose the gospel because it appeals to the disreputable. But that is its glory: it can change anyone who will receive it in humility and contrition.

Network for Strategic Missions:

What Does the Bible Say About Persecution?

The foregoing paragraphs help to document the prevalence of persecution in the world today. What does the Bible say about this unavoidable and painful part of Christian discipleship?

1. Persecution of Christians is a fact of life today. Jesus plainly tells His disciples to be forewarned about it (see Matthew 5:10-12). It is encountered during all eras of church history, in all places, in all degrees of severity, and in a variety of forms.
2. Persecution is involuntary suffering for Jesus' sake. Jesus tells His disciples that they will suffer because enemies will malign them, falsely saying all kinds of evil against them. This is what the Old Testament prophets experienced also-and what Christians likewise encounter today.
3. Persecution may come upon Christians who voluntarily deny themselves, take up their cross, follow Jesus, and lose their lives for His sake (Mark 8:34-35). Persecution also may be the consequence when Christ's disciples do not follow the way of conformity to this world but seek to be transformed by the renewing of their minds (Romans 12:1-2).
4. Persecution is a form of identification with Christ. When the apostles were ordered by the Jerusalem city council not to speak any more in the Name of Jesus, they rejoiced because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace on behalf of the Lord (Acts 6:41).
5. Persecuted persons need our prayers. The writer to Hebrew Christians instructs us to pray for believers confined to prison for Jesus' sake: "Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering" (Hebrews 13:3).
6. Persecution is to be regarded as a privilege. This may be "hard saying" to those who suffer and possibly face death for Christ's sake. The apostle wrote about this to the believers in Philippi: "For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for Him, since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have" (Philippians 1:29-30 and 3:7-11).

7. Persecution does not and will not last forever. "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love Him" (James 1:12). See also Jesus' comforting words recorded in John 14:1-2.

<https://www.strategicnetwork.org/index.php?loc=kb&view=v&id=18601&fto=1777&>

Bruce: The Thessalonians' persecution lasted a long time, and so did their steadfastness. Some six years later Paul can still speak of the churches of Macedonia (not least, the church of Thessalonica) as enduring 'a severe test of affliction' and continuing to give evidence of the reality of their faith in that 'their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of liberality' (2 Cor 8:1, 2). The 'extreme poverty' might well have been the result of mob violence and looting; elsewhere in the NT members of another Christian group are reminded how, in the early days of their faith, they 'joyfully accepted' the plundering of their property in addition to other forms of brutal maltreatment (Heb 10:32-34).

MacArthur: You say, "What's the application today?" The application today is we need to be thankful for those who believe and receive the Word and honor the saints by imitating their lives and those who persevere in trials, showing their hope and faith that perseveres to eternal glory, but we need to be sad for those who reject the Word, those who hinder the preaching of the gospel, those whose only ultimate suffering will be that of hell. We have to have a heart of compassion. One writer says this, "Paul is writing here about particular Jews, those who have shown hostility to God's messengers and not about the Jews in general. Further, what Paul says about them is valid only so long as they persist in their hostility to God and the gospel. If this view is correct, Paul is not guilty of anti-semitism. What he says here about the nearness of God's wrath is true for those Jews who persist in ungodliness, but does not contradict the hope that he holds out in Romans that the present time of Jewish opposition to the gospel will be followed by a turning of the people to God."

Piper: What does it look like to welcome the Scriptures as the word of God? I have a three-fold answer from the context of Thessalonians and a five-fold answer by implication based on what the Bible says elsewhere about how to use it. . . Embrace it as precious, pleasant, and practical, which means, in practice (five M's): to memorize it, meditate on it, make music with it, minister with it, and mind it.

Gil Rugh: It is important that we realize how convicted Paul was that the message he proclaimed was not human, but "...the word of God." This is essential in our own lives if we are going to have the confidence and assurance to serve Jesus Christ as we are commanded. Paul addresses this truth in 1 Corinthians 14:37; "If any one thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment." Paul believes without a doubt that his message is from God, and that is the standard for everything else. He is saying, "If you think that you have a message of God, measure it against what I say, because I am proclaiming the very Word of God." We need to have the same standard today. If anyone claims he has a message from God,

we need to measure it according to what God has already revealed. Unfortunately, this is rarely done in the church today. We have pastors teaching in our churches whose message is being enthusiastically accepted, even though they stand in direct opposition to what the Bible says concerning personal sin and salvation.

TEXT: 1 THESSALONIANS 2:17-20

TITLE: PRESSING ON TO MATURITY – PART 1: FAMILY FELLOWSHIP

BIG IDEA:

(2:17 – 3:13) PRESSING ON TO MATURITY -- CHURCH PLANTERS FEEL THE BURDEN OF ENCOURAGING THEIR DISCIPLES TO MATURITY

INTRODUCTION:

How many ministries have you seen where there was a huge disconnect between evangelism and discipleship? Where there was an intense, very focused period of preaching the gospel and plea for conversion but very little follow-up and personal interaction after the fact to encourage growth to maturity. That is why in the Great Commission Christ stressed the need to **make disciples** ... not just converts. That is why Christ trained His key leaders in how to **plant churches** that would have an ongoing ministry that was well-balanced – not just a para-church ministry that would focus on one aspect of Christianity. If someone is trying to grow as a believer without being plugged into a solid church, they are missing out on what Christ says they really need. College fellowship groups are a great encouragement – but they are not a substitute for the ministry of the local church. Women’s Bible studies can give one a boost during the week; but they are no substitute for fellowship in a solid church.

Apparently Paul was being accused of not having an ongoing concern for the spiritual growth of his converts from Thessalonica. Remember the very difficult circumstances of the church plant there. Remember: Severe opposition and persecution arose immediately and the missionary team was forced to flee. The gospel enemies were trying to persuade these young believers that they had been victimized by some hit-and-run spiritual con artists who had no personal long-term interest in their well-being. Instead, the missionary team blew into town with an elaborate dog and pony show; tried to bilk the people with a false message; and then when the heat was turned up they showed their true colors by taking off ... never to be heard from again. They could care less about you poor dupes. Why do you follow their teachings? Why don’t you switch your loyalties over to us? They don’t have any real love for you folks.

Paul has already shown that his care for them when he was present with them was like a tender-hearted mother and like a strong father with vision who nurtures his children to maturity. Now he develops this image of parental concern even further in the context of long-term family fellowship – not just how he cared for them at the planting of the church, but his **ongoing** concern for them and **desire to revisit them** despite this period of physical separation.

Stedman: On one occasion when Jesus was informed that his mother and brothers were waiting for him, he said of those he was teaching, *"These are my mother and father and brother"* {cf, Matt 12:47-49, Mark 3:32-35}, thereby indicating that a spiritual tie is as rich and deep as a physical tie – and oftentimes more so.

I wonder where the idea ever arose that Paul was stern and cold? You cannot read this letter without sensing the warmth of his heart and the depth of his love. At the time he wrote this letter, he was ministering alone in the city of Corinth. He was feeling the loneliness of that moment. Being far away from loved ones is a very unpleasant experience. Forgetting the danger that had

driven him from Thessalonica, and the cruelty he had experienced there, he longed to be with them again. He even tried to go to see them again but was prevented by Satanic interference.

New section of the epistle – will take more than 1 week to cover . . .

4 AREAS OF EMPHASIS FOR CHURCH PLANTERS AS THEY ENCOURAGE THEIR DISCIPLES ON TO MATURITY

- **FAMILY FELLOWSHIP** (cover this today)
- **SACRIFICING SECURITY**
- **FEEDING ON FAITHFULNESS**
- **PERSEVERING IN PROGRESS**

I. (2:17-20) PART 1: FAMILY FELLOWSHIP -- CHURCH PLANTERS (SPIRITUAL LEADERS) DESIRE TO BE WITH THEIR DISCIPLES

Seems almost too basic; that such a concept would not need much explanation or exposition; a local church should function as an extended family – there must be that love and concern for each other; How much you desire to be with someone is a good indicator of how much you care for them; look at how parents long to be with their children during difficult times in their lives; Simple Outline:

- **Desire Expressed** (and attempts at reunion made)
- **Desire Opposed** (by Satan)
- **Desire Realized** (at the coming of Christ)

A. Desire Expressed -- Separation Brings Longing For Family Reunion (:17-18a)

1. (:17a) The Emotional State of Separation -- described as being orphaned

“But we, brethren, having been bereft of you for a short while – in person, not in spirit – “

Addresses them as *“brethren”* – introducing this context of family fellowship right up front – intimate form of address

Had departed reluctantly – forced out; not by their own choosing

“bereft” – where we get our English word for “orphan”

Usually we think of **orphans** in terms of the children being bereft of their parents; here Paul turns around the analogy – but **same emotions** involved in this state of separation: (both sides in this relationship felt orphaned – Which side has it worse? They still have each other; missionary team has to start all over in another city)

- **Abandonment** – is there something wrong with me; Why me?

Can you imagine parents just abandoning their children; leaving them for someone else to raise; running away with no return address; making no efforts to contact or to see you; all the unanswered questions of what are my parents like? What do they think of me? Often a traumatized state – circumstances might have been quite tragic

- **Loneliness** – you look around and everyone else has a Mom and Dad; they have a stable family that supports and loves them and cares for them; no joy in going it alone

- **Insecurity** – worries about the future; Who will take care of me? What will happen to me?

- **Disconnected** – nobody to share their fears or their dreams

Many orphans grow up with lingering feelings of not belonging to anyone or to anything; There is a strong desire to be accepted. There is also a sense of separation, of longing - always searching for an identity rather than being labeled an orphan - **an outcast**.

Paul emphasizes two positive, mitigating circumstances:

a. Only for a short duration– for a limited time

Must always have an **eternal perspective**

Part of enduring any trial is the recognition of its brevity compared to Eternity

Rom. 8:18 “*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.*” – Paul will be talking about this coming glory in vs 20 – when this unpleasant state of separation will be reversed

Hiebert: It is a unique combination of two time designations, “*for a season*” and “*for an hour*”, and is apparently stronger than either alone. When they had been separated from them for but a brief period, the feeling of bereavement overcame them. The length of the separation intensified the pain. That the missionaries were unable to be away from them for a single hour without a deep sense of loss proved the strength of their affection for their converts.

b. Only in person, not in spirit – not as regards abiding inward affection

Not out of sight, out of mind ...

- **Fellowship of the Spirit** not limited to physical presence, face-to-face; but certainly enhanced by that

- **Prayer** is one way that concern is expressed when you cannot be present; Paul felt daily the burden of all the churches

- **Communication** is also key – letter writing

2. (:17b) The Efforts directed towards Reunion -- haste, earnestness, great zeal involved
“*were all the more eager with great desire to see your face*”

Hiebert: The noun *desire* generally has the evil connotation of sinful desire or lust; its use here is one of the few instances in the New Testament where it has a good sense (Lk 22:15; Phil 1:23).

Concept of **Reunions** – school reunions – whether high school or college;

Look at church reunions to celebrate significant milestone anniversaries;

Karen had opportunity to fly back to **San Antonio** to her high school fellowship group; her roots as a young believer; with her sister

- involves planning; setting the date and reserving it

- involves expense and sacrifice

- involves great anticipation to get back together and catch up

- amazing how you can pick back up with those relationships despite so much time spent apart and you are still very close to one another

Bruce: Cf. **Gal. 4:20**, where he wishes he could be present right then with his Galatian converts and show them by his tone of voice the intensity of feeling which could not be adequately expressed in written words

Some things cannot be communicated adequately except in person; you can't read someone's body language or perceive their intentions in an email

MacArthur: a longing that did not derive simply from the sentiment of friendship and socialization but from his sense of responsibility for their spiritual welfare. Paul exhibited the same trait for which he commended Epaphras, "*For I testify for him that he has a deep concern for you and for those who are in Laodicea and Hierapolis*" (**Col. 4:13**) . . .

"*seeing one's face*" means to come into intimate communication with him or her (cf. Gen. 33:10; 48:11; Ex. 10:29; 1 Thess 3:10; 2 John 12)

3. (:18a) The Emotional Desire to Return to them

"For we wanted to come to you – I, Paul, more than once – "

Specific instances where it sounds like Paul wanted to make plans to come visit –

So maybe Jason had not pledged that Paul would not return??

Paul answers 2 very basic questions:

- How much do I want to see you?
- How hard have I been trying to see you?

Remember the TV show **Lassie**? When Lassie was separated from Timmy, look at the efforts he made to overcome every obstacle to miraculously return home and be reunited with the one he loved; those reunion scenes were precious

Hiebert: Paul felt constrained to make this personal assertion since he has been the chief object of attack in the insinuations that the missionaries did not wish to come back. Further, it was necessary to distinguish himself from his associates as Timothy, and possibly also Silas, had actually returned since the beginning of the work at Thessalonica.

Zeisler: Time and again in this short section Paul refers to the absolute necessity he feels, the burden he carries, to be with these people; to be able to put his arms around them and to speak to them face to face; to enjoy their company and to serve and show his love for them. This is a much different proposition than saying, "Let's be on one another's prayer list." That is very important, but it is certainly way short of this inability to endure being separated from his friends that Paul expresses. How important it is to spend time with those people whom God has given us for special relationships.

B. Desire Opposed -- Satan Brings Opposition to Family Discipleship and Maturity (:18b)

"yet Satan thwarted us"

Hiebert: The word literally means "*to cut into.*" It was used as a military term in later Greek to picture an enemy force cutting up (or destroying) a road so as to make it impassable. Also used to denote any hindrance in general and conveys the thought of obstacles preventing the accomplishment of an intended movement.

Paul had good intentions, but he didn't control the situation; he had to resort to Plan B to assure these believers of his concern for them

4 Insights regarding Satan's Opposition:

1. Satan actively opposes God's kingdom program

Other references to Satan opposing the Apostle Paul

Rom. 15:22 – Paul repeatedly hindered in his plans from visiting Rome

Gal. 5:7 – Satan hinders the believers from continuing on in the Christian race

Bruce: Satan is the **adversary** par excellence; his main activity is putting obstacles in the path of the people of God, to prevent the will of God from being accomplished in and through them. Cf. 3:5

Zeisler: Satan is committed to keeping us from having deep and valuable Christian relationships. There is a war going on, and one effect of that war is to keep Christians from being able to love each other.

MacArthur: [examples of Satan opposing the kingdom of God]

- the devil tempted Christ (Matt. 4:3-10)
- he opposes the gospel (Matt. 13:19; 2 Cor. 4:4)
- he performs counterfeit miracles (Ex. 7:11; Acts 8:9-24; 13:8; cf. 2 Thess. 2:9; Rev. 16:14)
- he seeks to deceive believers (2 Cor. 11:3, 14; Eph. 6:11)
- he perpetrates lies and murders (1 Kings 22:22; John 8:44)
- he attacks individual churches (Acts 5:1-11; Rev. 2:9, 13, 24; 3:9)
- he especially attacks spiritual leaders (Job 1:6 – 2:8; Luke 22:31-32; 2 Cor. 12:7-9; 1 Tim. 3:7)

2. God's sovereignty extends even to the activities of Satan that oppose the gospel

Look at Satan's attacks against Job; had to function within the boundaries established by God

1:12 *"Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him."*

2:6 *"Behold, he is in your power, only spare his life"*

42:2 *"I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted"* – there is our key word!

Stedman: The book of Job says that Satan had to come before God and get permission from him to afflict Job's body. This man lost everything – his family, home and wealth; and he suffered terribly from boils which covered his whole body. But God had allowed it. The end of the book reveals what was accomplished by that suffering, but it was all hidden for the moment from Job's eyes. So, too, it is hidden from our eyes. But the Bible reveals there is a malevolent power of evil

at work. There are demonic beings, master manipulators, that are able to lead people about, putting thoughts in their minds and planting obstacles in the path of the gospel.

How is Satan's opposition discerned differently from that of the Holy Spirit restraining and changing the plans of the missionary team??

Acts 16:6-7 where the Holy Spirit did not allow them to go preach the gospel in Asia or Bithynia

3. Satan's opposition motivates us to pray for open doors for the gospel ministry

May lead us in different directions to accomplish God's purposes

4. Satan's opposition never thwarts the purposes of God so we should not be frustrated or discouraged or defeated

- part of God's program of trials to bring believers to maturity

- cause us to depend on Him; not to act independently and presumptuously

James 4:13-17

- part of God's guidance strategy to provide direction and open doors elsewhere

Transition: Stedman – opposition underscored for Paul the **value** of these believers: Paul considered the spiritual maturing of these believers in Thessalonica and other places his most important work. He is saying, "I have invested my life in you and your growth into mature, whole people. This is the most important thing in the world. When the Lord Jesus comes, I will glow with pride that you have achieved the changes in your life that I so long to see brought about."

C. Desire Realized -- Saved Saints Bring Family Joy and Reward (:19-20) -- How important are they?

Zeisler: Somehow the significance with which we view our opportunity to love and serve our brothers and sisters in Christ, and those around us, is going to affect the kind of people we are and the evaluation of us that will be true on the Lord's day. Do we love and value those people that Christ has given us to be members of his family? Is it supremely important to us that growth, maturity and depth become true of those around us?

1. (:19a) They are Viewed as Valuable

"For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation?"

Theme of awards at point of graduation

Similar references by Apostle Paul to his disciples:

Rom. 1:13 – the fruit of his service

1 Cor. 9:2 -- the seal of his apostleship

Phil. 4:1 -- his joy and crown

2. (:19b) Their Value will be fully Appreciated at the Return of the Lord Jesus –

When full salvation is realized

“Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming”

“a being alongside of one” – important eschatological term

Time to perform the final evaluation is at the Second Coming; and the only person qualified to make those determinations is the Lord Jesus Himself

1 Cor. 4:5 – *do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes*

- so Paul did not worry about how others evaluated his service in the present
- in fact he was careful not to even be too introspective himself
- his goal was on being faithful to the master building plan that had been revealed to him

3. (:20) Their Value Reiterated

“For you are our glory and joy.”

doxa = sense of that in which one takes pride (1 Cor. 11:7 – woman is the *doxa* of the man)

CONCLUSION:

Zeisler: Looking through a high school yearbook is a very amusing way to spend some time. I recommend it to you if you haven't done it lately. But along with the humor involved I think there is a nostalgia that comes when you check your old yearbook. Yearbooks are part of a large category of things that accomplish that same reflection evaluation purpose in our lives. Diaries, photo albums, scrapbooks, ballads, reunions, dozens of things have been concocted by the human brain to accomplish this purpose of being able to review our lives and check the goals we set for ourselves when we were young.

There is a desire in the heart of man to know whether or not his life has meant something. Whether it has accomplished any worthwhile purpose. That desire is given to us by the Lord, I believe, to reflect on our experience, because there is a day coming when we will go through that process for real and under the most serious conditions. That will happen on the day when the Lord returns. All of us who are Christians or are familiar with the Scriptures know that the day of Christ's return will grant us an opportunity to stand before him and to have him discuss with us what has been important and valuable about our lives. We will have our lives come under his scrutiny and we will receive from him his analysis of the kind of people we have been.

Now let me give you a hint right away. The things that are going to count on the day of the Lord's return concern **people**. God made people to last forever, and from eternity's point of view what matters is what he has been able to use us to accomplish in the lives of people. Those are the clippings that will go in the scrapbook. You may build a thousand widgets in your lifetime, or found a great library, or walk on the moon, but what is going to be measured on the final day is what the Lord has been able to do in your life for the sake of building the character of those who have been created in his image. . .

when the Lord does return the thing that will give us delight is not so much the time we spend in looking at ourselves, but our joy will be when we see what God has done in other lives through

us. We will see the way in which our obedience and service to him has produced growth, maturity and beauty in the lives of others around us.

CHURCH PLANTERS FEEL THE BURDEN OF ENCOURAGING THEIR DISCIPLES TO MATURITY

PART 1: FAMILY FELLOWSHIP -- CHURCH PLANTERS (SPIRITUAL LEADERS) DESIRE TO BE WITH THEIR DISCIPLES

What will be your hope or glory or crown of exultation when the Lord returns??

II. (3:1-5) PART 2: SACRIFICING SECURITY -- CHURCH PLANTERS SACRIFICE THEIR OWN SECURITY TO ENCOURAGE THEIR DISCIPLES TO PERSEVERE

III. (3:6-8) PART 3: FEEDING ON FAITHFULNESS -- CHURCH PLANTERS ARE ENCOURAGED BY FAITHFUL DISCIPLES

IV. (3:9-13) PART 4: PERSEVERING IN PRAYER -- CHURCH PLANTERS CONTINUE TO PRAY FOR THEIR DISCIPLES

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How could Paul have such a strong longing for face-to-face fellowship and personal discipleship when he was ministering to thousands of converts scattered over such a wide geographical area? How did he balance his public ministry to the masses with his more private discipleship ministry?
- 2) How much power does Satan have to oppose our plans and to frustrate our missionary efforts? How active is he in tempting new converts and trying to divert them from the path of true discipleship?
- 3) What will be the ultimate reward for church planters who have faithfully evangelized and discipled others to maturity?
- 4) What is the significance of the frequent use of the plural form “we” throughout the two epistles to the Thessalonians? (rather than Paul just making reference to his own personal ministry)

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Life Application Bible Commentary: Paul predicted persecution, which had been the common

experience of Jesus and the disciples. Jesus sacrificed his physical life, and many of the disciples suffered for the faith – even dying for it. Real discipleship implies real commitment – we must pledge everything to his service. Those who spend their whole lives trying to avoid danger, pain, or discomfort may isolate themselves from being able to contribute or serve at all. If our aim is only to protect ourselves from criticism and hardship, we begin to die spiritually and emotionally. Our lives turn inward, and we lose our intended purpose. When we serve Christ, the trials we face help us grow.

Stott: The apostle refers again to the devil. He is not ignorant of his devices, whether in hindering the apostle's ministry or in tempting his converts to renounce their faith. So Timothy had been sent on both a nurturing and a fact-finding mission. His brief had been to stabilize the Thessalonians in their faith, to remind them that suffering for Christ was unavoidable, and to come back with news of how they were doing.

MacArthur: Satan wants to thwart the progress of God's kingdom much as an army seeks to disrupt the advance of an opposing army. The word translated *hindered* is a military term referring to digging a trench or breaking up a road. One of the countermeasures an ancient army would take against the opposition was to dig a massive trench that would prevent enemy troops from reaching its men. Another way to frustrate the enemy's progress would be to tear up a brick or stone road so that he could not traverse it. Thus Paul depicted the powerful devil as supernaturally obstructing the apostle's strong desire to revisit Thessalonica. Paul did not state specifically how Satan thwarted his desire, but the hindrance could refer to the trouble at Jason's house and the pledge that Jason made (Acts 17:9).

Mayhue: Paul speaks of this whole episode in military terms. He was hindered by Satan from returning to Thessalonica (2:18). The Thessalonians were in danger of being ambushed by Satan's temptations (3:5). Paul was weighed down in Corinth (3:7) and could send only one man as a reinforcement to Thessalonica (3:2, 5).

Then, he gets Timothy's battlefield report (3:6-7) and announces, *you stand fast in the Lord*. They had faced the enemy and refused to retreat. The *if* here would be better translated "*because*", in light of the Thessalonians' resolves. This is certainly the language of spiritual warfare as evidenced by three mentions of stand in the context of putting on the spiritual armor of God and waging war against the spiritual forces of darkness in Ephesians 6:11, 13-14. *Stand fast* (or "*firm*") is a frequent exhortation by Paul to the churches (1 Cor 16:13; Gal 5:1; Phil 1:27; 4:1; 2 Thess 2:15). So Paul's small, newly-trained band of militia had withstood the well-equipped and expertly-prepared army of hell to win the battle. Now their spiritual general, Paul, shouts the victory. Paul's desire that they walk worthy of God (2:12) had surely been achieved by their immovable commitment to Christ.

Stedman: quoting from **Packer:**

My wife and I read every morning a fine devotional book which has been assembled from the writings of Dr. J. I. Packer. The other day he quoted a psychologist on the six marks of maturity. Americans love to take self-examinations, so here is one for you on what it means to be grown up, to be whole, balanced, sane and able to cope with life:

1. The first mark of maturity is the ability to deal constructively with reality, to face facts, to not cover up reality or call it something else, but to deal with it as it is. Mature people do not kid themselves.
2. The second mark is, adapting quickly to change. We all experience change, whether it be physical, at work, in the family, or whatever. I am amazed at how much some of you have changed through the years while I remain exactly the same! Immature people resist change. It makes them nervous. But the mark of maturity is to adapt to change because change is inevitable.
3. The third mark is freedom from the symptoms of tension and anxiety. The worried look, the frown, the ulcers, the palpitations of the heart -- all come because you are upset, anxious and worried. Maturing means you have begun to see that God is in control of this world. He is working out purposes that you do not always understand, but you accept it. He will take you through the deep water, not drown you in it. Maturity means you are learning to trust.
4. Fourth, it means to be satisfied more with giving than receiving. Some of you have recently learned that the joy of Christmas is not getting presents but giving them. To see the joy in someone else's face when they get something they either need or want. That is a sign you are growing up. You are discovering the true values of life.
5. The fifth mark is, to relate to others with consistency, helpfulness and mutual satisfaction. Maturity is learning to get along with other people, to be a help, not a hindrance, to contribute to the solution and not to be always a part of the problem.
6. Finally, maturity is sublimating and redirecting anger to constructive ends. Maturity is the ability to use the adrenaline that anger creates, not to lose your temper and add to the problem, but to correct a situation or to contribute to changing the nature of the difficulty. That is maturing, and that is what the apostle longed for in these believers in Thessalonica.

David Silversides: Christian Love Eternal

Absence not because of indifference to the Thessalonians; detractors giving wrong reasons as to why they had come and wrong reasons as to why they had not come back;

1. Expressing Brotherly Love (:17)

A particular type of bereavement as an orphan; torn away from; a terrible wrench for them to leave; maintained his concern and love for them; emphatic multiplication of phrases and expressions related to the intensity of his concern; important to assure other believers of our love for them and our desire to be with them; aloofness stems from pride

2. Satan and Providence (:18)

How did Satan hinder this desire of Paul? We don't know; When the servants of the Lord aim at the advancement of the truth, Satan uses every means to oppose them; but God is still in control over all; God so restrains Satan to allow us abundant opportunities to make the gospel known

3. Renewed Fellowship in the Presence of Christ (:19)

"coming" = parousia – coming resulting in His presence; to stay with His people; the central feature of our hope is Christ Himself; but within that is seeing the people of God in perfected fellowship; Paul has joy in them now, and anticipates greater joy in being with them in the presence of Christ; all the glory of salvation belongs to the Lord; nevertheless there is a reward of grace for faithful service

TEXT: 1 THESSALONIANS 3:1-5

TITLE: *PRESSING ON TO MATURITY – PART 2: SACRIFICING SECURITY*

BIG IDEA:

(2:17 – 3:13) PRESSING ON TO MATURITY -- CHURCH PLANTERS FEEL THE BURDEN OF ENCOURAGING THEIR DISCIPLES TO MATURITY

INTRODUCTION:

Where are you looking for security? Job? Health? Friends? Family? Co-laborers in the gospel? Why do we call some people insecure? They feel a need for the approval of others; they are threatened if people do not think well of them; they are not resting in the righteousness of Christ as how God views them ... as their ultimate security; they react in ways that are defensive and harmful. They live in anxiety and fear – without the confidence and boldness and peace and joy that should characterize those who are secure. We talk about the Eternal Security of believers – we have nothing to worry about for all of eternity.

How was the Apostle Paul able to make such extreme sacrifices as a spiritual leader and make himself even more vulnerable than he already was? It was because he had learned the lesson that David talked about from Psalm 62 – SECURITY MUST BE FOUND IN GOD ALONE.

Psalm 62 -- Solid Rock Community Church – He Only is My **Rock** and My Salvation – (look through the scriptures for imagery of God as our **Rock**)

SECURITY MUST BE FOUND IN GOD ALONE

I. THESIS STATEMENT / REFRAIN -- TESTIMONY OF A MAN OF FAITH

SECURITY MUST BE FOUND IN GOD ALONE (:1-2)

Heb. word "*alone*" occurs 6 times at the beginning of verses 1,2,4,5,6,9

A. Single Focus of Security -- Sourced in God Alone

B. 3 Images of Security -- Picturing Rest and Salvation

1) Rock -- Security of Steadfastness, Stability

2) Salvation -- Security of Deliverance

3) Fortress -- Security of Protection

C. Confident Boast of God-sourced Security -- "*I will never be shaken*"

II. SECURITY TESTED BY UNFAIR, JEALOUS, AND DECEITFUL ATTACKS (:3-4)

A. Unfair Attacks

1) Unfair in terms of excessive length of time -- "*How long*"

2) Unfair in terms of excessive unbalance in the number and strength of the attacking forces (i.e. unfair sides) -- attacking one man who is very vulnerable

B. Jealous Attacks -- confident boast of these envious attackers

C. Deceitful Attacks

III. THESIS RESTATEMENT / REFRAIN -- AMPLIFIED AND APPLIED

EXHORTATION TO CONTINUE IN SUCH STRONG FAITH --

SECURITY MUST BE FOUND IN GOD ALONE (:5-8)

A. Restatement / Refrain

B. Amplified (:7)

C. Applied to Others (:8)

1. Trust in Him

2. Pour out your heart to Him

IV. SECURITY CANNOT BE FOUND ANYWHERE ELSE (:9-10)

- A. Not from Men (or relationships)
 - 1) Lowborn -- men of low degree
 - 2) Highborn -- men of rank
- B. Not from Possessions
 - 1) Ill-gotten
 - extortion
 - stolen goods
 - 2) Legitimately earned

V. SECURITY CAN ONLY BE FOUND IN GOD BECAUSE OF HIS UNIQUE CHARACTER (:11-12)

- A. We have God's Own Testimony Confirmed Twice Over By Our Experience
 - 1) His Power -- He alone is able to provide security
 - 2) His Love / His Goodness -- He alone cares about us and wants to provide us with that security
- B. We can count on God's Justice

Where did the Apostle Paul find security in the ministry of the gospel?

[Not a good place for a chapter break – must look at this whole section together from 2:17 – 3:13]

4 AREAS OF EMPHASIS FOR CHURCH PLANTERS AS THEY ENCOURAGE THEIR DISCIPLES ON TO MATURITY

- **FAMILY FELLOWSHIP** (last week)
- **SACRIFICING SECURITY** (cover this today)
- **FEEDING ON FAITHFULNESS** (pick up in 2 weeks)
- **PERSEVERING IN PROGRESS**

II. (3:1-5) PART 2: SACRIFICING SECURITY-- CHURCH PLANTERS (SPIRITUAL LEADERS) SACRIFICE THEIR OWN SECURITY TO ENCOURAGE THEIR DISCIPLES TO PERSEVERE IN THE FACE OF HARDSHIP

Paul willing to make himself vulnerable to seek the welfare of the young believers at Thessalonica

A. (:1) **The Compelling Circumstances – The Pastoral Sacrifice**

Overwhelming Pastoral Concern Leads to the Sacrifice of Personal Security

“Therefore when we could endure it no longer, we thought it best to be left behind at Athens alone.”

“Therefore” – entire passage revolves around the deep love and concern the Apostle had for the spiritual vitality of his young disciples; previous verses talked about **Family Fellowship** and his great **Desire** to be personally with them – a desire that Satan had opposed – but a desire that Paul anticipated being realized in the ultimate sense at the return of Christ

“we could endure it no longer” – unbearable suspense to learn of the spiritual well-being of his children in the faith; on pins and needles – look at how Moms have a difficult time when they don't hear any word from their children who are living at college or out of state ... there is a need to know if you have family ties ...

Holy Spirit acts in our life to burden us to the point where we take action

Bruce: originally of keeping out or keeping in water or another fluid (e.g. of a watertight house or of a vessel that does not leak), comes from the latter sense to mean generally “to contain” and then “to endure” as in 1 Cor. 9:12; 13:7

“*we thought it best to be left behind at Athens alone.*” – not something Paul desired ... forced to this negative situation ... balancing different pastoral concerns Still he was able to embrace God’s will without complaining; making the best of the situation

Keathley: *eudokeo* means “to be well pleased, to willingly determine, to think it a good thing to do.” It stresses the willingness, the positive choice. Too often, ministry is performed out of a sense of, “Well, if I have to.” The option the missionary team chose was not done grudgingly.

“*left behind*” – never a good thing – for example ... how does it feel to be left behind in school – have to repeat a grade? How about left behind when others get to go on an exciting trip??

“*alone*” – not normally a good thing either – some of us don’t mind as much as others ... depends on how we are wired ... but loneliness can be a tough road

Look at the value that Paul placed on **Partnership in the Gospel Ministry** – laboring together with other team members – Why would anyone want to go it alone? Yet we traditionally send missionaries out to plant a church on their own ... we pay one pastor and ask him to do the work of the ministry and get the church started ... Why did we so quickly lose sight of this team emphasis in the Book of Acts?? When we go witnessing door to door, we usually think it is best to have two people ...

He understood the principle that “Two are better than one” --

Eccles: 4:9-12 “*Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor . . . A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart.*”

He appreciated laboring with Timothy and Silas – he did not like being left alone in Athens to confront those skeptical philosophers – review background of Acts 17 – Paul and Silas apparently agreed to send Timothy back to Thessalonica and then Paul sent Silas to Philippi or some area in Macedonia

(After coming to Athens to join Paul, Timothy was sent back to Thessalonica, at which time Paul and Silas were “left behind” in Athens. Silas himself returned to Macedonia as well, though this is not specifically mentioned but only implied from the Acts narrative. So Paul was then left alone. Paul left Athens and headed south to Corinth where Silas and Timothy caught up with him upon their return from Macedonia -- Acts 18.1, 5).

Paul did not have much going for him in Athens; distressed him to see their idolatry and intellectualism; they were spiritually bankrupt

Acts 16:21 “*All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas*” – lots of intellectual debate; but no worship of the true God; don’t hear much about the church in Athens down the road in terms of results

Very unselfish in his approach – was not making a sacrifice to be a hero; he had considered the options and felt that this sacrifice was necessary; it was essential; he was going to have to place all of his security in Christ alone to provide for his needs and stand with him in his ministry on his own – until Timothy and Silas could return

McGee: Love is not affection or just a nice, comfortable, warm feeling around your heart. Love seeks the welfare of another. That is the way love is expressed for anyone. If you love someone, you seek his welfare and you actually would jeopardize your own life for the person whom you love.

Athens is named after Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom and the arts. . . Athenians were said to possess the keenest minds among the Greeks, and the University of Athens was the most important school, ahead of those of Tarsus and Alexandria.

B. (:2a) The Competent Colleague – The Precious Sacrifice

The Sacrifice Should be Valuable, Worthy, sufficient to meet the need and get the job done
“and we sent Timothy, our brother and God’s fellow worker in the gospel of Christ”

Paul had a lot of history with Timothy – very valuable relationship; very comfortable ministering together; shared the same perspective on ministry – hard to develop those types of partnerships

Phil. 2:20-22 *“For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus. But you know of his proven worth, that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child serving his father.”*
Here he calls him *“our brother”*

No value just in sacrifice for the sake of sacrifice – you must meet a real need and you must be motivated by genuine love

1 Cor. 13:3 *“And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing”*

Cf. **John 3:16** – the Father so loved us He sent His precious Son {did not affect His security in any way]

1 Cor. 3:9 – another reference to fellow workers with God – *“we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, God’s building.”* [some manuscripts have different word here – “minister, servant”]

The work we are involved in is called the gospel ministry – *the gospel of Christ* – the good news about Jesus Christ – He should be the focal point of our preaching; we are calling people to be united to Jesus Christ

C. (:2b) The Courageous Challenge – The Productive Sacrifice

“to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith”

Not a wimpy mission – how was Timothy supposed to go into such a dangerous environment and accomplish these lofty objectives?? Might have struggled with timidity in his natural personality ... but he knew how to strengthen himself in the Lord and be bold and courageous and step out in faith to tackle some pretty big missions

“strengthen” – used of shoring up a building; make as solid as granite (cf new countertops) --

The basic idea is that of stabilizing something by providing a support or buttress (a projecting structure of masonry or wood for supporting or giving stability to a wall or building), so that it will not totter. The word implies fixedness.

[Used to sell shoring products for trench digging and excavation work] – you don’t want the pressure around you to cause a cave-in

“encourage” at the root there is the idea of enabling a person to meet some difficult situation with confidence

D. (:3-4) The Continuing Conflict – The Providential (Prophetic) Sacrifice

The danger of hard times and persecution had been prophesied

– Forewarned is Forearmed

“so that no man may be disturbed by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this. For indeed when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction and so it came to pass, as you know.”

How can charlatans go around and promise people a health and wealth gospel of good times and prosperity? The message of the NT is clear – we looked at it earlier – “All who live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.”

Christian should never be surprised by the trial of hard times

In Jesus' parable of the soils (**Matthew 13:1-23**), He described the way that some fall away when tribulation or persecution arises because of the Word.

“kept telling you” – imperfect tense – repeated warnings

Hiebert: There is an important principle to note for all those who would evangelize and then follow up (disciple) -- To leave converts unwarned of the possible adverse personal consequences of their acceptance of the gospel is to do them a serious injustice. Yes, God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life, but that plan will always include suffering for the gospel! We must forewarn disciples so they are forearmed (**Acts 14:22**)

MacArthur: The verb rendered *would be disturbed* originally designated the wagging of a dog's tail, but through the years it came to mean, “to allure, fascinate, flatter, or beguile.” When a dog wags its tail, it often does so to draw attention to itself and gain something it wants. Hence *saino*, the root verb of *sainesthai*, later referred to a person who tried to flatter or beguile other people. Paul did not want anyone to lure the Thessalonians away from the truth in that manner, because they had been made vulnerable by persecution and suffering.

Bruce: The active *saino* is used of a dog's wagging its tail and then, with the accusative of the person, of its fawning on someone. Neither of these senses is relevant in this context. **Chadwick** mentions an occurrence of *saino* with the meaning “to perturb mentally” . . . This is the sense required here”

Hendriksen: Afflictions that have been predicted, and that take place in accordance with this prediction, serve to strengthen faith.

E. (:5) The Crafty Charmer – The Purposeless (Futile) Sacrifice

“For this reason, when I could endure it no longer, I also sent to find out about your faith, for fear that the tempter might have tempted you, and our labor should be in vain.”

Sums up much of what we have already covered . . . then goes beyond to add the additional danger of the activity of Satan in trying to derail believers – throw them off the track of faith

Key Question today: How is your faith? How are you doing as a disciple of Jesus Christ to obey His commands and walk by faith? What type of pressures are you facing? How are you responding to that adversity and affliction and persecution?

Satan as tempter – **Matt. 4:3**; 1 Cor. 7:5

Mayhue: Paul was not ignorant of Satan’s schemes (2 Cor. 2:11), nor vulnerable to his methods (Eph 6:11), nor naïve about his intent (1 Pet 5:8), so he takes decisive action by sending Timothy to block Satan’s expected attack. Paul’s chief ministry priority at this point was to see the Thessalonians continue to mature in their walk with God.

Possibility of laboring in vain:

Gal. 2:1-2; cf. 4:11

Phil. 2:15-16

1 Cor. 15:58

CONCLUSION:

How was Paul able to sacrifice his own security, make himself vulnerable and send Timothy back to Thessalonica? Because as we learned from David in Psalm 62 – OUR SECURITY MUST BE FOUND IN GOD ALONE

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What were some of the conflicting arguments Paul entertained about sending Timothy back to Thessalonica?
- 2) What steps could Timothy possibly take to strengthen their faith and encourage them in the face of hard times?
- 3) How does it help you when you are prepared and anticipating hard times in your Christian life rather than being surprised by them?
- 4) In what ways does Satan work to tempt you during hard times? What are some of the lies that come to your mind?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

MacArthur: That love was far more than a mere sentimental desire for social fellowship with the church. It was Paul’s desire to help the Thessalonians fulfill God’s calling to be loyal to the truth and to experience spiritual maturity in their lives. As discussed . . . the enemies of the gospel forced Paul and his companions to leave Thessalonica, creating a potentially dangerous situation (cf. Acts 20:29-32) that increased his concern for the Thessalonians.

A man with a true and faithful pastoral heart is not concerned about his own success or his own reputation; nor is he preoccupied with his own trials. Rather, he is deeply concerned with the spiritual condition of his people, for whom he will suffer and rejoice with an unflagging affection. Paul

exhibited that kind of spiritual care no matter what the response was. He wrote to the Corinthians, “*I will most gladly spend and be expended for your souls. If I love you more, am I to be loved less?*” (2 Cor. 12:15; cf. 2:12-13; 11:28-29).

Mayhue: The apostle was most concerned to build up their faith (3:1-2, 5a), to bolster their courage (3:3-4), and to block or neutralize any temptation from Satan (3:5b). . . These experiences of tribulation for Paul were not just by chance, bad luck, or even an uncontrollable conspiracy. He knew and they knew that God had allowed this to happen and it would work out according to His sovereign will.

Hiebert: Paul well remembered the enthusiastic response that the Thessalonians had given to the preaching of the gospel. But he felt that the missionaries had been driven out before it could be established whether it was a mere emotional reaction or genuine faith. With the persecution sweeping over them would they prove to be mere enthusiastic “stony-soil” hearers who would be offended and forsake the gospel when made to suffer for it? It was this uncertainty that created the burden of suspense for the missionaries and propelled the sending of Timothy. The glad report of Timothy that the Thessalonians had not failed under testing and were standing firm in their faith convinced Paul that their conversion was truly genuine and that they were verily God’s elect. His statement concerning their election was made after the confirmatory evidence was received; the experience of anxiety concerning them dated to the time prior to the reception of Timothy’s report.

Bruce: Paul may have chosen to send Timothy rather than to return personally for any number of reasons. Timothy was the junior member of the missionary team, and Paul and Silvanus were the senior members. Timothy had a Greek father and probably looked Greek. He would, therefore, have attracted no special interest in a Greek city whereas Paul was immediately recognizable as a Jew (cf. Acts 16:20).

TEXT: 1 THESSALONIANS 3:6-8

TITLE: *PRESSING ON TO MATURITY – PART 3: FEEDING ON FAITHFULNESS*

BIG IDEA:

(2:17 – 3:13) PRESSING ON TO MATURITY -- CHURCH PLANTERS FEEL THE BURDEN OF ENCOURAGING THEIR DISCIPLES TO MATURITY

INTRODUCTION:

This past week has been a flurry of graduation activities – Julie graduating from HS along with her homeschool soccer teammates and then Steve receiving his English degree from Princeton. Graduation is a significant milestone because it means you have successfully passed a large number of tests. Lots of students didn't make it this far. Certainly at Princeton you have the cream of the crop intellectually in many respects. Think of all of the report cards that you have received down through the years. It started way back in elementary school – simple marks of Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory. Then it got more defined with letter grades with the ambitious students striving for those A's. Lately Julie amazes me with grades like 105 ... How can you get over 100?? I guess it's like athletes giving 110% effort.

But think about it from **the perspective of the teacher**. Teachers have invested their lives in trying to get their students to learn the necessary material and make progress in that specific discipline. I look at Karen's efforts in teaching math to the homeschool kids at the Heritage Tutorial Service – she takes the results very personally. She feels bad when her students perform poorly. She has a huge stake in seeing them succeed. Why? What's it matter to her if they flunk out? She is conscientious and she is concerned about the future of her students. She longs to see them succeed. In some respects, even though she knows she cannot control how diligently the students work or how seriously they prepare, the report card is somewhat of a report card for her. She needs the encouragement of her students making the effort and of those efforts being productive.

We are switching focus today in our study of 1 Thess chapter 3. We have been in the middle of a four-part series looking at

4 AREAS OF EMPHASIS FOR CHURCH PLANTERS AS THEY ENCOURAGE THEIR DISCIPLES ON TO MATURITY

- FAMILY FELLOWSHIP
- SACRIFICING SECURITY
- FEEDING ON FAITHFULNESS (today's message)
- PERSEVERING IN PROGRESS

The emphasis today switches from the **faithfulness of church leaders** to the **faithfulness of their growing disciples**. But just as in teaching – these two areas are closely related.

This is report card day and thankfully I can report that the Thessalonica believers graduated successfully. Timothy returns from his travels with the good news that the believers have stood firm in the Lord in the midst of much pressure and persecution. They majored in much more important subjects than math and English. They have received grades in faith and love and they have come through with honors. And Paul and Silas and Timothy could not be happier. **In the pressure of ministry, church planters feed on the faithfulness of their disciples.**

III. (3:6-8) PART 3: CHURCH PLANTERS ARE ENCOURAGED BY FAITHFUL DISCIPLES

Church planters have a pressing need to see their disciples standing firm in the Lord and walking in the truth. Think about how it is with us as **parents**. There is nothing more joyful than to see our children doing well spiritually and nothing more heartbreaking than to see them choose the path of rebellion and foolishness. We know what lies down that road. We grieve for the waste of life and opportunity. (NIV)

Prov. 10:1 “A wise son makes a father glad, but a foolish son is a grief to his mother.”

17:21 “To have a fool for a son brings grief; there is no joy for the father of a fool.”

17:25 “A foolish son brings grief to his father and bitterness to the one who bore him.”

19:13 “A foolish son is destruction to his father”

Grief . . . Bitterness . . . Destruction – Solomon certainly knew what type of anguish David had experienced – His own son Absalom chased him off the throne and out of the royal city; Solomon was no picnic to parent either

Not just an OT concept –

3 John 1-4 “I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth.”

[Children – now you know what Mom and Dad want for Mother’s Day and for Father’s Day – flowers and ties are nice . . . but what floats our boat is to see you walking faithfully with the Lord]

A. (:6) Three Ways a Disciple Can Encourage His Spiritual Leaders

[or children can encourage their parents]

- **Faith**

- **Love**

- **Appreciation**

(by Virtue of a Good Report) – cf. report cards

“But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us good news”

Shepherds delight in good news about the condition of their flock

Robert Thomas: “*Just now*” shows that Timothy’s arrival from Thessalonica immediately preceded the composition of the Epistle and probably provided its chief motivation.

Same word normally used for proclaiming the gospel; evangelizing; spreading the good news

The Cycle of Good News –

- proclaim the good news to the unsaved – so exciting you have to share it

2 Kings 7:9 “This day is a day of good news, but we are keeping silent; if we wait until morning light, punishment will overtake us. Now therefore come, let us go and tell the king’s household.”

Urgency of proclaiming the good news

- see God convert them

- receive back the good news that they are maturing in the faith and standing firm

- you feed on that good news as you are motivated even more to proclaim the good news to Others

Let’s look at the 3 subjects that these disciples majored in:

1. **Faith under Fire -- Exhibited under Pressure Situations**

Confirmation of their election; they were the genuine article; deep roots bearing godly fruit –

Willing to depend on God for help against impossible obstacles

Parable of the **soils**

MacArthur: Your faith was real. You were good ground, weren't rocky soil, weren't weedy ground, didn't get choked out, didn't get burned off, you were good ground...good news about your faith, you're real.

Analogy of the **crucible** – trials burning off the dross; left with pure gold and silver
Thanksgiving for changed lives – evident to others; you don't have to toot your horn
Steadfastness of their faith

Study the **Book of James** – In the Practical Realities of Everyday Life Genuine Faith Embraces Fully the Will of God – Faith should be evidenced in all these areas:

- (1:1-18) Trials test our faith with the goal of perseverance (1:2-3, 12)
Are we going to give up and give in or Stand Firm in the Lord?
- (1:19-27) Need to be doers of the Word; obedient – some key areas: (v.22)
 - self control in the area of speech
 - ministry of compassion to those in need
 - personal purity
- (2:1-13) Faith without impartial love is dead (2:1)
- (2:14-26) Importance of good works – vindicate the reality of our faith (2:17)
- (3:1-18) The taming of the tongue and practical wisdom (3:8, 17)
- (4:1-10) Intimacy with God – not friendship with the world; Draw near to God and He will draw near to you (4:4, 8)
- (4:11-17) Submission to the will of God (4:12, 15) – not taking matters into our own hands
Accepting God's role as Judge and the Sovereign master of our destiny
- (5:1-12) Be patient and persevering – takes faith – example of farmer (5:7)
- (5:13-20) Fervent, effectual prayer –takes faith – example of Elijah (5:17-18)

Faith still needed to grow; there was room for improvement; Paul wanted to visit them and fill in any cracks or holes in their faith

What report could others give about your faith? Where are you stepping out and trusting God – walking by faith instead of by sight ... willing to attempt something that is beyond your natural ability ... takes faith to commit to a church planting effort ... doesn't look like much at the start ...

Takes faith to witness in a variety of contexts;

Takes faith not to be anxious about tomorrow, about our finances ...

2. Love in Action toward others

MacArthur: You love God, you love Christ, you love each other, you love the lost.

Gal. 5:6 *“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but **faith** working through **love**.”*

They had certainly applied Paul's teaching in the proper manner:

1Tim 1:5 *“the goal of our instruction is **love** from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere **faith**.”*

[Next week: Paul will be praying for them – that their faith and love grow and abound and not have any holes or cracks that would cause problems]

They should know we are Christians by our love; amazing how the early church demonstrated love in practical ways

Study **1 Cor. 13** to see what Genuine Love should look like in our relationships with other believers

3. Appreciation and Affection -- A High Regard for Spiritual Leaders; Valuing the Partnership

“and that you always think kindly of us, longing to see us just as we also long to see you.”

Phillips: “cherish happy memories of us”

Robert Thomas: Timothy’s report of the kindly feelings of the Thessalonians toward him assured Paul that they had not written him off as an exploiter, disinterested in their welfare. They still maintained a warm spot for him, matching his own tender longing to see them (cf. 2:17; 3:10).

Wouldn’t it be great if people always thought kindly of us ... Paul experienced plenty of slanderous attacks; counted it a blessing when people responded with kindness ...

But not a **man-pleaser**; not a politician – out to please God rather than man

Gal. 1:10 *“For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ.”*

1 Thess. 2: 4 *“not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts”*

Look at all of the curses and name-calling and slander that **Christ endured:**

- Is. 53:3 *“He was despised and forsaken of men”* – prophesied that He would be maligned

- Psalm 22:6-7 *“But I am a worm and not a man, a reproach of men and despised by the people. All who see me sneer at me”* – great Messianic Psalm speaking of His crucifixion

- Matt 10:25 *“If they have called the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign the members of his household?”*

- Matt. 12:24 *“But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, ‘This man casts out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons.’”*

- 1 Pet. 2:23 *“while being reviled, He did not revile in return”*

Look at all of the false charges **levied against Paul:**

- 2 Cor. 10:10 *“For they say, ‘His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible.’”*

- 2 Cor. 12:19-21 – attacks on him at Corinth

- Phil. 1:15-18 – people competing with him from bad motives

Matt. 5:11 *“Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”*

Don’t look for your reward too soon – It is worth waiting for

Still, it is nice when believers think kindly of you as a spiritual leader; it is nice when they want to fellowship with you in person and demonstrate their loyalty and affection and respect and appreciation. These Thessalonian believers were loyal to the Apostle Paul.

Need to express our kindness and appreciation so that our leaders can be encouraged.

Long to see one another – **Acts 20:37**

We have looked at 3 ways a disciple can encourage spiritual leaders; now . . .

B. (:7-8) Three Reasons Church Planters Need Encouragement

1. Pressure and Persecution Abound on the Front Lines

“for this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction”

Suffering is worth it anyway . . . but certainly alleviated by good reports

PreceptAustin:

The idea of trouble, distress or hardship is dominant in Luke 21:23; 1Co 7:26; 2Co 6:4; 2Co 12:10. This is the predominant sense here in 1Thessalonians 3:7 where *anagke* refers to difficult circumstances that come on one with compelling force. . .

Affliction -- (*thlipsis* from *thlibo* = to crush, press together, squash, hem in, compress, squeeze in turn derived from *thláo* = to break) originally expressed sheer, physical pressure on a man. Medically *thlipsis* was used of the pulse (pressure). It is a pressing together as of grapes. It conveys the idea of being squeezed or placed under pressure or crushed beneath a weight. When, according to the ancient law of England, those who willfully refused to plead guilty, had heavy weights placed on their breasts, and were pressed and crushed to death, this was literally *thlipsis*.

In summary, the truth you need to remember regarding afflictions (*thlipsis*) is that

- (1) tribulations have a purpose
- (2) one's response to tribulations demonstrates the reality of one's faith
- (3) temporal tribulations produce inestimable future, eternal glory
- (4) God will avenge tribulations you have endured for His Name and Word

Mayhue: Both words are used together in Job 15:24 (LXX) of one who is terrified and overpowered. It is no wonder then that the Lord appeared to Paul in a vision at Corinth saying, *‘Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city’* (Acts 18:9-10; cf. 1 Cor 2:3). In the midst of intense pressure over preaching the gospel, the good news from Thessalonica comforted Paul and brought great joy.

2. Pastoral Concern Regarding the Maturity of Their Faith

“we were comforted about you through your faith”

the crucible of life will test the reality, depth and maturity of their faith

Since Paul had so great concern for all the churches – reports of steadfastness in faith brought him great encouragement and comfort; he was also saddened whenever he learned of people falling away from trusting the Lord

3. Personal Fulfillment Tied to Perseverance of Disciples

“for now we really live, if you stand firm in the Lord”

church planters are in this business to see fruit that remains

This is the **key phrase** that should dominate our thinking this week. What causes us to really live? Think of the world's perspective – they might say they would really be living the good life if

- they have financial security – no worries; all their needs met
- freed up to travel and do the fun things they have always wanted to do
- received the job promotion that gives them the challenge and opportunity of a lifetime
- chance to party with their buddies and give themselves over to their favorite form of entertainment

For church planters like Paul – it was never about himself – What a statement ... his joy in life is tied to the spiritual well-being of others ... just like for parents it should never be about us – that would be selfish – How are our children doing?

Think of the phrase “Get a life!” – usually directed at someone who is involved in less than significant pursuits ... Paul's emphasis here is surprising.

The real meaning of life; rejuvenation; stimulated to renewed ministry activity

Preach and leave the results to God?? In one sense; but not in a dispassionate sense; we care deeply about the eternal impact on the lives of others; the preacher is not a mere broadcaster; strong affection for others; expresses his desire for others

We have already seen that spiritual leaders function as a tender Mother and as a nurturing Father – that is the type of intimate relationship they have with their disciples

Hiebert: Before there had been a dead weight of apprehension; they felt lifeless and had no enthusiasm. But now in consequence of the news Timothy brought, we live feel like we truly live, not just exist.

The present tense indicates that this is not just a momentary reaction but an abiding inspiration. Paul's words are a vivid rhetorical description of the contrast between the former state of apprehension, when they were ignorant concerning the reaction of the Thessalonians under persecution, and the ease of mind and encouragement produced by the news Timothy brought. They felt that they had been given a new lease on life, could again go on living with a sense of fullness of power and satisfaction. Had the Thessalonians apostatized, it would have been a veritable deathblow to Paul.

Importance of **standing firm**

MacArthur: If you have a strong faith, if you have a strong commitment--that word "stand fast" is a military term, steko. It refers to a refusal to retreat against an attack. Stand your ground under attack. When I see you stand your ground under attack, I really live, I really live. I know you've got your armor on, you're holding up the shield of faith. I really live. To the Corinthians he wrote, chapter 16 verse 13, "Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong." To the Galatians he wrote, chapter 5 verse 1, "Keep standing firm." To the Philippians he wrote, chapter 1 verse 27, "Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ that I may hear of you that you're standing firm." In chapter 4 verse 1, the Philippians again, he said, "Therefore my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, so stand firm in the Lord, my beloved." And in that second letter to the Thessalonians chapter 2 verse 15, "So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us." Always wanted them to stand firm...stand firm. And always the idea was standing against an attack and showing your faith is real, your commitment is strong. That's the delight of the pastor's heart.

CONCLUSION:

How are you being an encouragement to those who are shepherding you spiritually? We need encouragement! You have the power to provide it.

Like cold water to a weary soul, so is good news from a distant land. (Proverbs 25:25)

Have you taken the time to give a cup of cold water to anyone lately? How about spiritual leaders from your past – ones whom you haven't seen for many years. Maybe they would appreciate a word from you.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What helps us to persevere when others don't think kindly of us and attack us unjustly?
- 2) In what practical ways have you demonstrated your appreciation and affection for your spiritual leaders?
- 3) How aware and sensitive are you to the pressures and concerns of your spiritual leaders?
- 4) What is your answer if someone asks you:
 - What floats your boat?
 - What makes you tick?
 - Under what conditions do you consider yourself to be living life to the fullest?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

MacArthur: That must have been a wonderful day. More and more weeks have passed. Paul was now in Corinth, his heart longing to know what was going on. Timothy arrived and at the same time Silas arrived and the news from Timothy was, I love this, "Good news." Rather than using a simple word, he doesn't just say, "And Timothy gave a good report," or "Timothy came back and told us so-and-so." He said, "Timothy brought good news." You know what word he uses? The word "gospel," euangelizo, it's only used in the New Testament everywhere else to refer to the gospel. He brought us such good news I have to use a word that is usually referring to the news of salvation to even express how good it is. He takes the term reserved usually for the message of salvation by grace through faith, and so it was that kind of good news, thrilling news. And it really is amazing. He had such a heart for those people that he gets this report from Timothy and he calls it "gospel," good news, the best news. .

PreceptAustin:

Nothing done or not done in the flesh, no matter how outwardly pious appearing and ceremoniously religious, makes any difference in one's relationship to God. What is external is immaterial and worthless, unless it reflects genuine internal righteousness wrought in a transformed heart by the Spirit as the saint abides in the Vine, Christ Jesus {John 15:5}. The point is that saving faith proves its genuine character by works of love. The one who lives by faith is internally motivated by love for God and Christ {Mt 22:37, 38, 39, 40}, which supernaturally issues forth in reverent worship, genuine obedience, and self-sacrificing love for others. And this was the good news Paul received from Timothy regarding the saints in Thessalonica.

http://preceptaustin.org/1thessalonians_36-8.htm#3:6

Hiebert: Faith speaks of their characteristic attitude Godward, while love is their characteristic attitude manward. Their faith had its most significant exhibition in love toward others, especially their Christian brethren. If their faith separated them from the world, their love united them more closely to each other. The two terms summarize their religious and ethical excellence. The two must always go together. "Paul's formula 'faith working through love' (Gal 5:6) expresses the intimate relationship between the two qualities." . . .

The two nouns, "distress" (anagke) and "persecution," (thlipsis) are linked together under one article, thus forming two aspects of the whole difficult situation in which they find themselves. The former denotes a necessity or compulsion that forces itself upon one, while the latter indicates the crushing pressure to which one is being subjected. Both terms refer to the difficult external circumstances confronting the missionaries. It is precarious to seek to identify their precise cause or character. Findlay points out that the former "signifies outward constraint, whether of circumstances or duty" while the latter points to "trouble from men." But the word rendered "in" is again the preposition epi, "over," and implies that the distress and afflictions continued but the missionaries were able to surmount them and no longer feel them as evil. This helped to make the report so welcome. This reference to their own distress and affliction is a tactful reminder to the readers that Paul was also facing difficulties while away from them.

Mayhue: The relationship had grown so strong that they *greatly desired* to be reunited, i.e. *to see* each other. Paul speaks of this strong yearning in the same terms as a babe desiring mother's milk or his own longing later to see Timothy (2 Tim 1:4) and other churches (Rom 1:11; Phil 1:8).

Steve Shepherd: PROP.- In our text, Paul speaks of good news and pleasant memories that come from his relationship to his Christian brothers and sisters.

- 1- Good news and pleasant memories come when faith is working
- 2- Good news and pleasant memories come when fellowship is enjoyed
- 3- Good news and pleasant memories come when firmness is evident

<http://sermoncentral.com/sermon.asp?SermonID=127858&Sermon%20Good%20News%20And%20Pleasant%20Memories%20by%20Steve%20Shepherd>

David Silversides: Joy in the Saints (3:6-10)

God is the Christians' greatest joy; but there is also joy in the people of God as they manifest His character; apostle has been defending his motives in coming and preaching the gospel to them; charged with coming and leaving and no longer having any care for them; He cared enough to send Timothy to them at sacrifice to himself; expresses joy he experienced when Timothy came back with such a good report

1. A Minister's Joy (:6-8)

Not just "returned" but was sent back from them to Paul; Timothy had become one of them; avoiding any "us" and "them" mentality because we are brethren in Christ; Timothy had just recently returned; they were persevering in the face of discouragement; showed their faith was genuine; looked back with good remembrances and positive feelings of affection; no bitter disillusionment; looked back with fondness to the days when Paul and Silas were among them; Why did they want to see Paul? **Acts 20:37** – elders at Ephesus wept when they realized they would see his face no more; ministers are not to be indifferent regarding the fruit of their labors or the welfare of the souls of men; they should care deeply

TEXT: 1 THESSALONIANS 3:9-13

TITLE: PRESSING ON TO MATURITY – PART 4: PERSEVERING IN PROGRESS

BIG IDEA:

(2:17 – 3:13) PRESSING ON TO MATURITY -- CHURCH PLANTERS FEEL THE BURDEN OF ENCOURAGING THEIR DISCIPLES TO MATURITY

INTRODUCTION:

Today we are finishing a four part series from 1 Thess 2:17 – 3:13 about **Pressing on to Maturity**. The Apostle Paul went to great lengths to defend his ongoing commitment to encourage the new believers at Thessalonica on their pathway to maturity. He wasn't out to take advantage of them. He hadn't left town and forgotten about them. He talked about the importance of **Family Fellowship**; he reminded them of how he **sacrificed his own security** in sending Timothy to check up on them; last week we looked at his incredible joy over the good report that Timothy had brought back – energizing Paul as he **fed on their faithfulness** and spiritual stability.

Immaturity is natural for a baby ... in fact it is the only possible condition; but **healthy growth** must be expected over time or something is drastically wrong. I remember when our older son Rick didn't seem to be developing physically at a normal rate and we took him to the midget doctor to get checked out. Turns out he was just a late bloomer ... but not seeing the growth you expect can be alarming. God is not in the business of producing spiritual pygmies. Last week we talked about the good **report card** that Paul had received regarding the spiritual status of the believers at Thessalonica – especially their rock solid **faith** and active **love** so that they were *standing firm* in the Lord. That was Paul looking into the **past** to see their track record in following Jesus Christ. What type of disciples had they proven to be thus far. Now he looks into the **future** to encourage them to press on and persevere in spiritual growth and progress until Jesus returns.

Just any type of growth won't do. It must be **growth in the appropriate areas**. I've been going to the gym lately because I had some growth in the wrong areas. My added weight was even affecting my sleep patterns – not helpful for Karen's sleep either. Humbling (and costly) to take one of those sleep apnea studies – just to have the doctor write out a simple prescription: eat less, exercise more, sleep more. It's the same spiritually – nothing complicated ... just follow the instruction manual God has given. I would rather see more muscle and less fat. It takes **discipline and perseverance** – but surprisingly what I eat and how much I exercise does seem to make a difference. Go figure! Someone might be growing in their intellectual knowledge of spiritual things but the result will just be a big head rather than spiritual strength. Someone might be accumulating earthly treasures but their heart might not be loyal to God's kingdom.

How do you evaluate your own spiritual growth lately? Have you been growing in the right areas? Or do you need to spend more time in the spiritual gym?

How have you been actively encouraging others to grow? Remember last week that Paul said what really gave him satisfaction in life was seeing the spiritual maturity of others.

Before we look at our passage for today, let's quickly review our Scripture reading passage from **Phil. 3:12-14** – Paul's perspective on his own spiritual growth – what he pursued for himself is exactly the same type of maturity that he exhorts his young converts to pursue. He practiced what he preached. You will appreciate the **parallel thoughts** of these two passages today – Phil 3 and 1 Thess 3.

PRESSING TOWARD THE GOAL IS THE ONLY WAY TO RUN THE RACE OF CONFORMITY TO JESUS CHRIST

Walvoord: "On the one hand, discontent with one's spiritual life can bring discouragement and unnecessary resignation to spiritual defeat. On the other hand, in overestimating one's spiritual attainments, it is easy to become complacent with the measure of transformation which has taken place. Either alternative is falling short of the scriptural standard. What Paul is teaching in this section is that absolute perfection, such as exists in heaven, or attainment of spiritual victory which makes defeat impossible, is never achieved in this life. But there is the possibility of a *high plateau* [I prefer: *growing experience*] of victory in Christ, of joy in the Spirit, and of the satisfaction of having served the Lord acceptably. It is this proper doctrine that the apostle is attempting to teach in this section."

I. THE GOAL IS CONFORMITY TO JESUS CHRIST

THE MOTIVATION OF A LOFTY GOAL:

"in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus" / "the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus"

A. Salvation is Just a Starting Point

B. Christ Jesus Sets the Standard

Rom. 8:28-29 = the purpose for which we have been called by God

C. The Prize is Worthy of the Effort

II. IF YOU THINK YOU HAVE ALREADY "ARRIVED" YOU ARE OFF TARGET

THE DELUSION OF PERFECTION: great passage for refuting those who hold to perfectionism

(just ask their spouse = easier way to refute them)

A. Some People Feel They Have Reached the Spiritual Mountaintop

"Not that I have already obtained it"

He had not received yet all that God has for him.

B. Some People Feel They have Arrived

"or have already become perfect"

He had not been matured yet to the point where he was like Christ.

C. The Reality is That We All Have a Long Way to Go

"Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet"

III. LOOKING AT THE PAST WILL SLOW YOU DOWN

THE PITFALLS OF THE PAST:

"forgetting what lies behind"

A. Weighed down by Sins/Failures of the Past (Heb. 12:1-2) / OR

Complacent because of Past Spiritual Success

(Past Positive Performance is no Indication of Future Success --

cf. the warning on commercials for mutual funds)

B. Tainted by Bitterness and a Lack of Forgiveness / OR

Over confident because of the evidence of the Fruit of the Spirit

C. Resigned to Powerlessness / OR

Distracted from continuing to Rely on the Lord

IV. PRESSING TOWARD THE GOAL IS THE ONLY WAY TO RUN THE RACE

THE CHALLENGE OF PERSEVERING IN MAKING PROGRESS:

A. Requires a Perspective of Hope -- *"I press on"*

- B. Requires a Work Ethic of Diligence -- "*but one thing I do... reaching forward to what lies ahead*"
- C. Requires a Large Dose of Perseverance -- "*I press on toward the goal*"

That is what Paul practiced in his own life – that is the type of race he has been training the Thessalonians to run – that is the same path we must follow – no exceptions ... no shortcuts

[Read 1 Thess 3:9-13]

III. (3:9-13) PART 4: CHURCH PLANTERS ENCOURAGE THEIR DISCIPLES TO PERSEVERE WITH THEM IN SPIRITUAL PROGRESS – 5 AREAS OF SPIRITUAL PROGRESS

A. (:9) PROGRESS IN JOY AND THANKSGIVING

“For what thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account.”

The sense of this rhetorical question is that words simply cannot adequately express to God the thanks which filled Paul’s heart. His joy was overflowing every time he remembered these saints before his God.

Psalm 116:12 *“What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward me?”* vv. 13-19 are the response – including the sacrifice of thanksgiving

Third outpouring of thanksgiving expressed by Paul in this short epistle -- **1:2; 2:13**
 constantly thinking with fondness in his heart of their *“work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ”*

Greek word *“thanks”* is where we get our English word **Eucharist** – to show favor; gratitude
 Other aspects of prayer like intercession for needs will cease when Christ returns; but we will continue to express our thanksgiving and gratitude for all of eternity

We lose sight of **how important a thankful heart** is to God:

1 Thess 5:18 *“in everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”*

1 Cor. 14:16-17 – giving of thanks should be a major component of our corporate worship services

2 Cor. 4:15 *“For all things are for your sakes, so that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God”* – spread of the gospel message and the liberating power of the grace of God should cause giving of thanks to abound ... end result is that God receives even more glory

2 Cor. 9:11 ff – sacrificial giving – when done cheerfully and from a thankful heart – enriches those in need so that thanksgivings to God overflow

Good way to evaluate what ministries to invest in – time, spiritual gifts, money – what will cause thanksgiving to overflow so that God is glorified – be involved in that

Ephes 5:4 *“and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks”* – Pastor Charlie had preached about putting off the old man and putting on Christ – here is one way you do it with your tongue – need to express your thanksgiving

Col. 2:6-7 – marks one who is characterized by maturity – *“Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude.”*

We owe something back to God for all of His rich blessings and encouragement and grace to enable us to progress in spiritual maturity; what we pay back is our thanksgiving

Opposite: lack of contentment; grumbling; complaining; indifference; ungratefulness; failure to fully appreciate God

Our countenance should reflect our joyful and thankful spirit

Joy is the deep-down sense of well-being that abides in the heart of the person who knows all is well between himself and the Lord.

Transition: Constant connection between thanksgiving and prayer – good to study this -- **Phil. 4:6**
Col. 4:2 “Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving, praying at the same time for us as well”

B. (:10a) PROGRESS IN PRAYER -- Persistent Prayer for Renewed Opportunity to See Them and Grow Them to Maturity

“as we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face

1. Frequency of Persevering Prayers

“worked night and day” as well **2:9** – How is this possible??

Praying always – not without break or cessation; but constant pattern at all times of the day and night without long seasons in between of neglect or forgetfulness

Cf. **24/7 Response Center** – all calls received and treated as emergency calls; not dismissed or put on the shelf until later; night or day = no difference

Keathley: Their prayer life was not a haphazard affair. This illustrates the reality of their own faith, their dependence on the Lord, and the genuineness of their relationship with Him. They believed God was in charge and that He answered prayer.

Mayhue: The word Paul uses for prayer (*deomai*) indicates a begging-like passion for God to supply an urgent need.

2. Fervency of Persevering Prayers

Compound word with superlative emphasis = overflowing all bounds, surpassing, superabundantly, surpassingly, beyond measure, exceedingly, quite beyond all measure, overwhelming, over and above, more than enough. It describes an extraordinary degree, involving a considerable excess over what would be expected.

3. Fellowship Goal of these Persevering Prayers

“*see your face*” – If you are not so good with names and faces = not a good thing; faces reveal the individual personality; not just coming to visit the collective entity of the gathered church; he knows them as individuals; Shepherd knows each sheep; sensitive to where they are hurting and where they need help

Robert Thomas: Paul returned to the Macedonian province approximately five years later (Acts 19:21; 20:1; 1 Cor 16:5; 2 Cor 2:13) and in all likelihood made a point of visiting Thessalonica.

C. (:10b) PROGRESS IN FAITH --

“and may complete what is lacking in your faith”

Not a negative thing to note that they had not yet arrived ... there will still areas where their faith needed to grow and mature

Hiebert: The meaning is not that something has gone wrong with the faith of the Thessalonians and that rectification is needed. Rather, Paul clearly recognized that the faith of their converts needed to be brought to its full development. This is indicated by the addition "what is lacking in your faith." Not that the faith they had was defective, but it still needed completing and rounding out

When applied to that which is weak and defective, it denotes setting right what has gone wrong or restoring to a former condition, whether mending broken nets or setting broken bones. And so it means to fit or join together and thus to mend or repair.

For example Mark records

And going on a little farther, He saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who were also in the boat mending (katartizo - present tense) the nets. (Mark 1:19)

Secular Greek used *katartizo* for manning a fleet or outfitting an army with provisions so they would be thoroughly prepared to go to war. This latter secular use has spiritual parallels for the saints in Thessalonica (indeed all saints) needed to be thoroughly prepared and "outfitted"

I think of **outfitters** where you rent canoes or provisions for white water rafting or tubing down a river; you must be sure to take with you everything you need for safety and to have a successful outing

D. (:11-12) PROGRESS IN FELLOWSHIP AND LOVE –

1. (:11) Face-to-Face Fellowship

“Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you”

“our God and Father” –

Combines	Majesty	and	Intimacy
	Rule of God		Provisions and Love of Father
	Transcendence		Warm Embrace
	Universal Program		Personal Guidance

Clear support for **Deity of Christ** – putting Christ on an equal footing

Bruce: The fact that the verb *direct* is singular in Greek, despite its compound subject, has no such theological significance as is sometimes imagined; in such a construction the verb commonly agrees with the nearer subject. But it is significant that Christ is thus associated in action with God the Father.

MacArthur: By calling **God** our . . . **Father**, an address emphasizing personal relationship, and **Jesus our Lord**, an address emphasizing personal rulership, Paul switched the usual popular ideas about God being the ruler and Christ being the one with whom believers have a relationship. The use of **our** before both **God** and **Jesus** underscores the relationship Paul and the Thessalonians enjoyed with both Persons of the Trinity. God came down to be intimate with them as their gracious, loving, and forgiving Father, and Jesus ascended to heaven's throne to be their sovereign Lord..

PreceptAustin: *Kateuthuno* gives a picture of opening up the way by removal of obstacles so that the desired goal may be reached. Paul recognizes the uselessness of personal efforts toward a revisit unless God "clears the way" and removes the obstacles that Satan had previously placed in his path of return which made that path impassable. Paul had learned the secret (Php 4:13-note) that it is God Who "directs our way" and Who Alone is powerful enough to remove all hindrances (1Th 2:18-note) that Satan places in our path. . .

means to make straight, to straighten fully, to guide or lead directly straight towards or upon something, to guide one's way or journey to a place. The idea is that of conducting one straight to a place, and not by a round-about course.

Importance of dependence upon the **Providence of God**

2. (:12) Lavish Love

"and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all men, just as we also do for you"

Difference between love (unselfish sacrifice) and lust (taking advantage of another) – takes that up in chap. 4; provides instructions on loving the brethren

Phil. 1:9 I pray that your love should abound still more and more

Hiebert: Genuine Christian love . . . is the one thing in the Christian life which cannot be carried to excess.

Donald W. Burdick: [gives an excellent summary of *agape* writing that...]

It is spontaneous. There was nothing of value in the persons loved that called forth such sacrificial love. God of His own free will set His love on us in spite of our enmity and sin. [*Agape*] is love that is initiated by the lover because he wills to love, not because of the value or loveableness of the person loved. [*Agape*] is self-giving, and is not interested in what it can gain, but in what it can give. It is not bent on satisfying the lover, but on helping the one loved whatever the cost. [*Agape*] is active and is not mere sentiment cherished in the heart. Nor is it mere words however eloquent. It does involve feeling and may express itself in words, but it is primarily an attitude toward another that moves the will to act in helping to meet the need of the one loved." (Burdick, D W: The Letters of John the Apostle. Chicago: Moody, 1985, page 351)

MacArthur: [*for all*] Other NT commands concerning **all men** include pursuing peace (Ro 12:18); doing good (Gal 6:10), being patient (Php 4:5), praying (1 Ti 2:1), showing consideration (Tit 3:2), and honoring (1 Pe 2:17).

Connection between Love and Holiness – essential for holiness (1 John 3:14; 4:20); If we do not love the brethren, we do not love God Himself and we do not have zeal for conformity to God's character

E. (:13) PROGRESS IN HOLINESS AND HOPE –

"so that He may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints"

Details about eschatology are not the key point here. We know the Lord Jesus is returning and we know He is coming soon.

“*blameless*” – not to be found perfect in holiness, but blameless, without reproach, spotless before God in His eschatological judgment (different from Greek work used for elders being without reproach)

Luke 1:6 – used of the priest Zacharias and his wife Elizabeth who were found walking blamelessly in all the commandments

Phil. 2:15 – prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent (in contrast to this corrupt world)

1 Thess 2:10 – the conduct of the missionary team among them had been blameless

1 Thess 5:23 – be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ

MacArthur: Paul prayed that there would be no grounds of accusation because of unholiness. Cf. 1Co 1:8; 2Co 11:2; Eph 5:25-27; 1Pe 5:16, 17; Jude 24.

“*His saints*” = “*His holy ones*” – angels, or **believers who have died**, or both??

4:14 – seems to be the context here; characteristically used of **saints** in the NT

[Mark 8:38 references the angels – but spells it out in the text; also OT prophecies reference angels]

All of the apostles make the same connection between the truth about our future destiny impacting our present pursuit of Purity – Why study eschatology?? It has a practical effect on how we live right now:

John: **1 John 2:28 – 3:3**

Peter: **2 Peter 3:10-14**

What’s the connection? Jesus is coming back soon ... so what? Why a Push for **Purity** and **Holiness**?

- Accountability – our Lord and Judge is returning
- Urgency – time is growing shorter; opportunities must be seized; small window and it is shrinking – time to show our faith by our love is now
- Family Identity – need to live consistent with our nature as children of God
- Consistency of Values – where my treasure is ... there my heart will be also
- Boldness and Confidence – Victory assured; no need to fear men; seek to please God

CONCLUSION:

Remember the **questions** we asked at the beginning:

- How do you evaluate your own spiritual growth lately?
- Have you been growing in the right areas?
- How have you been actively encouraging others to grow?

Sometimes churches establish goals and measure their progress with those **thermometer charts** – you’ve seen them – how far has the mercury risen towards the completion of the goal? Maybe it is a building campaign where you need to raise \$1.5 million dollars; maybe some type of attendance contest where you are tracking the results.

What we have seen in today’s passage is that there are **5 key barometers** to our spiritual progress that we should be monitoring: are we making healthy progress in the area of

- Joy and Thanksgiving
- Prayer
- Faith
- Fellowship and Love
- Holiness and Hope

The Lord Jesus is returning soon ... Have we put our faith completely in Him for our salvation and our spiritual growth? Do we understand that we can accomplish nothing on our own? Are we persevering in the pathway of spiritual progress? Start by picking just one of these areas and making a plan this week to apply more discipline and seek the Lord's grace and strengthening power.

Jude 24: "Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy; to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen."

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Would people characterize you as a joyful and thankful person? How do you express your thanksgiving to God?
- 2) If Paul was "*working night and day*" (2:9), how could he say here that he was praying night and day for them?
- 3) Do we limit our active love to just the brethren or do we carry out Paul's exhortation to show love to all people?
- 4) How many references can I find in the NT that make the connection between our knowledge of end time events and our practical pursuit of holiness and purity?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

MacArthur: Purpose of Paul's Prayer:

- a perfecting faith
- a prospering love
- a purifying hope

Even though the true pastor will have joy and gratitude because of his people, he will still realize the need for prayerful intercession on their behalf. He will understand that their lives are not yet perfect and that his ministry among them is incomplete. For those reasons he, like the apostle, will engage in sincere intercession to God that he may have opportunity to minister again among them (cf. Rom. 1:8-12; 15:5-7, 13; 2 Cor. 1:3-5; Eph. 1:15-21; 3:14-21; Phil. 1:3-11; Col. 1:9-12; 2 Thess. 1:11-12; Philem. 4-7).

Robert Thomas: The final accounting Paul alludes to will take place in the personal "*presence of our God and Father.*" The local force of *emprosthen* ("*in the presence of*") obtains whenever this preposition relates appearance before a judge (Matt 27:11; 25:32; Luke 21:36; 2 Cor 5:10).

Constable: This is the first explicit reference to deficiencies in their spiritual condition – deficiencies in their spiritual condition – deficiencies due more to immaturity than to waywardness. Up till now Paul described them as having the characteristics of new Christians. Now he said they were deficient in certain respects, as a child is deficient in comparison with an adult. In chapters 4 and 5 Paul ministered to some of these deficiencies.

Keathley: Since all believers will be transformed to be like Christ when He returns (1 John 3:2), Paul could not be referring to their personal condition in heaven. However, one of God's objectives for all believers is experiential sanctification or change into the character of Jesus Christ so that when we stand before the Lord at the Bema or Judgment Seat of Christ, we will be blameless (not sinless or faultless experientially) and will be able to receive rewards for faithful service.

There is an important connection between verses 12 and 13. Verse 13 begins with "so that" which introduces it as a result clause (The Greek has *eis to* + the infinitive to express intended result.). This is a further request, but one which is also a result of the preceding request.

As believers grow in their faith, and as their hearts are strengthened in love, their inner life is stabilized or strengthened with the result their inner motives and desires become more and more pure and blameless before the Lord. We will never face our sins in heaven, for they are remembered no more (Rom. 8:1; Heb. 10:14-18), but our works will be tested as to their quality. Are they the results of the work of the Spirit, or the product of selfish motives (cf. Gal. 5:16f.; 1 Cor. 4:1-5)?

Before God they should be holy, separated to God in their hearts and habits. Paul longed that when Jesus Christ would return He would find them blameless before men and holy before God.

David Silversides: Knowing Our Dependence Upon God

Spiritual progress depends upon an increasing awareness of our dependence upon God and the expression of that dependence in prayer and acceptance of God's providence. See God as One who hears and answers our prayers. Children of God grow in dependence rather than independence. Unity of the persons in the one Godhead stressed here in action (as well as their distinction and harmony).

1. Depending on the God of Providence (v.11)

For some reason it had not been possible for Paul to return yet to the city of Thessalonica. Satan had hindered his attempts. We are not in charge of our circumstances. We need to recognize that God sets the limits of what we can do in His providence. We spend too much time fretting over what is not in our power to do.

2. Depending on the Lord as the Author of Holy Love (:12-13a)

The Holiness that Christ Imparts is Acceptable Before the Father (:13a)

Holiness of being Christlike = conformity to person of Christ and righteousness of God = all of the moral law of God; If love is absent, then there will be a lack of holiness; true godliness will show itself in love to the brethren, in seeking their good and desiring their welfare

3. Depending on the Lord to Complete the Work (:13b)

[argues against the premill position – glorified Christ cannot reign in a millennium of unperfected persons; Christ comes with his saints and for his saints in one single coming]

Let us not lose sight of the hope that is set before us of perfected holiness; it will be ours; now we see the sin still within us and how much ground still needs to be covered; how much progress we need to make; Jude 24

TEXT: 1 THESSALONIANS 4:1-8

TITLE: SANCTIFIED SEX

BIG IDEA:

15 PRINCIPLES REINFORCING SANCTIFIED SEX – PART ONE

INTRODUCTION:

The Apostle Paul directs his thoughts particularly to men here – but all can listen in and benefit from the principles. It is significant that he chooses this topic of appropriate sexual relations as the first practical area to address after his opening section defending his pastoral commitment to the believers at Thessalonica. God has a lot to say on this topic – not surprising since He is the Creator who designed our bodies and understands how we are wired; men and women are wired very differently.

First we must understand the immoral conditions that were pervasive back in the culture at that time. We tend to think that our current state of morality is at an all-time low . . . but a case could be made that things were actually far worse back in Thessalonica:

- a port city with all of the transient problems associated with business and commerce
- no background of Judeo-Christian ethics and restraint
- temple prostitutes associated with false worship of the day
- rampant immorality of all types including blatant homosexuality

[One major difference today is the graphical content so readily available via different media sources like the TV and the Internet.]

Homer Heater: When the impact of the Gospel was first made on the pagan culture of the Greeks and Romans, immorality was rampant. Faithfulness in marriage was rare, divorce was common, aberrant sexual practice was widespread, and unwanted children were aborted or killed subsequent to birth.

Secondly, we must understand what **our culture** is saying to us about sex:

MacArthur: Several obvious tenets constitute the world's immoral, unscriptural outlook regarding sex. [MacArthur lists 6 tenets held to by most secular humanists:]

- First, people are basically good and all but the most heinous activities should be tolerated. Therefore, virtually any kind of consensual sexual activity is good (except for child molestation), especially if one views sex as merely a way to personal gratification.

[The argument is that these are personal behavior choices made in the privacy of one's bedroom where no harm results to the participating individuals or to society = very naïve

1 Cor. 6:18 *“Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body.”* Proverbs speaks of the irreversible finality of devastation that results **2:18-19** *“For her house sinks down to death and her tracks lead to the dead. None who go to her return again, nor do they reach the paths of life.”*]

- Second, since sexual activity is only a biological function, it is normal and necessary to engage in it without placing on it any moral restrictions. [Views man as no different than any other

animal – might be interesting for them to study how even some species of animals are monogamous -- cf. **1 Cor. 6:13** – “*Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food, but God will do away with both of them. Yet the body is not for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body.*”]

- Third, since “casual” sex is just another form of fun and pleasure, it is permissible to enjoy sexual activity recreationally, any time with any consenting partner. [In God’s eyes, no such thing as casual sex – very serious matter – directly tied to the commitment of the sacred marriage covenant with responsibilities pledged by both parties and a bond that should be lifelong.]

- Fourth, fulfilling one’s sexual desire is a major goal in life, more important than developing meaningful personal relationships.

- Fifth, instant gratification is more important than delayed satisfaction. Therefore, having premarital sex is legitimate and preferable to waiting until marriage to have sex.

- Sixth, enjoyable sexual intercourse is the most important factor in establishing a good marital relationship. Therefore, the early stage of every romantic relationship should include sex. The couple should live together to determine sexual compatibility and fulfillment before they marry. [Doesn’t it make sense that you test drive one another to see if you are compatible before taking the next step of entering into marriage?]

**(:1-2) GENERAL PRINCIPLES: APPLY TO ANY AREA OF HOLINESS –
OUR PRESENT LEVEL OF OBEDIENCE SHOULD BE THE FOUNDATION FOR
STRIVING FOR EXCELLENCE IN PLEASING GOD**

(rather than the excuse for settling for mediocrity)

“Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus,”

Major transition in the epistle; moving from Paul’s defense of his pastoral ministry to his exhortations and instruction regarding specific topics; he first gives four general principles and then takes up the specific topics where truth needs to be reinforced. His tone is not browbeating them into submission but coming alongside of them and exhorting and imploring them to take seriously this call to sanctification.

1. (:1a) Follow the Directions

“that, as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk”

- God has provided specific instruction through apostolic instruction that comes to us via the inspired Scriptures
- These instructions are sufficient to guide how we live [*walk*] in this particular area
- We continue to have access to those same instructions

the one who says he abides in Him (Christ) ought (present tense = is continually indebted) himself to walk in the same manner as He walked. (present tense = as Jesus habitually walked)

(1John 2:6)

Ray Stedman illustrates the Christian's walk noting that walking... merely consists of two simple steps, repeated over and over again. It is not a complicated thing. In the same way, the Christian life is a matter of taking two steps, one step after another. Then you are beginning to walk. Those two steps (are seen in Colossians 3). Paul describes them as, "*Put off the old man*" (see Colossians 3:5-10) and "*put on the new.*" (see specific attitudes and actions in Colossians 3:12-Colossians 4:6) Then repeat them. That is all. Keep walking through every day like that. That is how Scripture exhorts us to live."

Probably no area where we see so clearly the distinction between the saved and the unsaved than in our views regarding the Sanctity of Sex; we are concerned with Purity ... with Holiness

Always an adventure when someone inadvertently fails to follow the recipe ... leads to a cooking disaster of one type or another; Far worse to intentionally ignore what we know are divinely inspired directions; you have questions about the propriety of some action?? First check the directions. This is not an area where God is silent and lets every person make up their own rules.

2. (:1b) Goal = Please God

"and please God"

A second general principle – applies to every area of our conduct ... but in our context for today -- Not the gratification of our own personal sexual desires [this speaks directly against certain sexual practices]; or even merely the gratification of those desires of our sexual partner; All things must be done to please and glorify God. God has revealed that only **marriage** provides the proper context for sexual relations between a husband and wife – only that pleases God – and even within that context one must be acting in a loving and unselfish way (**1Cor.6:20**)

... concepts of sexual morality founded upon anything other than **God's holiness** always pervert God's standards of sexual moral purity.

How do we know that proper sexual conduct within the boundary of marriage pleases God?

- Institution of Marriage before the Fall – leave and cleave commands (**Gen. 2:24-25** "*For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.*") Marriage and sexual relations are all part of what God initially created as good and innocent (without evil); tainted by the Fall like everything else so that even within marriage we must pursue sanctified sex; but still marriage is pleasing to God (cf. **Is. 62:5**)

- **Heb. 13:4** "*Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.*"

- **1 Cor. 7:38** "*So then both he who gives his own virgin daughter in marriage does well, and he who does not give her in marriage will do better.*" [Don't disparage the single state]

God has much to say about the proper roles of a husband and wife; angels are apparently watching the relationship to see how things play out (**1 Cor. 11:8-10** "*For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake. Therefore the woman ought to have a symbol of authority*

on her head, because of the angels.” Apparently angels are very concerned that God’s created order function as He intended it to with men and women fulfilling their proper roles)

If you are considering some type of sexual activity – just ask the simple question: Will this please God? You cannot justify your actions on some type of selfish basis ... I need this ... this will draw us closer together . . .

Not some type of **legalistic lifestyle** – we have been freed from bondage to sin and from the weight of the law to obey the law of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit

3. (:1c) Goal = Pursue Excellence

(just as you actually do walk), that you may excel still more.”

We are not called to mediocrity; we cannot afford the danger of playing too close to the line of sinful behavior. Some people approach the topic of sex from the standpoint of how close can I get to that line of prohibited behavior ... that is the wrong orientation ... leads inevitably to crossing the line; We should want to be an **exemplary husband** in this area

What does excellence involve in this area? The specific principles will develop this. Apparently the newlywed couple on their honeymoon still has room to grow and excel in this area of pleasing God as they mature in every other area.

PreceptAustin: *Excel* (perisseuo from perissós = abundant, exceeding some number, measure, rank or need, over and above, more than sufficient from peri = in sense of beyond) means to exceed a fixed number or measure and so to exist in superfluity, to cause to superabound, to be superfluous, to be in excess, to overflow, to be in affluence, to excel or to be in abundance. The implication is that there is considerably more than what would be expected. The idea is to overflow like a river out of its banks!

Richeson: The words “*more and more*” point to spiritual growth. It is not enough to exist as a Christian, we must move toward excellence. It is one thing to park ourselves in the Christian life but it is another thing to prevail in it. God wants us to move beyond the status quo. We should ask ourselves whether we are making any progress in the Christian life. We do not tell our spouses that we love them the day we get married and that is supposed to last them for the rest of their lives! Neither do we live the Christian life with one fell swoop. Each day with the Lord should be sweeter than the day before but it will take work. Status quo in the Christian life always means stagnation, deterioration and decay in holiness. Doctrine precedes duty and precept precedes practice. The Christian life is not a set of rules but a set of principles. The design of the Christian life is to teach us God’s viewpoint on life by forming that viewpoint into principles. When we apply those principles by faith God transforms our lives. Principles are lifeless without application.

Keathley: It seems that far too often some Christians just want to hear new truth. Certainly, God wants us to grow in the knowledge of His Word, but we also need the exhortation to excel still more in the truth we know; our goal should be to press on to greater and greater appropriation of the truths which we already know and are already practicing, but to only a limited degree.

4. (:2) Ignorance is Not an Option

(familiar expression: Ignorance is no excuse – here it is not even possible)

“For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.”

What planet are you living on? You know what is right and wrong in this area of sexual relations. Paul is not presenting anything new or surprising ... just reinforcing previously delivered commands.

Note that these are divine commandments ... not suggestions or alternative lifestyle options or whatever floats your boat or different strokes for different folks; these are backed by the authority of the Lord Jesus Himself

These apply universally ... not culturally differentiated ... just as true for our culture today as back in the first century church at Thessalonica

Those first **4 general principles** can be applied to any area of morality – to all of the areas that Paul deals with in this chapter – love for the brethren; responsible work ethic

- **Follow the Directions**
- **Please God**
- **Pursue Excellence**
- **Ignorance is Not an Option**

You can do the math – $15-4 = 11$... so that is how many specific principles remain -- #5 thru #15

Note the connection to Paul’s earlier emphasis on **Faith, Love and Hope**:

- You need to walk by faith in the area of sanctified sex – not feelings or experience
- You need to pursue love rather than lust
- You need to have an eternal perspective in view rather than short term gratification

Stott: From his general exhortation to please God, Paul moves on to some specific ways in which we should do so, especially in the areas of **sexual self-control** (3-8), **daily work** (9-12) and **bereavement** (13-18). It was J. E. Frame who made the attractive suggestion that these were the topics which Paul had in mind when he issued his threefold exhortation in 5:14 to *“warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak.”* For these seem to have been the three groups in the Thessalonian church who needed special help. So Paul urged “the idlers”, who were neglecting their daily work, that if they loved each other they would earn their own living. He reminded “the timid” or “the faint-hearted” (RSV, REB), who were anxious in their bereavement about their friends and relatives who had died, of the Christian hope of Christ’s return. And to “the weak”, who lacked the strength to resist sexual temptation, he spoke of God’s call to purity and honour.

Sex, work and death continue to be three major human preoccupations, so that Paul’s teaching on these subjects has about it a ring of relevance.

(:3-8) SPECIFIC PRINCIPLES: APPLY TO THE TARGET AREA OF SANCTIFIED SEX (SEXUAL PURITY)

5. (:3a) **God’s Will for You = Sexual Purity** -- a specific aspect of sanctification

“For this is the will of God, your sanctification”

“will of God” – not His determinative will but His desire for you

Note that Satan has a will for your life that he is lobbying for as well

Progressive aspect of *sanctification* is what is in view here

Stedman: What do we mean when we say a thing is holy? Look at your Bible and it says, "Holy Bible." What makes it holy? The land of Israel is called, "the Holy land," and the city of Jerusalem is called, "the Holy City." Why? There is a quality about all three which they share in common. They all belong to God. The Bible is God's book, Israel is God's land; Jerusalem is God's city--they are God's property! That is why they are holy, they belong to God. Perhaps one of the most helpful ways of expressing the will of God is to put it in that very practical way. The will of God is simply that you may become God's property. "This is the will of God, your sanctification; that you become God's property."

Sanctification has to do with our what we set our mind on! Be careful where you allow your thoughts to wander. Every believer potentially has God's power to control their thought life or at least to take ungodly thoughts captive (see **2 Cor 10:3-5**).

6. (:3b) [Negative Perspective] Abstinence is the Only Approach to Sexual Immorality *“that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality”*

Note, Paul does not say: completely abstain from sex – **1 Tim. 4:3** Paul speaks against *“men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude; for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer.”*

Some helpful insights here into Sanctified Sex

- the standards of God’s Word and all of its principles must be applied
- Prayer is key – **1 Peter 3:7** (look at next week) *“You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker (weaker vessel), since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered.”*

Sexual immorality is a very broad term – applies to all types of deviant sexual behavior as well as premarital sex and adultery; The command is to **ABSTAIN** – very clear; no confusion here; the culture is not abstaining; participating fully; glorifying immorality; mocking those who abstain

Look at the humanistic arguments in the academic world regarding the role of **teaching abstinence** to unmarried teenagers – they scoff at this approach – they have already given up the battle; they are willing to live defeated lives – their only objective is how to minimize the collateral damage – concerned with unwanted pregnancies but not with the harmful effects of immorality – focus on advocating the use of contraceptives – let’s promote “Safe Sex” --

* * *

Look at the **loaded language** in just one recent article --

Editorial: [Teenagers and Pregnancy](#) – New York Times, June 17, 2009 (this past Wed)

Between 1991 and 2003, increased contraceptive use among **sexually active** [Do you want to be labeled inactive? Why not use the word immoral?] teenagers played an important role in driving down teenage pregnancy rates. Since then, according to a new report from Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health, contraceptive use by teens has declined while their sexual activity has remained unchanged [Would it have increased apart from the abstinence only instruction?]. This is a worrisome shift — and it has bearing on the coming budget battle in Congress.

The report's authors, Dr. John Santelli, Mark Orr, Laura Lindberg and Daniela Diaz, said they found a decrease of about 10 percent in contraception use that is consistent with recent gains in the teenage birth rate.

They suggest, not unreasonably, a link between the shift in use of contraception and one of former President George W. Bush's **great social-policy follies: highly restrictive abstinence-only sex education programs that deny young people information** about sexually transmitted diseases, contraceptives and pregnancy. [To the extent these programs even mention [contraceptive approaches], typically it is to disparage their effectiveness.]

Responding to mounting evidence of **the program's danger** as a public health strategy, many states now decline to participate, forgoing federal money.

To President Obama's credit, his budget plan would direct current funds now devoted to the abstinence-only programs, along with some additional money, to a **new** teenage pregnancy prevention **initiative**, with an emphasis on **comprehensive** sex education.

This **science-based effort** to protect the health of young people and reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies should win support from lawmakers on both sides of the aisle — and both sides of the abortion divide.

A second article: "Like teenagers, computers are built to hook up" (June 16, 2009)

Demanding that users abstain from net will never work when they need it for their jobs.

Better to practice safe hex

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2009/jun/16/computer-security-abstinence>

* * *

In one sense the world has a point ... *Can a leopard change its spots??*

Jer. 13:23 "*Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then you also can do good who are accustomed to doing evil*" – had a great time at the beach – you learn very quickly certain things about your skin – if you have a fair complexion and you don't apply enough sunscreen, you quickly burn – You might long for a deep, rich tan ... but you cannot change the laws of nature and how your skin responds to intense sunlight; Human depravity is a spiritual law; you cannot overcome it with will power; the world does not have the power to abstain from sexual immorality. They can change the standard to just an external one so that the Pharisees can claim to never have committed adultery; but Christ quickly exposes their self

righteousness with the insight regarding the internal dimension of lust (Matt. 5:28 “*but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart*” – the famous President Jimmy Carter verse) – this has been called every man’s battle – it is always with us because our sin nature is ever present

(Job 31:1; Phil. 4:8; James 1:14-15).

But let’s not redefine what constitutes sin and where the problem really lies – it is not just with the unwanted consequences of premarital sexual activity ... it is with the immoral nature of that activity itself.

God commands us to Abstain from sexual immorality – and remember he is primarily addressing men here as we will pick up with and continue next week ...

* * *

Cf. ministries like True Love Waits

<http://www.lifeway.com/tlw/>

* * *

Al Mohler comments on Bristol Palin remark that abstinence for teenagers is not realistic:

Is sexual abstinence realistic for teenagers and young adults? Well, abstinence is certainly not realistic when teenagers put themselves or are put into a situation where sexual activity is likely. At some point, sexual abstinence becomes very unrealistic indeed.

The real issue for Christian teenagers and their parents is not to debate whether sexual abstinence before marriage is realistic or not. The larger and more important issue is that sexual abstinence until marriage is the biblical expectation and command. Once this is realized, the responsibility of all concerned is to ensure that expectations and structures are in place so that abstinence *is* realistic.

The debate over whether abstinence is realistic or not misses the more important issue -- abstinence must be *made* realistic.

Parents and teenagers must make certain that adequate protections and expectations are in place so that sexual abstinence is very realistic indeed. Far too many Christian parents allow their teenagers to be part of the "hooking up" scene of teenage culture. In that highly sexualized context, sexual abstinence would appear unrealistic in the extreme.

Premature pair dating and unsupervised liaisons, set within the supercharged culture of teenage sexuality, can put teenagers into very vulnerable situations. Asking whether sexual abstinence in those contexts is realistic can appear almost irrational.

Those who reject the norm of sexual abstinence for teenagers will leap on Bristol Palin's statement as evidence for their cause. But the real issue here is our responsibility to ensure that abstinence is made realistic and *stays* realistic. Anything short of this is truly "not realistic at all."

<http://www.christianity.com/christian%20living/features/11599789/>

CONCLUSION (to Part 1):

How is Sanctified Sex even possible then for believers??

1 Cor. 10:13 *“No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.”*

Must guard against opportunity for sexual immorality; don't place ourselves in contexts that would feed our sinful lusts

Must recognize that temptation will come .. but how we react is key (James 1)

The battle is first won in the arena of our thought life

Follow the Directions God has provided; remember: **Ignorance is not an option**

Must have the positive orientation to want to **please God** and **pursue excellence** in this important area

God's will for you is sexual purity ... **Abstain from sexual immorality** in any shape or form

15 PRINCIPLES REINFORCING SANCTIFIED SEX – PART TWO

Continuing from where we left off last Sunday.

“It began very innocently,” **Mark Sanford** the Gov of SC explained in his news conference this week after he returned from spending six secretive days in Argentina with his mistress – a euphemism for committing adultery. From some email chats to deeper emotional involvement and then a full blown affair – such is the stuff of **unfaithfulness in marriages**. The governor voted to impeach President Bill Clinton after the Monica Lewinsky affair – saying: “He lied under a different oath, and that's the oath to his wife, So it's got to be taken very, very seriously.” It is interesting that he is resisting the pressure to resign, even though he applied that standard of discipline to Bill Clinton: "it would be much better for the country and him personally (to resign). I come from the business side. If you had a chairman or president in the business world facing these allegations, he'd be gone." Quotes like that are coming back to bite him as his own sins are exposed. Certainly the sin of lying and deceit is closely attached to that of marital infidelity.

Republican National Chairman Michael Steele responded with some degree of moral outrage, explaining that elected officials are "held to a **different standard**" and that they need to "behave themselves." What is this “different standard” business -- Like critics are being severe in calling this a serious character and judgment issue that merits removal from office. We just wish that all men were held to the **same standard** of taking sin seriously and viewing it as God views it.

These type of **lurid soap opera intrigues** seem to be exposed every week – if it is not politics (cf. Nevada Senator **John Ensign** -- On June 16, he announced that he had conducted an extra-marital affair with a campaign staffer, who is the wife of one of his full-time Senate staff

members.) it is in the world of entertainment – with Jon and Kate + 8 apparently being exposed as + others as well. Those are just the affairs hitting the media. What about all of the immoral sexual relationships in the Christian community that are flying under the radar every week? We can't get all judgmental and smug and boast that such things could never happen in our marriages. We are in the midst of a wicked and perverse generation with danger and temptation all around us. Look at the outlook of the Greek culture quoted by **Desmosthenes** in his oration Against Neaera: “We keep mistresses for pleasure, concubines for our day-to-day bodily needs, but we have wives to produce legitimate children and serve as trustworthy guardians of our homes.” Is our culture far behind in its corruption??

Bruce: A man might have a mistress (*hetaira*) who could provide him also with intellectual companionship; the institution of slavery made it easy for him to have a concubine (*pallake*), while casual gratification was readily available from a harlot (*porne*). The function of his wife was to manage his household and to be the mother of his legitimate children and heirs.

That is why it is so important to get a grip on these **15 principles** reinforcing sanctified sex that Paul lays out in this passage. It only takes obeying **one** of them and you can make the right decision when faced with temptation. But we have **15** to guide us.

4 General Principles:

- **Follow the Directions**
- **Please God**
- **Pursue Excellence**
- **Ignorance is Not an Option**

2 Specific Principles:

- **God's Will for You = Sexual Purity**
- **Abstinence is the Only Approach to Sexual Immorality**

As we explore **Principle #7**, we are starting off with a phrase that has been much debated [spend most of the time here – the other principles are easy to understand]

“*that each of you know how to possess his own vessel*” – [NAS, NAB] -- two main possibilities:
- Look at the different English translations

1) control your own body – vessel would then be the male sexual organ

Remember, Paul is addressing the men specifically here

NRS: *that each one of you know how to control your own body in holiness and honor,*

NIV *that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable*

2) acquire a wife for yourself and enjoy sexual relations with her alone
(the preferred view)

Acquire or gain control of someone external to self = a wife

RSV: *that each one of you know how to take a wife for himself in holiness and honor,*

GNT: *Each of you men should know how to live with his wife in a holy*

and honourable way

- Need to study the verb *ktaomai* that is used here – “acquire, procure, possess”
(used 7 times in NT)

Homer Heater: “to gain possession of something external to oneself” – that alone would decide the case

[only translated “*to possess*” in the Perfect tense]

Bruce: George Milligan suggests from the papyri that *ktaomai* was beginning to be used in popular language for to “*possess*” or “*take possession*” in the sense of to “*use properly*” or “*control*”, but the evidence is slender.

Matt. 10:9 instructed not to acquire money to take with them on the trip

Luke 18:12 – give tithes on all that you newly acquire; otherwise you would continually be paying tithes on the same money you own

Acts 1:18 – “*now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity*”

Emphasis is not on controlling what he already has, but on obtaining something

Acts 8:20 – “*that the gift of God may be purchased with money*”

Acts 22:28 – “*With a great sum obtained I this freedom*”

Luke 21:19 = only difficult passage – “*In your patience possess ye your souls*”

NIV = “*By standing firm you will save yourselves*” = **gain** deliverance for the soul

Study the usage in the **LXX** – for Hebrew *qanah* = get, acquire

Gen. 4:1 *I have gotten a man-child through the help of the Lord*

Gen. 25:10 *Abraham purchased a field to bury Sarah*

Gen. 39:1 Potiphar bought Joseph from the Ishmaelites

Gen. 47:23 *Joseph acquired the Egyptian people and the land*

Ex. 15:16 speaking of God having redeemed the people of Israel

***Ruth 4:10** *Boaz acquired Ruth the Moabitess to be his wife* = strong support

2 Sam. 12:3 purchasing a lamb

Prov 8:12 speaking of wisdom

Eccles 2:7 *I bought male and female slaves*

Is. 43:24 *You have bought me no sweet cane with money*

Jer 13:1 *a linen waistband*

Jer 19:1 *buy a potter's earthenware jar*

Lev 25:14 speaking of buying in general

2 Kings 12:12 *timber and hewed stone*

Is. 11:11 speaking of repossessing rather than initially acquiring – *the Lord will again recover the second time with His hand the remnant of His people*

Amos 8:6 the poor

Theological Wordbook of the OT – a commercial financial acquisition of movable goods; the usual word for buying something

[payment of some type of **dowry** behind the expression??]

- Need to study the noun for “*vessel*” – 23 NT usages – metaphor for wife or body?

Used of material possessions – Matt. 12:29; Mark 3:27; Luke 17:31

Used of some type of container or jar – Luke 8:16; John 19:29; Rev. 2:21

Used of some other object

Acts 10:11 – a sheet being held by four corners and holding all kinds of animals

Used of people as a whole – would certainly include the body

Acts 9:15 *he is a chosen vessel unto me*

Rom. 9:21 *to make one vessel unto honor*

Rom. 9:22-23 *vessels of wrath . . . vessels of mercy*

2 Cor. 4:7 *have this treasure in earthen vessels*

2 Tim. 2:21 *a vessel unto honor*

[Extra-biblical usage – a cognate early Akkadian word (*lahanattu*) combines the meanings of “vessel” and “harlot, darling”]

- Need to study **the context** – Support for *vessel* = wife:
 - the presence of the emphatic possessive pronoun “*his own*” – it would be redundant to modify one’s own body with this emphatic pronoun
 - But what about **1 Cor. 6:18** “*He that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body*”; also 1 Cor. 7:4 – **Hiebert** *to idion* – diff. expression
 - context is all about fidelity of sexual relationships within the marriage context
 - context shows that Paul is focusing on the responsibility of the men – “defraud” ...
 - parallel passages of **1 Cor 7:1** and **1 Peter 3:7**
 - qualification of “*in sanctification and honor*” fits better how you treat your wife

Stott: Again, the contrast in Paul’s phrase “*in holiness and honour, not in passionate lust*” can readily be understood as presenting alternative views of marriage; they can hardly be seen as alternative styles of self-control.

Bruce: The difficulty with the translation “*take a wife*” lies in the noun. For *skeuos* means a vessel, utensil, instrument or container, which appears to express a very derogatory concept of woman in general and of marriage in particular. Reference to woman as a “container” seems in later Judaism to have been an established (and demeaning) euphemism for sexual intercourse.

[**Hiebert**: One other possibility – **Frame** (and others) propose to place a comma after the word *vessel*, interpreted as “*wife*,” and divide the verse into two parts. “that each one of you [who is already married] respect [know the value of, treat with respect] his own wife; that each of you [who are not yet married] get his own wife in the spirit of consecration and honor.”]

Now that we know what the phrase means, we can derive our seventh principle:

7. (:4a) [Positive Perspective] Focus Your Sexual Attention on Your Own Wife -- Remain Faithful -- Fidelity in Marriage is God’s Provision for Sexual Fulfillment and Avoidance of Immorality --

Each – no one gets a pass

Paul recognizes the power of man’s sexual drive; he understands how hormones work; he understands the temptations men face ...

Double standard back in Paul's day; culture looked with much more tolerance on men indulging their sexual lusts than on women being adulterous or unfaithful; Paul particularly focusing on the men in this passage

Piper: The specific application of love in view here in our text is abstaining from sexual immorality. Abounding in love for all men is incompatible with sexual promiscuity.

Verses 4-5 apply the principle even more specifically: Paul addresses the men and admonishes *"that each one of you know how to take a wife for himself in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like heathen who do not know God."*

The parallel between verse 4 and **1 Corinthians 7:2** is so close that I am persuaded the RSV is more correct here than the NIV, which says, "Each of you should learn to control his own body," instead of "Each one of you should know how to take a wife for himself." 1 Corinthians 7:2 says "Because of temptation to immorality (the same word as verse 3 in our text), each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband." I think the words *"each man should have his own wife"* in 1 Corinthians 7:2 mean basically the same as the words *"each of you should know how to take his own vessel"* in verse 4 of our text.

(Other reasons are that the normal meaning of *ptaomai* is acquire not possess or control; the context is similar to **1 Peter 3:7** where vessel means the wife not the man's body; the emphatic "his own" seems to contrast with someone else's, but if it refers to ruling his own body that would be an odd contrast.)

So it seems to me that the meaning of verse 4 is that men should stop trying to satisfy their lusts by sexual immorality, using prostitutes or seducing other men's fiancés or wives. Instead they should take their own wives.

* * *

What about **the Single State** – just not being addressed here – must look at **1 Cor 7** passage; Requires special grace from God to be content in this state; but then there are definite advantages when it comes to undistracted Christian service

Stott: We [singles] too must accept this apostolic teaching, however hard it may seem, as God's good purpose both for us and for society. We shall not become a bundle of frustrations and inhibitions if we embrace God's standard, but only if we rebel against it. Christ's yoke is easy, provided that we submit to it. . . . Alongside a natural loneliness, accompanied sometimes by acute pain, we can find joyful self-fulfillment in the self-giving service of God and other people.

* * *

Kenneth O. Peterman: Remain Faithful to your Spouse in a Soap Opera Society

In light of all the soap opera immorality on TV ... Christians must be especially careful not to get comfortable with the world's standards and value system.

- Remember the one flesh relationship that God has established
- Remember that God hates immorality and divorce
- The unique union of husband and wife illustrates a similar union between Christ and the church

- Pursue forgiveness and reconciliation – not divorce – “hardness of heart” is the common denominator of every divorce (Matt. 19:8); Involves or is associated with:

- stubbornness (Acts 19:9)
- disobedience (Heb. 3:8)
- selfishness (Matt. 25:24)

If devotion and honor must be demonstrated between members of the body of Christ – how much more should we honor our spouse? **Rom. 12:10** “*Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love*”

Unfaithfulness reveals the presence of a toleration for lying (**Jer. 23:14**) – “*I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem an horrible thing: they commit adultery, and walk in lies*”

- lying to self, spouse and God

1 Cor. 7:2 – This admonition does not demonstrate a low view of marriage (as some suggest), but it does evidence a respect for the power of our sexual needs and desires.

Both partners have sexual rights and expectations that need to be honored.

8. (:4b) [Positively:] Honor Your Wife -- The Wife is Worthy of Sanctified Sex and Special Honor

“*in sanctification and honor*” = pursue sexual relations in the context of marriage rather than fornication or adultery (those would not be consistent with sanctification and honor) ... and even there (in marriage) in the proper attitude of treating your wife with honor and respect

Don't take advantage of your wife; includes the concept of self control and tenderness since it is set in contrast to lustful passion; certainly don't pressure your wife or treat her in any way that would be offensive

This caveat answers the objection that Paul was portraying a very demeaning view of marriage

Should we just let our feelings govern our actions??

Hiebert: Christians must not allow their desires to dominate them and make them the slaves of passion.

Stott: The fact that marriage is the only God-given context for sexual intercourse does not mean that within marriage there is no need for restraint.

Honor is associated with a **recognition of worth**

Peterman: We do this by acknowledging good personality characteristics or effective temperament traits, by recognizing positive contributions and by depreciating negative ones. Honor is also associated with speech. We can't abuse them with the “silent treatment” or try to shout them down.

Must think of positive ways that we can show honor to our wives and treat them with respect –

Colorado Statement on Biblical Sexual Morality

Sex in marriage should be an act of love and grace that transcends the petty sins of human selfishness, and should be set aside only when both partners agree to do so, and then only for a limited time of concentrated prayer (1 Cor. 7:3-5). Thus we affirm that sex in marriage should be enjoyed without selfishness. We do not believe that sex should be withheld as a way of controlling, punishing, or manipulating the behavior of a spouse. We reject the morality of any sexual act, even in marriage, that does not express love seasoned by grace. We believe no sexual act

can be moral if it is driven by selfishness or ambition for power.

9. (:5) [Negatively:] Deny Lust -- Lustful Passion Has No Place in the Life of a Believer
“not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God”

Knowing God should make a difference in our morality – quite an indictment to be characterized as the heathen or the pagans who have no knowledge of the one true God

1 Peter 1:14-16

Understand and avoid what feeds your lust

Other verses: **Rom. 1:24-25** – makes the connection between lust, immorality and a wrong view of God

Also: Gal. 5:16; Eph. 2:3; 4:22; Col. 3:5

Titus 2:11-12 *“For the **grace** of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age”*

Description of unsaved = those who *do not know God*: 1 Cor. 1:21; 2 Thess. 1:8; Ps. 79:6; Jer. 10:25 – **Mayhue**

Piper: Sexual desire in itself is good. God made it in the beginning. It has its proper place. But it was made to be governed or regulated or guided by two concerns: honor toward the other person and holiness toward God. Lust is what that sexual desire becomes when that honor and that holiness are missing from it. . .

In summary then, lust is a sexual desire that dishonors its object and disregards God. It's the corruption of a good thing by the absence of honorable commitment and by the absence of a supreme regard for God. If your sexual desire is not guided by respect for the honor of others and regard for the holiness of God, it is lust. ...

Why should we ever live like the Gentiles???

Keathley: We should note that Paul did not say the heathen do not know about God. The reason, they behave as they do is because they do not know God personally, even though they may know about Him. When a person comes to know God by faith in Jesus Christ, not only should his attitudes toward sex and marriage drastically change, as he gains a knowledge of the Word, but he also discovers that God gives him the ability to handle sexual temptation as he couldn't before. Knowing God intimately is fundamental to living a life in sanctification and honor. This is why both having relationship with God (through faith in Christ) and maintaining a close walk with Him (through daily intimate fellowship) is vital to having and keeping a pure walk before God.

Colorado Statement on Biblical Sexual Morality

But while sex is designed to be pleasing, not all sexual pleasure is ethical. Feelings are extremely unreliable as guides to the morality of sex. As a matter of fact, it is possible for sinful men and women to experience a form of physical enjoyment and degrees of emotional, psychological, and spiritual fulfillment even in sexual conduct that

God considers abhorrent. For this reason, the Bible gives many solemn warnings against appealing to human passion or lust as the basis for our definition of moral sex (Rom. 1:24, 26; 13:13-14; 1 Thess. 4:5; 2 Tim. 2:22; 2 Pet. 3:3; 1 John 2:15-17; Jude 18). Our sex lives are moral only when conducted according to God's standards. When engaged in according to these guidelines, sexual activity is enriching, fulfilling, and eminently blessed.

10. (:6a) Don't Violate God's Standards

"and that no man transgress"

Sin is transgression of God's righteous standards; crossing the line and rebelling

Bruce: Only used here in NT; force is of crossing a boundary – here of crossing a forbidden boundary, and hence trespassing (sexually) on territory which is not one's own. – Jerome: to transgress the permitted bounds of marriage

Some men should wear one of those **dog collars** associated with the invisible fence – so when they go outside of their boundaries, they would get that unpleasant shocking sensation to force them back to reality; our conscience is intended to act in that fashion ... but we can sear our conscience so that we lose the value of its checks and balances ... we need to be sensitive to our conscience about what is holy and unholy; the culture works hard at desensitizing us

11. (:6b) Don't be a Cheater

"and defraud his brother in the matter"

Context still talking about sexual issues – not business dealings or legal dealings

Unmarried woman = The father of the woman has **rights**; the daughter should be able to enter into marriage with her virginity intact

Married woman = the husband of the woman has **rights**; he is your brother in the Lord (or even in the general sense of humanity this would still be cheating – but especially repugnant given your **family connection** – shocking that Paul views this type of behavior happening within the Christian community = within the same church)

Here you can see that Paul is more directly addressing the men than the women

Certainly adultery involves **cheating on your wife** – other terrible sins often associated – look at David and Bathsheba – ended up killing Uriah;

What an **awful testimony** when believers end up cheating and defrauding one another instead of living in love and purity

12. (:6c) Fear the Lord = the Enforcer and Judge of God's Standards

"because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you"

We are never to be spiritual vigilantes = taking judgment and vengeance into our own hands; yet the Lord is a just and powerful Judge and Avenger
Rom. 12:19; Deut 32:35; Ps 94:1; Heb. 10:30

John 5:22 *"For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son"*

2 Thess 1:7-9 *when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, 8 dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,*

Interesting emphasis on the **Triunity of God** again in this passage – here we have Jesus referenced – followed immediately by identifying the work of the Father and that of the Holy Spirit

13. (:7) Fulfill Your Moral Calling

“For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification.”

The Election to the Standard (Who set the standard and wants us to keep it?)

This is a killer verse for those who take an **easy believism** approach – as if you can embrace Jesus as your Savior and your get-out-of-hell-free card and avoid any commitment to a changed life. God has not brought us into His family to remain in a state of impurity. Conversion turns us around and starts down that path of progressive sanctification.

Bruce: The mention of *impurity* confirms that the subject of v 6 is sexual rather than commercial behavior.

Hiebert: God took the initiative in bringing us into union with Christ. That call, mediated through the preaching of the gospel at Thessalonica, took the readers out of paganism and placed them into God’s blessed kingdom. **That call carries moral implications**, both negative and positive.

14. (:8a) Submit to God’s Authority

“Consequently, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God

Mayhue: The word translated reject is a strong word that indicates “rejection with finality”. This seems to be the picture of one who claims to be a Christian, but demonstrates a pattern of behavior which indicates that the profession of faith was counterfeit (cf. Matt 13:20-22; Heb 6:4-8). The outcome is that the fornicator rejects God, not man.

Believers who are truly repentant and seeking God’s forgiveness will recognize the seriousness of rejecting God by violating His standards –

Cf. David **Ps 51:4** *“Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight – that You may be found just when You speak, and blameless when You judge”*

15. (:8b) Submit to the Control of the Holy Spirit

“who gives the Holy Spirit to you.”

Holy Spirit was given to us as a valued gift and for a lofty purpose;

Holy Spirit ... not Unholy Spirit;

We are not to grieve the Holy Spirit or resist His control in any way;

Implies the power to obey the standard in those who have the Holy Spirit

Key passage: 1 Cor. 6:12 – 7:1

CONCLUSION (to Part 2):

All it takes is to follow one of these 15 principles and you will stay on the right track; Paul provides 15:

4 General Principles:

- #1 **Follow the Directions**
- #2 **Please God**
- #3 **Pursue Excellence**
- #4 **Ignorance is Not an Option**

11 Specific Principles:

- #5 **God's Will for You = Sexual Purity**
- #6 **Abstinence is the Only Approach to Sexual Immorality**
- #7 **Focus Your Sexual Attention on Your Own Wife**
- #8 **Honor Your Wife**
- #9 **Deny Lust**
- #10 **Don't Violate God's Standards**
- #11 **Don't be a Cheater**
- #12 **Fear the Lord**
- #13 **Fulfill Your Moral Calling**
- #14 **Submit to God's Authority**
- #15 **Submit to the Control of the Holy Spirit**

shows how important this topic is and what the dangers are to believers; must take sexual sin seriously; We need to love others who have fallen in this area and encourage them that God is faithful and just to forgive and restore them if they repent and turn to the Lord Jesus Christ. We do not want the knowledge of these principles to puff us up and make us self righteous. We must each strive by the grace of God to remain faithful to our own wife in the midst of a corrupt culture.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why do all Christians, even those already growing, still need strong exhortations to watch their conduct and guard against temptations? When is good not good enough?
- 2) How can we discover the will of God for our lives from this important passage? How does this emphasis differ from the usual topics discussed under this same heading?
- 3) Why is sexual purity such an essential component of sanctification? Why does Paul focus so much attention on this one area?
- 4) Why does the world have such a strong reaction against public policies that teach young

people the importance of abstinence before marriage?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Keathley: The missionaries had laid a doctrinal foundation and then taught them the moral obligations of that doctrine. This was Paul's practice and forms a precedent for us: first doctrine, then duty; precept and then practice. Doctrine should lead to godly practice, but a godly practice that is in keeping with God's Word as to its character and the means (root to fruit). Learning to live and please God is a matter of biblical instruction. It is neither natural nor innate. Without the Word, there is simply no way any of us are going to be able to walk as we should so we are able to please the Lord. Over and over again in the Old Testament we read that God's people are to walk in His ways, statutes, and laws, i.e., according to the Word (Lev 26:3; Deut 5:33; 8:6; 10:12; Josh 22:5).

William MacDonald: Chapter 4 opens with a plea to walk in holiness and thus to please God, and closes with the taking up of the saints. Paul was probably thinking of Enoch when he wrote this. Notice the similarity: (1) Enoch walked with God (Gen. 5:24a); (2) Enoch pleased God (Heb 11:5b); and (3) Enoch was taken up (Gen. 5:24b; Heb 11:5a). The apostle commends the believers for their practical holiness, but urges them to advance to new levels of accomplishment. Holiness is a process, not an achievement. (MacDonald, W & Farstad, A. Believer's Bible Commentary: Thomas Nelson)

Vine: The character of a person is expressed in his will; therefore, since God is holy, He can desire only holiness for His children, ("but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior because it is written, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY." 1Pe 1:15, 16-notes 1Pe 1:15; 16). But all men by nature follow the desires, thelemata, of the flesh and of the mind, ("Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest." Ep 2:3-notes), and are thus in inveterate opposition to the will of God, ("those who are in the flesh cannot please God" - Ro 8:8-note ("A natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him and he cannot understand them because they are spiritually appraised." 1Cor 2:14). Hence the need of all men for a new and spiritual birth, ("Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God...Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'" - John 3:5, 7), and for that conversion to the state of the child which is the evidence of the new birth, ("Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven" - Matthew 18:3); and hence, too, the need for that lifelong discipline in which is learned by experience "what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God," ("I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." Ro 12:1,2 -see notes Ro 12:1; 12:2) ("so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God." 1Pe 4:2-note) (Vine, W. Collected writings of W. E. Vine. Nashville: Thomas Nelson)

Our Daily Bread: Re purity:

In the forests of northern Europe and Asia lives little animal called the ermine, known for his snow-white fur in winter. He instinctively protects his white coat against anything that would soil it. Fur hunters take advantage of this unusual trait of the ermine. They don't set a snare to catch him, but instead they find his home, which is usually a cleft in a rock or a hollow in an old tree. They smear the entrance and interior with grime. Then the hunters set their dogs loose to find and chase the ermine. The frightened animal flees toward home but doesn't enter because of the filth. Rather than soil his white coat, he is trapped by the dogs and captured while preserving his purity. For the ermine, purity is more precious than life. - H G Bosch

William Barclay: Chastity was the one completely new virtue which Christianity brought into the world. In the ancient world sexual relationships before marriage and outside marriage were the normal and accepted practice. The sexual appetite was regarded as a thing to be gratified, not to be controlled. That is an attitude which is not unfamiliar today, although often it is supported by specious arguments. The Christian ethic insists on chastity, regarding the physical relationship between the sexes as something so precious that indiscriminate use of it in the end spoils it." (Barclay, W: The Daily Study Bible Series, Rev. ed. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press)

Ray Stedman: "Words like immorality do not seem to register with many people. Let us put it plainly: Immorality means no sexual wrongdoing; no pre-marital sex (no fornication); no extra-marital sex (no messing around with someone else's wife or being faithless to your own husband or wife); No homosexual sex (that is very clear in Scripture in many places); No pornography (no standing in the news section at the airport and flipping through Penthouse or Playboy magazine and getting yourself turned on by looking at the pictures; that is sexual fantasy and that is wrong, too, as Jesus pointed out). So to "flee immorality" means to have none of those things going on in your life. (from Handling your Sex Drive)

Focus on the Family: Colorado Statement on Biblical Sexual Morality

God intends sex to be a source of satisfaction, honor, and delight to those who enjoy it within the parameters of the moral standards He has established.

God intends sex to be a source of satisfaction, honor, and delight to those who enjoy it within the parameters of the moral standards He has established. Biblically speaking, human sexuality is both a *gift* and a *responsibility*. At creation, the gift of sex was among those things God declared to be "very good" (Gen. 1:31). What's more, the sexual relationship is invested with a profound significance in that it brings together a man and a woman within the context of the shared image of God (Gen. 1:27). Because sex is God's idea, and because it touches the image of God in human life, it is very important that the holiness of sexual behavior be diligently preserved. In fact, sexual behavior is moral only when it is holy (Eph. 1:4; 5:3; 1 Thess. 4:3-7; 1 Pet. 1:14-16).

Not only is sex good in itself; it is also given to serve good purposes. At creation God made it very clear that sex functions in two ways: it generates "fruit" (Gen. 1:28); and it enables relational "union" (Gen. 2:24). In other words, sexuality does not exist merely for its own sake. Rather, sex fosters human nurturing, both through the union of husband and wife and also through the enrichment of society through the building of families and communities. God also

made sex to reflect the mysterious spiritual relationship He will one day enjoy with all redeemed humanity following the wedding supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7, 9).

According to God's plan, sexual intimacy is the exclusive prerogative of husband and wife within the context of marriage. Sexual morality, on the other hand, is everyone's concern. It matters to single individuals, to families, and to society. Most of all, it matters to God.

Sex that honors God's guidelines and standards is pleasurable. He designed sexual activity to be physically enjoyable, emotionally satisfying, psychologically fulfilling, and spiritually meaningful because He delights in the joys and pleasures of His creatures (Song of Sol. 4:1-16). Men and women who honor God's standards for sexual behavior please Him as well as themselves (1 Cor. 6:20; also note analogy in Isa. 62:5).

But while sex is designed to be pleasing, not all sexual pleasure is ethical. Feelings are extremely unreliable as guides to the morality of sex. As a matter of fact, it is possible for sinful men and women to experience a form of physical enjoyment and degrees of emotional, psychological, and spiritual fulfillment even in sexual conduct that God considers abhorrent. For this reason, the Bible gives many solemn warnings against appealing to human passion or lust as the basis for our definition of moral sex (Rom. 1:24, 26; 13:13-14; 1 Thess. 4:5; 2 Tim. 2:22; 2 Pet. 3:3; 1 John 2:15-17; Jude 18). Our sex lives are moral only when conducted according to God's standards. When engaged in according to these guidelines, sexual activity is enriching, fulfilling, and eminently blessed.

We want to warn against deceptions that hinder or forestall this blessing of God upon our enjoyment of the wonderful gift of sex. We also want to help men and women understand God's good plan for sexual conduct, and thereby to realize all the joy, satisfaction and honor God offers to sexual creatures made in His image.

Based on our understanding of biblical teaching, we make the following declarations. We do not claim that these declarations cover everything the Bible says on sexual morality. But we do believe they highlight standards that are critical for our time.

1. Desire and experience cannot be trusted as guidelines to the morality of sex (Rom. 8:5-8; 13:14; 1 Cor. 2:14; 1 Thess. 4:3-5; 2 Tim. 2:22; James 1:14; 1 John 2:15-16; Jude 19). **Instead, the morality of sex is defined by God's holiness** (Lev. 20:7-21, 26; 1 Cor. 6:18-19; Eph. 1:4; 5:3; 1 Thess. 4:3-7; Heb. 13:4; 1 Pet. 1:15-16).

Thus we affirm that men and women are free to enjoy sex in any way that honors God's holiness. We affirm that God made sex to be physically enjoyable, emotionally satisfying, psychologically fulfilling and spiritually meaningful, and that only sex that honors God's holiness can fully realize the complexity of His design at every level. We affirm that concepts of sexual morality founded upon anything other than God's holiness always pervert God's standards of sexual moral purity.

2. God's standard is moral purity in every thought about sex, as well as in every act of sex.

Sexual purity can be violated even in thoughts that never proceed to outward acts (Job 31:1; Matt. 5:28; Phil. 4:8; James 1:14-15). Sex must never be used to oppress, wrong or take

advantage of anyone (1 Thess. 4:6). Rape, incest, sexual abuse, pedophilia, voyeurism, prostitution and pornography always exploit and corrupt and must be condemned (Lev. 18:7-10; 19:29; 2 Sam. 13:1-22; Prov. 6:26; 23:27; Matt. 5:28; 1 Thess. 4:3-7; 1 Pet. 4:3; 2 Pet. 2:13-14). Thus we affirm that God requires sexual moral purity in thought as well as in deed. We affirm that sexual desire must be disciplined to be moral. We affirm that thoughts of indulging sexual desire by outward acts of sexual sin are inward sins of lust. We deny that stimulating lust by images of sexual sin can be moral at any age or under any circumstances. We believe that no sexual act can be moral if driven by desires that run contrary to the best interests of another human being. We believe no sexual act can be moral that treats persons as impersonal objects of sexual lust. We reject the idea that thoughts about engaging in sexual sin are not immoral if not expressed in outward acts. We reject the idea that pedophilia, voyeurism, prostitution or pornography can ever be justified.

3. God's standards for sexual moral purity are meant to protect human happiness (Prov. 5:18-19; 6:32-33; John 15:10-11), but sex is not an entitlement, nor is it needed for personal wholeness or emotional maturity.

Thus we affirm that unmarried singles who abstain from sex can be whole, mature persons, as pleasing to God as persons who are faithful in marriage. We affirm that sexual celibacy is a worthy state for mature men and women (Matt. 19:12; 1 Cor. 7:1, 8; Rev. 14:4), and that lifelong celibacy can be a gift from God (1 Cor. 7:7). We affirm that freedom for service without obligations to spouse and children is a worthy advantage of the unmarried life (1 Cor. 7:32-35). We reject the idea that persons are not "whole" without sexual intercourse. We affirm that all persons, even unmarried teenagers, can rely on God for strength to resist sexual temptation (1 Cor. 10:13). We deny that unmarried teenagers must have sex and cannot abstain from sex before marriage.

4. God calls some to a life of marriage, others to lifelong celibacy, but His calling to either state is a divine gift worthy of honor and respect (1 Cor. 7:36-38). No one is morally compromised by following God's call to either state, and no one can justify opposing a divine call to either state by denying the moral goodness of that state.

Thus we affirm that God is pleased with those He calls to serve Him through the loving expression of sexual intimacy in marriage. We also affirm God is pleased with those He calls to special witness and service through a life of celibacy apart from marriage. We reject the idea that God's Word ever represents the loving expression of sexual intimacy in marriage as morally compromised.

5. Sexual behavior is moral only within the institution of heterosexual, monogamous marriage. Marriage is secure only when established by an unconditional, covenantal commitment to lifelong fidelity (Gen. 2:24; Mal. 2:14-15; Matt. 19:4-6; Mark 10:6-8; 1 Cor. 7:39; Rom. 7:2; Eph. 5:31), and we should not separate what God has joined (Mal 2:14-15; Matt. 19:6; Mark 10:9). Christians continue to debate whether there are a limited number of situations in which divorce is justifiable (Deut. 24:1-4; Matt. 19:9; 1 Cor. 7:15), but all agree that divorce is never God's ideal; lifelong commitment should always be the Christian's goal.

Thus we affirm that God established the moral definition of marriage, and that it should not be changed according to the dictates of culture, tradition, or personal preference. We deny that the morality of marriage is a matter of mere custom, or that it should be allowed to shift with the tide

of cultural opinion or social practice. Furthermore, we affirm that God views marriage as an unconditional, covenantal relationship that joins sexual partners for life. We oppose the reduction of the moral obligations of marriage to a business contract. We do not believe that divorce for reasons of dissatisfaction, difficulty, or disappointment is morally justified.

6. Marriage protects the transcendent significance of personal sexual intimacy.

Heterosexual union in marriage expresses the same sort of holy, exclusive, permanent, complex, selfless and complementary intimacy that will some day characterize the union of Christ with the redeemed and glorified Church (Eph. 5:28-33; 1 Cor. 6:12-20).

Thus we affirm that intimate sexual union in marriage is a reflection of the intimate moral and spiritual union Christ will some day enjoy with the redeemed and glorified Church. We do not agree that the meaning and purpose of human sexuality can be defined on the basis of personal preference or opinion. We oppose the idea that sexual morality is simply a matter of culture, tradition, or individual aspiration.

7. Sex in marriage should be an act of love and grace that transcends the petty sins of human selfishness, and should be set aside only when both partners agree to do so, and then only for a limited time of concentrated prayer (1 Cor. 7:3-5).

Thus we affirm that sex in marriage should be enjoyed without selfishness. We do not believe that sex should be withheld as a way of controlling, punishing, or manipulating the behavior of a spouse. We reject the morality of any sexual act, even in marriage, that does not express love seasoned by grace. We believe no sexual act can be moral if it is driven by selfishness or ambition for power.

8. Sex outside of marriage is never moral (Exod. 20:14; Lev. 18:7-17, 20; Deut. 5:18; Matt. 19:9,18; Mark 10:19; Luke 18:20; Rom. 13:9; -1 Cor. 6:13,18; Gal. 5:19; Eph. 5:3; 1 Thess. 4:3; Heb. 13:4). This includes all forms of intimate sexual stimulation (such as foreplay and oral sex) that stir up sexual passion between unmarried partners (Matt. 5:27-28; 2 Tim. 2:22). Such behavior offends God (Rom. 1:24; 1 Thess. 4:8) and often causes physical and emotional pain and loss in this life (Prov. 5:3-14). Refusal to repent of sexual sin may indicate that a person has never entered into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:32; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Eph. 5:3-5; Jude 13; Rev. 22:15).

Thus we affirm that God's blessing rests on sexual intimacy only when it occurs within the boundaries of marriage. We deny that sex outside of marriage is justified for any reason. We reject the idea that sexual intimacy outside of marriage can be moral if partners are honest, consenting, or sufficiently committed. We oppose the portrayal of sexual sin as a way of enhancing the popular appeal of entertainment. We reject the idea that sex between unmarried teenagers is acceptable if it is "safe." And we do not believe that churches should welcome into fellowship any person who willfully refuses to turn away from the sin of living in a sexual relationship outside of marriage.

9. The Old and New Testaments uniformly condemn sexual contact between persons of the same sex (Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Rom. 1:26-27; 1 Cor. 6:9; 1 Tim. 1:10); and God has decreed that no one can ever excuse homosexual behavior by blaming his or her Creator (Gen. 2:24; Rom. 1:24-25).

Thus we affirm that moral sex is always heterosexual in nature. We affirm that God gives

strength to His people when they ask Him for help in resisting immoral sexual desires, including desires for homosexual sex. We affirm that God has perfect knowledge concerning human sexual biology and made no mistake in prohibiting homosexual sex without qualification or exception. We deny the claim that science can justify the morality of homosexual behavior. We reject the idea that homosexual attraction is a gift from God (James 1:13). We deny the idea that homosexual relationships are as valid as heterosexual relationships. We do not agree with those who claim that it is sinful to make moral judgments that favor heterosexual behavior over homosexual behavior.

10. The moral corruption of sexual sin can be fully forgiven through repentance and faith in Christ's atoning work (1 Cor. 6:9-11; 1 John 1:9), but physical and psychological scars caused by sexual sin cannot always be erased in this life.

Thus we affirm that God fully forgives all who repent of sexual sin. We believe that relationships broken by sexual sin can be restored through genuine repentance and faith. We deny that there is any sort of sexual sin God cannot forgive. We oppose the idea that victims of sexual infidelity or abuse should never forgive those who have sinned against them.

11. Christians must grieve with and help those who suffer hard-ship caused by sexual immorality, even when it is caused by their own acts of sin (Rom. 12:15; Luke 19:10). But we must give aid in ways that do not deny moral responsibility for sexual behavior (John 8:11). Thus we affirm that God calls Christians to love all who suffer social isolation, poverty, illness, or the burdens of unplanned pregnancy and single parenting, whether or not it was caused by their own sexual sin. We believe Christ set an example of loving ministry to those who suffer from the results of their own acts of sin. We reject the idea that our obligation to alleviate human suffering is valid only if such help is "deserved."

<http://www.citizenlink.org/FOSI/abstinence/bv/A000002141.cfm>

MacArthur: Christians must not lower themselves to a level of pagan sexual behavior determined merely by unthinking passions and uncontrolled fleshly urges. Because of their intimate relationship with a holy God, believers must not subject themselves to an ungodly society's vast array of sexually immoral temptations (cf. 2 Tim. 2:22; 1 John 2:15-16). Over-exposure to such temptations will only lower one's resistance and diminish one's outrage, thus weakening spiritual resolves and virtue. Scripture warns God's children to stay far away from, even to flee, all immorality (1 Cor. 6:18). Lustful thoughts and feelings can lead believers to actions that are completely incongruous with their position in the body of Christ.

TEXT: 1 THESSALONIANS 4:9-12

TITLE: BROTHERLY LOVE AND RESPONSIBLE LIVING

BIG IDEA:

GROWING DISCIPLES MUST STRIVE FOR EXCELLENCE IN PLEASING GOD

INTRODUCTION:

There is a complacency that can settle over the Christian life when we have a sense that we are doing OK. We understand God's demands on our life. We have not rebelled against God's rule but have invested many years in Christian discipleship and service. We have experienced growth. We have learned much. We have ministered in a variety of contexts and been used by God to impact the lives of others. But it is easy to lose our fervency and our hunger to draw closer to God. We lose our passion to please God; to make the most of our opportunities; to strive for excellence. Paul is encouraging the Thessalonians to build on their foundation of faith, love and hope and to press forward in the transformation process that leads to Christian maturity.

II. (:3-12) THREE TARGET AREAS (WHERE WE MUST STRIVE FOR EXCELLENCE IN PLEASING GOD)

A. (:3-8) Sexual Purity -- a specific aspect of sanctification

Transition: from safeguards against Lust to Encouragement to Love – moving beyond the area of love for your wife which involves sanctified sex to the more general love of the brethren – sacrificing yourself and your resources to meet their needs

Sexual sin is self-centered and selfish at its root – a life of unselfishness will reflect the type of love that God has demonstrated towards us

But remember the **four general principles** we studied earlier ... because they still apply

- Follow the Directions
- Goal = Please God
- Goal = Pursue Excellence
- Ignorance is not an Option

B. (:9-10) Brotherly Love -- Aggressive But Responsible Love for the Brethren

“Now as to the love of the brethren”

Peri. de. thj fil adel fiaj

Introducing a new subject ... *peri de* – same expression starts off chap. 5

Difference between brotherly love (love members of a family have for one another) and agape love (special unmerited gracious love that God has demonstrated towards us)

Hiebert: Christian love does not undervalue or disregard natural family ties; it gives them their due importance and condemns those who are without natural affection (Ro 1:31; 2 Ti 3:3). But Christian love transcends these limited natural ties and finds its wider sphere of affection in the redeemed family of God's children (Lk 8:21). This love which Christians cherish for each other as brethren is not just a passive disposition of fondness; it manifests itself in overt acts of kindness toward the brethren.

1. (:9-10a) **Commendation** for present level of obedience in this area;
There is no need for further teaching because:

a. (:9) They are God-taught

“you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another.”

ouu creian ecete gra,fein umih(autoi. gar umeij qeodidaktoi, este eij to. agapah a| l h| ouj

only NT usage – compound word – taught by God

Wuest: you yourselves are those taught by God with a view to loving one another with a love that impels you to deny yourselves for the benefit of the one whom you love,

Romans 5:5 *the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us* (fruit of the Holy Spirit – Gal. 5:5)

Not talking primarily about any commandments given by God in the OT; or even about all of the NT passages about loving one another – emphasis seems to be on the **Holy Spirit** directly teaching us

Cf. **1 John 2:27** *“As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him.”*

Isaiah 54:13... *It is written in the prophets, 'AND THEY SHALL ALL BE TAUGHT OF GOD.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me.*

Quoted in **John 6:45**

* * * * *

John 13:34 *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*

John 15:12-13 *This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.*

Romans 12:10 *Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor*

Hebrews 13:1 *Let love of the brethren continue* (Pres. Impv) – already being practiced; there are things that might hinder it; you need to continue to practice such love

2 Peter 1:7 *and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love*

* * * * *

b. (:10a) They are practicing the truth

“for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia.”

kai. gar poieite auto. eij pantaj touj adel fouj itouj en ol h| th/ Makedonia|

Not just a local love, but a **regional love** was practiced; what does this say about the interaction among the local churches and the common bonds of fellowship ...

Churches established in Berea and Philippi that we know of; others would have formed in the outlying areas

Zeisler: What characterizes love among the family of Christ is that it does not exclude anybody. Jesus said clearly that anybody can learn to love the people who love him. Anybody can be nice to people who are guaranteed to be nice in turn. There is nothing difficult about that. What sets Christian love apart is that it is love for people who have nothing in common with you; love for people you might otherwise overlook or despise or have nothing to do with; love for people outside your background who do not share the same interests, who do not attend the same parties who have nothing in common with you--"all the brethren who are in all Macedonia." Paul reminds us that that includes everyone.

2. (:10b) **Challenge** to strive for excellence

"But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more."

parakaloumen de. umaj(adel foi(perisseuēin mallon

Had talked about this striving for excellence earlier in the chapter; a repeated theme and emphasis

The Pursuit of Excellence – not talking about **programs** in the church – and making sure that our organization and administrative skills have developed some lengthy set of rules and procedures to govern every possible situation; that is not the type of excellence that Paul makes reference to here; talking about practical love for the brethren – inconveniencing yourself to go out of your way to meet the needs of others; does not require some complicated vetting process or classroom seminars on the right way to perform a certain ministry (training might be very helpful) – but Paul is encouraging people to step out in faith and do good works – **you are taught of God** how to love one another – go do it! Paul constantly encourages and empowers Christian ministry rather than regulating or restricting it or making it burdensome.

Transition

Keathley: While there is a change in emphasis, what we have in these next two verses is actually a further application of the responsibility to excel in love through walking in a biblical and orderly fashion. Hard work and individual accountability to responsibly care for one's own life and needs is not unrelated to the subject of Christian love.

Not really introducing a completely new topic here ... brotherly love is still in view ... but Paul wants to warn against the abuse of that brotherly love – so he puts emphasis on responsible living = the faithful performance of our everyday duties

C. (:11-12) Responsible Living

5:14 "*admonish the unruly*" – **Stott:** example of an apprenticeship contract with a weaver which a father signed for his son in AD 66. In it he undertook that if the boy played a truant and missed any workdays, he would make them up. And the verb for "play truant" is *atakteo*. Translated "idle" by RSV and NIV – deals with an irresponsible attitude to the obligation to work (see 3:6-7, 11). Same group of people referred to here even though the word is not used.

Hiebert: three phases of trouble in the Thessalonian church – mental excitement, meddlesomeness and idleness

1. **3 Responsibilities:**

- a. (:11a) **Don't be a Troublemaker** – Don't Stir the Pot -- Keep a Low Profile – Recognize your limitations – Don't be an undisciplined fanatic (Don't be a **big shot**) – ambitious restlessness
(lead a quiet life rather than one of frenzied activity or unruliness)
“and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life”
kai. filotimeisqai h̄sucazein

Apparently Christ and the Apostle Paul must be examples in this area of leading “a quiet life” – how can that be given all of the turmoil surrounding their proclamation of the gospel?

Stott: oxymoron, or contradiction of terms: “make it your ambition to have no ambition!”

Bruce: ambition usually involves more energetic action

Quiet in the sense of restfulness ... rather than ceasing from talking

Not all about striving for self promotion; restless eagerness in any pursuit – here in the context of fanatical evangelization in the light of the imminent return of the Lord

Findlay: connotation of some desire to shine or pursuit of eminence

MacArthur: In anticipation of the Lord's return, believers are to lead peaceful lives, free of conflict and hostility toward others, which is a witness to the transforming power of the gospel.

Gil Rugh: As believers, we need to have the right balance. Paul says our ambition is to lead a quiet life. Well, anyone who knows about the life of Paul knows that **his life wasn't quiet**. But remember, everything he stirred up was centered around the gospel. Evidently, some in Thessalonica were just stirring the pot with a purpose of unsettling things and causing problems. We as believers are not to be causing problems, but rather to lead a quiet life. This does not mean that I will sacrifice the truth of the gospel (Christ didn't do that, and neither did Paul), but by the same token, we are not just to go somewhere to stir up trouble. The areas in Paul's ministry where he had difficulties resulted from his presentation of Christ. But in other areas he was above reproach. He conducted himself in a manner that was above question. This trait is to characterize all believers.

Drew Worthen: The Christian walk is something that doesn't bring attention to itself, but to Christ. In most cases the world promotes ungodly ambition, to lead a life which elevates self, and it doesn't normally mind its own business, and it will gravitate towards dishonesty, if it has the opportunity.

Mayhue: avoid unnecessary contention

Matt. 7:1-5 – Don't go around judging the motives of others; stirring up trouble; causing unrest

Look at example in **1 Kings 18:17-18; 21:20** – Ahab calling Elijah a troublemaker

Acts 16:20-21 – Paul accused of causing civil unrest; **Acts 17:6-8** – Jason and the brethren

Acts 24:5 *For we have found this man a real pest and a fellow who stirs up dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes*

Look at the type of **peace** that characterized the life of Christ and that He gave to us ... a peace that the world cannot give

One hand full of rest is better than two fists full of labor and striving after wind. (Eccl 4:6)

Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread. (2Thes 3:12)

First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, 2 for kings and all who are in authority, in order that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. (1 Ti 2:1-2)

Hiebert: there was a spirit of **restlessness** in the young church. It was due, apparently, not to political influences, but rather to the new religious experiences and hopes that had gripped their minds. Although there is nothing to prove that this restlessness was caused by their excited anticipation of the impending return of Christ, such a connection, nevertheless, seems probable. The inspiring expectation of Christ's return, whereby earthly interests were reduced in importance in their eyes, had become the center of their excited interest. This connection seems justified from the fact that Paul immediately follows this exhortation with his treatment of the second advent, thereupon to return to further practical exhortations concerning daily living. Paul urges that this "eschatological restlessness" be turned into the proper channel. Instead of allowing their excited expectation to lead them to neglect their daily duties, let them use this enthusiasm faithfully to fulfill those duties. . .

hesuchazo... basically means "to be at rest" and was used of silence after speech, rest after labor, peace after war, and the like; it was also used of tranquility or peace of mind; here it is used to urge the **living of a calm, restful life**. The present tense ...stresses that they must constantly strive to lead such a life. They must eagerly endeavor to be eminent in the effort "to be quiet," live tranquilly and restfully. Instead of allowing them to succumb to fanatical excitement, Paul desires to recall them to restfulness of mind and a **balanced outlook** upon life. If they will develop a quiet, restful attitude, the outward manifestations of restlessness will cease.

Green writing on the meaning of *hesuchazo* adds that... At times the theme of "being quiet" appears in the literature of the era in the description of those respectable people who do not cause problems in the community.

Hesuchazo is used 4 other times in the NT...

Luke 14:4 *But they kept silent. And He took hold of him, and healed him, and sent him away.*

Luke 23:56 *And they returned and prepared spices and perfumes. And on the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment .*

Acts 11:18 *And when they heard this, they quieted down, and glorified God, saying, "Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life."*

Acts 21:14 *And since he would not be persuaded, we fell silent, remarking, "The will of the Lord be done!"*

McGee “That ye study to be quiet.” That is an interesting commandment for Christians. We have all kinds of schools today to teach people to speak. Every seminary has a public speaking class. Perhaps they should also have a class that would teach their students to be quiet. A lot of saints need such a course! A lady went to a “tongues meeting,” and the leader thought she was interested in speaking in tongues. He asked her, “Madam, would you like to speak in tongues?” She answered, “No, I would like to lose about forty feet off the one I have now!” We need to study to be quiet. That is a commandment. (McGee, J V: Thru the Bible Commentary: Thomas Nelson or Logos)

Hiebert: the following two duties explain how they are to go about living quiet lives.

b. (:11b) **Mind Your Own Business** -- Concentrate on your own affairs
(Don't be a **busybody**)
“and attend to your own business”
kai. prassein ta. idia

Chess: call this person a **kibitzer** – doesn't get involved and challenge someone to a game himself; sits on the sidelines and observes your game and makes all types of critical comments

Proverbs 20:3 *It is an honour for a man to cease from strife: but every fool will be meddling.*

1 Timothy 5:13 *And withal they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not.*

1 Peter 4:15 *But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters.*

c. (:11c-12) **Work Diligently** -- Work to provide for your own needs
(Don't be a **burden**)
“and work with your hands”
kai. ergazesqai taij lidiaijð cersin umwh

PreceptAustin: One must also keep the cultural context in mind for in Paul's day (not much different then our modern times) manual labor was regarded as degrading, befitting the status of slaves and free men should never "stoop" to this level. Thus mundane work was generally despised by aristocrats and those of higher social status.

Example of Jesus the carpenter and Paul the tentmaker

2 Thess. 3:7-12

Eph. 4:28 *Let him who steals steal no longer; but rather let him labor, performing with his own hands what is good, in order that he may have something to share with him who has need.*

Acts 20:33-35

Rom. 12:11 not lagging behind in diligence

1 Cor. 4:11-13

Titus 3:14 *And let our people also learn to engage in good deeds to meet pressing needs, that they may not be unfruitful.*

Be contributing members of the community; not parasites

2. 3 Reasons for Responsible, Disciplined Living :

a) Trustworthy Apostolic Teaching and Example --

Obedience – Responsible living commanded and exemplified by apostles

“just as we commanded you”

kaqwj umih parhggei, amen

Apostles did not command something they were unwilling to do themselves

b) Testimony to unbelievers

“so that you may behave properly toward outsiders”

ihā peripathte euschmonwj proj touj exw

What a privilege to be “insiders” – others are watching our conduct

Gk. word means “decently, honestly” –

Rom. 13:13-14 *Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality; not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.*

What type of testimony do you have at work?

Disciplined living is your platform for presenting the gospel.

c) Team Contribution -- Sufficiency -- so as not to be in any need yourself

“and not be in any need”

kai. mhdenoj creian echteā

Whatever you fail to produce in the way of sufficient income impacts the overall Christian community; now they need to relieve your needs and you do not have the resources to contribute to relieve the needs of others.

Gal. 6:2,5 *Bear one another’s burdens, and thus fulfill the law of God . . . For each one shall bear his own load.*

Some people will take advantage of Christian generosity and will not perform their own obligations

Prov. 18:9 *He also who is slack in his work is brother to him who destroys.*

2 Cor. 8:12-15 Principle is one of trying to maintain **equality** so that the needs of all will be provided for

Prov. 6:6-11 Learn the value of diligent work from studying the **ants** – they have no needs

Laziness leads to poverty (not always the cause of poverty)

Prov. 10:4-5

Prov 12:11 *He who tills his land will have plenty of bread, but he who pursues worthless things lacks sense. (also vs. 24 and vs. 27)*

Hendriksen: With respect to diligence, *fanatics* – afflicted probably with Parousia hysteria (cf. II Thess. 2:1, 2) – should become “ambitious to be calm”; *busybodies* (Paul uses the actual term in II Thess. 3:11, but the idea is implied here in I Thess. 4:11) should begin to mind their own affairs; and *loafers* should start working with their hands. (In all probability the same persons were all three: fanatics, busybodies, and loafers.) No offence should be given to outsiders. Besides, by working diligently a person develops the art of being “dependent on nobody.”

CONCLUSION:

Some **quotations regarding excellence:**

Excellence is the gradual result of always striving to do better.

There are no speed limits on the road to excellence.

Persistence is the twin sister of excellence. One is a matter of quality; the other, a matter of time.

“Excellence can be obtained if you:

- ...care more than others think is wise;
- ...risk more than others think is safe;
- ...dream more than others think is practical;
- ...expect more than others think is possible.”

The Apostle Paul exhorts us to **excel** still more and more ... especially in this area of **brotherly love** – and make sure that our efforts are not thrown off track by becoming undisciplined or irresponsible. Commit ourselves to **responsible living** ...

- Not being a **big shot** – make it your ambition to live a quiet life ...
- Not being a **busybody** – mind your own business . . .
- Not being a **burden** – work diligently

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Is my brotherly love tainted by any favoritism or limited to certain groups of believers?
- 2) How do I find the Holy Spirit directly teaching me to love the brethren and motivating me to act in this way?
- 3) What are some characteristics of busybodies or those who meddle in the affairs of others?
- 4) What type of fanaticism does Paul reject? How orderly does my life look to outsiders? Am I unnecessarily burdening others in any way? Do I have a heart to work diligently so that I may be able to supply the needs of others?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Piper: So what is the difference between a human being at work and a beaver at work? Or for that matter, a bee, or a hummingbird? They work hard, they subdue their surroundings and shape them into beautiful structures that serve good purposes. The difference is that humans are morally self-conscious and make choices about their work on the basis of motives which may or may not honor God.

No beaver or bee or hummingbird consciously relies on God. No beaver ponders the divine pattern of order and beauty and makes a moral choice to pursue excellence because God is excellent. No beaver reflects on the purpose of his existence and consciously chooses to glorify his Maker by relying on Him. But humans have all these potentials because we are created in God's image. When God commissions us to subdue the earth -- to shape it and use it -- he doesn't mean do it like a beaver. He means do it like a human, a morally self-conscious person who is responsible to choose his proper destiny. When he sends us forth to work in his image, to be sure, our ditches are to be dug straight, our pipe fittings are not to leak, our cabinet corners should be flush, our surgical incisions should be clean, our typing sharp and accurate, our meals nutritious and attractive, because God is a God of order and beauty and competence. But cats are clean and ants are industrious and spiders produce orderly and beautiful works. Therefore, the essence of our work as humans must be that it is done in conscious reliance on God's power, as a conscious quest of God's pattern of excellence and in deliberate pursuit of God's glory.

When you work like this -- no matter what your vocation is -- you can have a sweet sense of peace at the end of the day. I don't think God has created us to be idle. Therefore, those who abandon creative productivity lose the joy of purposeful work. Ecclesiastes 5:12 says, "*Sweet is the sleep of a laborer, whether he eats little or much, but the surfeit of the rich will not let him sleep.*" People who spend their lives mainly in idleness or frivolous leisure are rarely as happy as those who work. Most of the retired people at Bethlehem know this, and so have sought creative, useful, God-honoring ways to stay active and productive in God's kingdom. And we should help each other in this, and with the whole problem of unemployment. It is not first an economic problem. It is first a theological problem. Human beings are created in the image of God and are endowed with traits of their creator that fit them for creative, useful, joyful work. Therefore, extensive idleness (when you have the ability to work) brings down the oppression of guilt and futility.

4 Reasons Why God Wills Work:

So the first reason God wills work is that when we work in reliance on his power and according to his pattern of excellence, his glory is made known and our joy is increased. . .

The *second* reason God wills work is that *by working we provide for our legitimate needs*. When Adam and Eve sinned, God imposed on the human race a condition of hardship that continually reminds us: things are not all right while there is sin. . .

The third reason God wills work is that by working we provide for the needs of those who can't provide for their own. The promise that if you sweat, you shall eat is not absolute. The drought may strike your village in sub-Saharan Africa; thieves may steal what you've earned; disability may cut your earning power. All that is part of the curse which sin brought onto the world. But God in his mercy wills that the work of the able-bodied in prosperous times supply the needs of the helpless, especially in hard times. . .

Finally, God wills work as a way of building bridges for the gospel. In our work we are usually in the world. We rub shoulders with unbelievers. If we do our work in reliance on God's power, according to his pattern of excellence, and thus for his glory, we will build bridges for the gospel so that people can cross over and be saved.

MacArthur: When believers display diligent work attitudes and habits and live in a loving and tranquil manner that respects others' privacy and does not intrude or gossip, it constitutes a powerful testimony to unbelievers and makes the gospel credible... Believers who sacrificially love other people, exhibit tranquil lives, conscientiously focus on keeping their own lives in order, and faithfully carry out their daily responsibilities in the workplace (thus avoiding any welfare dependence)—all the while proclaiming the gospel in light of the return of Christ—are the most effective witnesses to their unsaved neighbors and loved ones.

Stedman: These Christians in Thessalonica were making fools of themselves by stressing the immediacy of the coming of the Lord to such a degree that they had stopped working. That is why the apostle bids them to keep busy. Here in the United States, in 1846, a group of followers of William Miller abandoned their work, sold their possessions, and went out on a hilltop to wait for the Lord to appear because this prophet had told them that Jesus was coming at a certain day and hour. There was tremendous expectancy on their part, but, of course, Jesus did not come. They became fools in the eyes of people because of their extreme action and turned many against biblical prophecy by what they had done. The apostle corrects that kind of thinking in these words. "Keep busy" is his advice. "Keep from meddling in other people's affairs. Do not try to get them to follow some foolish idea that you may have about prophetic things. Keep busy, providing your own needs (that is a wonderful word) so you do not become a burden to others and you will win the respect of the outside world." These are very important words.

Zeisler: can think of three different kinds of "plateau" Christians, three different kinds of Christians who, having come to this point, really fail to heed Paul's word here that having achieved this much, they "excel still more." One of this group of "plateau" Christians might be described as the "faddist" Christian. He needs to be into the very next evangelical thrill, the very next new thing that happens in the Christian world because ordinary Christian living has gotten boring; ordinary obedience to Christ and following the emphasis of the Scriptures has worn out. He needs "Christianity and Christian Diets", or "Christianity and Radical Politics," or "Christianity and Transactional Analysis," or "Christianity and Tongues," or even "Christianity and Hand-Tooled Leather Bible Covers!" It does not really matter--whatever is happening, whatever the next thing is, he requires that to stay committed to the Lord because he has gotten burnt out with just living the life that Jesus has for him.

Others we might encounter on this plateau are "cynical" Christians. I remember in my early Christian life that Christian camping was an important element for me of growing in the Lord. After a couple of years I graduated to the point where I was a worker at camp rather than a participant, and I remember that having come to that inner circle I was struck by the fact that many who were in leadership, full-time working positions were really cynical about what was going on around them. They would spend their free time in the evening making fun of the people who were excited about the message, ridiculing the speaker, perhaps, telling his jokes a half a minute before he did, and so on. You probably know Christians like that too. They are cynical. They never quite bail out of everything, but they have lost their first love. They look down on those who are emotionally and intellectually involved with the faith.

The third kind is the complacent Christian who, after an initial period of growth, just files his religious life away with fifty other things that are happening in his life. He goes to meetings occasionally and continues to respond to appeals for money every now and then, but his faith, his life with Christ, is no more vital to him than anything else in his life.

Now Paul knew that these things happen to people. He knew that after the first blush, the initial stages of growth, that all of us are going to face that day, and what he says to the Thessalonians, these serious-minded, faithful believers is, "I know you are doing well. I know you are successful. I know you believe, but I say to you 'excel still more.' Don't stop now, don't flatten out; don't quit; don't give in to something else. Take it seriously. Out of gratitude for what Christ has done for you 'excel still more'."

Keathley: Principles on Love and Loving the Brethren

(1) Love is described in 1 Corinthians 13, illustrated in the story of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), and commanded throughout the Bible. Indeed, it is declared to be the preeminent virtue, the summary of the whole of Scripture (Mark 12:30-31). Paul exclaims, "The entire law is summed up in a single command, 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Gal. 5:14). Compare also Romans 13:8-10.

(2) The standard and impelling motivation for our love for one another is Christ's love for us (John 15:34; 1 John 4:11). Allender writes, "I will not live with purpose and joy unless I love; I will not be able to love unless I forgive; and I will not forgive unless my hatred is continually melted by the searing truth and grace of the gospel." Our hearts need to be melted by God's forgiveness of our sin and sins (cf. Eph. 4:31-32).

(3) Love for one another is fortified by other Christian virtues or Christ-like attributes (1 Pet. 3:8; 2 Pet. 1:7; Rom. 12:10; Eph. 6:23). From the standpoint of its foundation, love is a matter of having a purified inner heart or soul (1 Pet. 1:22).

(4) Love is to be a continuous, abiding virtue regardless of the problems or the behavior of the one being loved (Heb. 13:1). Agape love is the ability to love our enemies.

(5) Love is the measuring rod of character, the index by which our lives will be assessed. This is the message of 1 Corinthians 13. "Talent without love is deafening; spiritual discernment and power without love is debasing; and sacrifice of possession or body without love is defrauding."

Some of the responsibilities of love include:

- It involves serving and doing, not just talking (Gal. 5:13; 1 John 3:18).
- It means a mutual affection and respect which places others above oneself (Rom. 12:10, cf. Phil. 2:3-4).
- It means showing hospitality to one another and to all men as we are able (Rom. 12:13; 1 Tim. 3:2; Heb. 13:1-2).
- It means showing sympathy to those in suffering (Heb. 13:3).
- It means praying for one another (Eph. 4:18; Rom. 15:30).
- It means not seeking your own advantage, but the well being or advantage of others (1 Cor. 10:24; Phil. 2:3-4).

(6) As the summary of the whole of Scripture, love must be the motive behind anything we do as we minister to others in their need whether encouraging, exhorting, teaching, helping, or comforting.

Dr. Whitcomb: Why We Must Work

Look at work in pre-Fall era in the garden; man charged with significant work; God is a worker and Christ is a worker; Ps. 121:3-4 – God never rests; never gets tired or needs rest; Ex. 20:9; work has absolutely nothing to do with our salvation; Eph. 2:8-10 – work that glorifies God is an outcome of salvation; no excuse for laziness; either work or starve = good motivation (there are exceptions); no retirement culture in the Bible; because of sin and Fall, work transformed into drudgery and sorrow by the sweat of his face; only through Christ can drudgery be transformed back into something significant and meaningful; even in heaven His servants shall serve Him; we won't be sitting on clouds doing nothing – **Rev. 22:3**

Alex Strauch: The Christian Perspective on Sex, Love and Work

I. (:9-10) Call for Brotherly Love

Turns from sexual immorality and plea for sexual purity to subject of love; that is what pleases God; this is a special kind of love; not romantic love here; intimate, close family type of love; we are connected by the Holy Spirit; have the exact same Father; same Lord; same life power; eternal spiritual family; they were listening to the teaching of the Holy Spirit within them; part of the fruit of the Spirit; large-hearted in their love; if you love only those who love you ... how is that different from the Gentiles? Christ is not talking about natural love; Love your enemies; those who speak against you; this is supernatural love; standard is Christ; don't be complacent thinking we are a loving group of people; let's excel more

II. (:11-12) Call to Work

Part of love increasing; a practical outworking; developed more in 2 Thess; eschatological excitement; prophetic hysteria; abused doctrine of Christ's return; this is not anything new; examples of erroneous date setting; people actually stopped working; ran out of money very fast; living as parasite; work is part of the creation order; don't want the world to view you as religious kooks;

III. How to Stimulate Love

Heb. 10:24 – consider ways to stir up love and good works among one another

How do we progress more and more in love; motivate selfish hearts; build a loving church
Cf. church in Ephesus – lost her first love; must restore it

1. **Study** Love – I know what Hollywood says about love; what the world says; God's work cannot be done without love; look up every reference in concordance; categorize the verses
2. **Pray** for more Love – Spirit's enablement; Mueller: great fault of the church is that they don't persevere in prayer; Eph. 3 prayer – to know the love of Christ for us; sing your prayers; pray to love others more – 1 Thess. 3:12; don't ever say "I have loved enough"; Philip. 1:9; Jude 2 *may love be multiplied to you*
3. **Teach** Love – God's view, not the world's
4. **Model** Love – people learn best by seeing it; look at David's love; Christian biographies; parents
5. **Guard** Love – we can lose love; let it grow cold; need to Abide in love of Christ; make a conscious effort to maintain our love for God and one another; there are many enemies of love
6. **Practice** Love – easy to talk about love and admire it and never actually do it; costs something; can be inconvenient

TEXT: 1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-18

TITLE: GOD'S FORMULA FOR COMFORT

BIG IDEA:

**CONVICTION REGARDING GOD'S PROGRAM FOR THE FUTURE
GIVES HOPE FOR THE BEREAVED**

**GOD'S FORMULA OF COMFORT: KNOWLEDGE + FAITH GIVES HOPE
KNOWLEDGE + FAITH = CONVICTION
CONVICTION GIVES HOPE**

INTRODUCTION:

Very **simple passage** on the surface if you separate it from all the complex issues related to timing and harmonization with other texts about the return of Christ –

Two different groups of believers in view:

- 1) those who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord – they are all potentially in this category along with the Apostle Paul; we as believers today are in this same category
- 2) those who have fallen asleep (already died and gone to be with the Lord in spirit – waiting for their bodies to be resurrected so that they could once again be a whole person – body and spirit united in the presence of Christ)

The Context is tremendous anticipation of the climactic return of Christ – the event called the **Rapture** of the Church – from the Latin word for the Greek word here translated “*caught up*”; often hear this text at funeral services because of the comfort it provides

Problem: It seems like the Thessalonian believers were convinced of the imminent return of Christ so that this was a real issue to them – not something that they expected would not happen for 2000 years. (In fact, some had irresponsibly stopped working and were fanatical in their focus on Christ’s return. They needed Paul’s admonitions to keep loving the brethren and to quiet down and keep working at all their responsibilities ... for they do not know the hour or the day.) They were concerned about their fellow believers who had died before the Rapture. They were bothered by the possibility that when the Lord returns they might have to wait until after the millennial kingdom before they would be reunited with their loved ones. Were these dear believers going to miss out on the coming Kingdom? When will we see them again?

Tremendous passage about being reunited with our believing loved ones and being united with the physical presence of Jesus Christ. [Think about someone specific whom you have lost as we go through this passage.]

Spiritual Algebra Lesson:

$K + F ? H$ **Hope** is what we want to take away from this passage today; confident hope;
Most people just have vague dreams about the future; they want things to turn out a certain way

$K + F = C$ **Knowledge** alone just puffs up – but necessary; we need more knowledge;
Faith alone is ridiculous (“Believe”); Illustr: “your faith is so strong” – faith is nothing; it is the object of our faith that is key; we need stronger faith

$C ? H$ **Convictions** must be embraced and lived out
I have developed a conviction about church leadership – drives my

behavior; others don't share that conviction – diff understanding; diff application of personal faith

A couple of you are getting ready to go off to college –

- What is your conviction about dating only believers?
Rationalizations : It's only a date; I won't get emotionally involved ... want to have fun
- What is your conviction about the priority and importance of the local church?
No time; need to catch up on my sleep; have fellowship and bible studies with some of my college friends during the week

A couple of you just coming back and starting to live on a more independent basis – Your convictions will determine your priorities and how you live;

- What is your conviction about seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness
Career defines who I am – most important thing
- What is your conviction about being a vocal witness for the Lord
People will be saved through my actions ... not if you don't say anything
- What is your conviction about working hard to give God the glory in everything?
Or can we just be lazy and only have to be serious about spiritual things like prayer and our devotions ...

we are developing a **generation of mindless and faithless Christians** – they have no **convictions** to govern their actions

What type of **Hope** are you going to have when you lose a loved one? How will you grieve any differently than a non-believer?

3 parts to message tracking the 3 parts of this formula – Emphasis on **Knowledge** ... on **Faith** ... on **Conviction** – giving Hope
Don't lose sight of the goal – want to come away with a firm **HOPE**

Stedman and **Stott**: **Simple Outline** --

1. Return
2. Resurrection
3. Rapture
4. Reunion

I. (:13) CONVICTION FREES THE BEREAVED FROM UNMITIGATED GRIEF – EMPHASIS ON KNOWLEDGE

That is why we spent 2 weeks laying the groundwork for some **systematic knowledge** about end time events – need some structure in our thinking; some precision; some distinctions between things that are similar but not the same [**Eschatology Overview**]

A. Uncertainty Regarding Lost Loved Ones Intensifies the Grieving

- What does the future hold?
- Are the dead in Christ going to lose out in some way?

- When will we be reunited with our loved ones?

1. The importance of knowledge

“But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren”

This is an emphatic expression Paul uses when he wants to clarify some point of doctrine or relieve anxiety on the part of his fellow believers or shed light on some area of his own motivation or itinerary – often with reference to something where they might not have had all of the details laid out to them clearly before

5 usages of this phrase in the NT --

Rom. 1:13 – *“often I have planned to come to you”* – his desire to minister in person to the believers in Rome

Rom. 11:25 – reference to the **mystery** of the present partial hardening of the Jews to allow the Gentiles to be grafted in during this church age; as well as the future salvation of all of the nation of Israel after the fullness of the Gentiles

1 Cor. 10:1 – reference to spiritual privileges enjoyed by that generation of Jews who experienced the miracle of the deliverance from Egypt and the crossing of the Red Sea and yet did not respond with the proper faith and spiritual discipline to avoid idolatry and temptation

1 Cor. 12:1 – the whole subject of **spiritual gifts** and how you need to minister them in the context of love to build up the body

2 Cor. 1:8 – some type of **serious persecution** and danger that brought Paul and his missionary team to the brink of death somewhere near Ephesus after the writing of 1 Corinthians

Lack of knowledge makes them prime targets for the false teachers who would try to alarm them with misrepresentation of end time events.

“Now” – link to previous section – while I want you to live responsibly – I don’t want you to lose your passion for the Lord’s return – but let’s have the right understanding about all that Christ’s return will involve -- Christian life is one of balance and moderation – not extreme fanaticism where you live like an unbalanced fanatic

Paul was all about bringing **knowledge** to bear on the situation so that his fellow brothers and sisters in Christ would walk by faith in accordance with their calling; how can we be content to remain uninformed when Christ wants us to be informed about the future?

2. The area of concern = the status of those sleeping

“about those who are asleep”

18 NT references – 5 to physical sleep; 13 to the death of believers
Restful, peaceful, temporary, pleasant, removed from pain and pressure
Body is still, motionless (for the most part); rest from your labors of the day;

Stedman: That term, by the way, is never used in the New Testament of anyone but believers. It never says of a non-believer when he died that he *"fell asleep."* There is a wonderful lesson in that. It shows that death, for the believer, is nothing more than sleep. . . You know that they are quietly resting, that they will awaken again, and that you will have contact with them again soon. That is why the New Testament regards the death of believers as nothing but sleep.

Jesus declared of the daughter of Jairus who had died, *"She is sleeping,"* {Mark 5:39, Luke 8:52}. It is a wonderfully encouraging word for those who are facing the death of dear ones.

Mayhue: This did not represent some kind of "soul sleep", as taught by Jehovah Witnesses or Seventh Day Adventists, that the spirit or soul after death is in an unconscious state. When a Christian dies, the body is committed to the grave (1 Cor 15:42), but the spirit is in the presence of the Lord, very much awake (2 Cor 5:8).

3. The nature of the grieving process

"that you may not grieve" – Natural to grieve at our separation and loss

Interesting – look at the occasion when Jesus wept at the grave of **Lazarus** – **Why did He weep?** Most commentators believe it was as the Jews at the time reported = because of how greatly Jesus loved Lazarus and how He empathized with the grief of Mary and Martha; But there is another possibility: not actually because of the loss of a good friend and someone he cared deeply about – but because of the hardness of their hearts and their lack of faith that they did not have confidence in Christ to raise him up

John 11:4 – look at promise Jesus had made: *"This sickness is not to end in death, but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it."* – look at how Jesus made a point to delay his coming to help for two days ...

Vs 11 *"Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I go, so that I may awaken him out of sleep"*

Jesus wept; He was deeply moved – Why?? They were being critical of Him for not coming at once and not healing him before he died ... when His objective was to glorify the Father by an even greater miracle – the resurrection

This perspective should change the way we view the death of a believer – oppty for God to receive great glory; entrance of the believer into the certain hope of glory – with the certain prospect coming very soon of being reunited back with a glorified body

Stott: However firm our Christian faith may be, the loss of a close relative or friend causes a profound emotional shock. To lose a loved one is to lose a part of oneself. It calls for radical and painful adjustments, which may take many months.

Hiebert: "The force of the original is to prohibit all sorrow for their dead. We need not assume that Paul intended to prohibit that natural sorrow and sense of loss we feel at the death of loved ones, but he is prohibiting all sorrow which mourns the supposed loss sustained by loved ones because of their death. Such sorrow is not for Christians. For them to give way to their grief would be to act like the pagan world." (p.189)

B. A Vacuum of Hope leads to unmitigated grief

“as do the rest who have no hope.”

cf. the type of false hope that most people express upon the death of a loved one:

“they are better off”

“they are in a far better place” ...

Hope is the distinguishing mark of Christians –

Eph 2:12 before we came to Christ, we were *“separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world”* – pretty bleak picture

1 Peter 1:3 “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time ...”

Driving around province of **Ontario Canada** this past week – enjoying the sight of many beautiful homes on various lakefront estates – yet not envying the people who live there – because the home that Christ is preparing for us is so far more magnificent and we will enjoy it for eternity – not just for the brief moment of this day

Knowledge by itself is dead ... or even worse ... puffs up; must be linked with the personal commitment of faith

II. (:14) CONVICTION FOCUSES ON THE REALITY OF THE RESURRECTION AND RETURN OF CHRIST – EMPHASIS ON FAITH

(Focus is not on the **Timing** – which is where Christians have so much debate)

A. Faith in the Death and Resurrection of Jesus is the Sure Foundation of our Christian Hope

“For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again”

Do we believe that God intervenes in history?

Are we looking for Jesus to return and prepared for His coming?

Not enough to just know the facts of the gospel message – even the demons know these facts and tremble – but it doesn’t give them any peace or joy; knowledge will not transform our lives and give us freedom from the bondage of sin

Christ took the sting out of death and transferred the victory from the grave to the resurrection (**1 Cor. 15**)

"**It's Friday, but Sunday's coming**" = famous sermon by **Tony Campolo**
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=naajYZSbWdw> (snippets of message with video)
<http://www.tonycampolo.org/mp3/itsfriday.htm> 45 minute classic message

There is no way imaginable that the followers of Christ will not experience the same glorious resurrection as their Master = the first fruits – Certainty of our resurrection

Rom. 6-8 takes the facts of the death, burial and resurrection and shows how God gives us the victory right now in our battle with sin as we apply personal faith and view ourselves as united with Christ; as we appropriate the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit who is given to every believer

If we were put on trial with respect to our faith in Christ, would there be enough evidence to convict us?

B. The Future Glory of Sleeping Believers is Assured at the Return of Christ
“even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.”

- Talk about the Great Awakening!

III. (:15-17) CONVICTION FEEDS ON A KNOWLEDGE OF ESCHATOLOGY = GOD’S PROGRAM FOR THE FUTURE – COMBINATION OF PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE AND APPLIED FAITH

A. Divine Revelation Validates Conviction

“For this we say to you by the word of the Lord”

No chance Paul got this message wrong;

Does this mean that Christ had personally taught these truths during His ministry ... or that Paul had received some special additional revelation from the Lord on this matter . . .??

Source and Authority for these details come directly from the Lord

B. The Equality of the Two Different Groups of Believers at the Return of Christ

1. The Living will not have an Advantage over the Dead (:15)

“that we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep.”

Coming – *Parousia* – the personal presence and visitation of the King

Importance of **Christian solidarity** – that we not be separated from Christ or from each other; separation is painful

2. Description of the Lord's Impressive Climactic Return – cf details to **Matt 24** account

a) Bodily, personal return

“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven”
just as the disciples saw Him ascend up into heaven

not just sending some representative to collect the believers

Stedman: This is all suggested by the three sounds which the apostle connects with this initial appearing of Jesus. It is the Lord himself who will come. That always warms my heart. He is not going to send Michael, the archangel, or Gabriel, or Moroni, or anyone else. He is coming himself.

- b) In spectacular glory, majesty, and authority –
“with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God”
does not sound like a **silent, secret coming** here; victorious, exulting – for believers; Paul not going into great detail here about the timing of all the events ... but trying to convey the majesty and triumph of the scene

Shout – implies both authority and urgency; probably similar to the Lord’s cry to Lazarus or Rev. 4:1 where John was summoned to “*Come up here*”

Michael is identified as *archangel* in Jude 9; Daniel 12:1 – has been waiting a long time for God to once again take up His program with the nation of Israel – will have a prominent role during the Tribulation Period

Problem for pre-trib position: concept of the **last trump** – **1 Cor 15:51-52** passage – how is this possible? Other trumpets mentioned in Rev. 8-11 (during the tribulation period) and Matt. 24:29-31 (at the Revelation of Christ)

Renald Showers (p. 259, ff) offers several possible **resolutions** to this apparent problem:

- In contrast to **Ex. 19:10-20** the first trump of God was related to the Mosaic Law of God, because it called the people of Israel together to meet God and be placed under the law. – associated with ministry of death and condemnation – this last trumpet has the opposite purpose and signals the beginning of the end of death, the last enemy of mankind to be destroyed
- Associated with the fulfillment of the Jewish observance of the **Feast of Trumpets** – occurs before the Day of Atonement – which prefigures the purification of the nation during the Tribulation Period

- Possible **military connotations**

- sounds the end of the battle for the church and the march back to camp
- for the Roman guards, there was a first trumpet to start their watch and then a last trumpet to end their watch

3. Priority Given to the Dead in Christ

“*and the dead in Christ will rise first*”

speaking of the bodies which will be united with the spirits which God is bringing with Him

Bible does not speak of just one general resurrection of the dead that all occurs at one point in time – even though **Daniel 12:2** speaks of only **two results** from ultimate resurrection – without getting precise as to the timing (cf. John 5:28-29; Rom. 2:5-8) – telescopic sense we have talked about earlier. Rev. 20:4-5 speaks of 2 resurrections – one before the millennium and one after; 1 Cor. 15 makes it plain that there are a number of different resurrections ... starting with Christ as the first fruits, then a resurrection at the coming of Christ (which has multiple stages as well –

both before the rapture and at His revelation), and then a resurrection before delivering the kingdom over to God after the millennium. (Mayhue)

4. Equality Accorded the Living in Christ

“Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air”

Stott: the Greek verb *harpazo* expresses **suddenness** and **violence**, as when the centurion ordered his troops to take Paul by force in order to rescue him from a possible lynching; threefold repetition of preposition *‘together with’*

“be snatched away” – John 10:28; Acts 8:39; Rev 12:5

Bruce: Ref to *“clouds”* – not simply because clouds suggested themselves as convenient vehicles for transportation through space but because clouds are a regular feature of biblical theophanies; the divine glory is veiled in clouds, shines forth from them and retreats into them.”

Benware: This parallels Jesus’ ascension into heaven, when He was received up into the clouds (Acts 1:9). Clouds can, of course refer to literal clouds that may carry rain. However, clouds are also used figuratively in the Bible to refer to the presence and glory of God (e.g. Ex. 14:19-24; 16:10; 19:9, 16; 20:21; 40:34-38).

“in the air” – distinguishes this event from the Revelation where Jesus comes all the way down to the earth to the Mount of Olives in dramatic fashion

5. Both groups will have realized their goal of personal union with the Lord that will last forever

“and thus we shall always be with the Lord”

No kingdom on earth picture at this juncture; **just looking at the big picture, not the details**

Most important aspect of our future hope = spending eternity in the presence of Christ, our Lord and Savior – be with Him whatever He is doing ...

- if He is ruling over the Millennial Kingdom .. we are involved with Him in that;

- if He is enjoying His inheritance over all things, we are enjoying that inheritance with Him as co-heirs

(:18) CONCLUSION: Ultimately, a Message of Comfort and Encouragement = **HOPE**

“Therefore, comfort one another with these words.”

MacArthur: He doesn't say...Therefore would you please write out a large eschatological chart. No. He just says comfort each other. This is a comfort passage, friend, exactly like John 14 was. The Rapture always appears shrouded in mystery because it is seen always from the pastoral viewpoint as the great comfort of the believer that Jesus is coming for His own. Don't worry about the ones that die, don't worry about the ones that are alive, we'll all be there when He

comes. The God of all comfort will send Christ and we are thus comforted. No need to grieve. No need to sorrow.

We **comfort** one another in different ways

- sometimes just with our presence and support
- sometimes with a loving touch, a squeeze of the hands, a silent hug
- sometimes with the empathy of crying with those who cry
- Here, we comfort one another with **Words of HOPE** – reinforcing our **Knowledge** and strengthening our **Faith** so that we face the future with **Conviction** and embrace with confidence the **Hope** that we have in **Christ's return**

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Who are the “*dead in Christ*” that are most precious to you personally? What type of anticipation do you have of seeing them again and being united together with Christ?
- 2) What is the significance of the term “*sleeping*” when applied to the believing dead? How can you refute the error of “soul sleep” which is taught by some (i.e. that when you die your spirit is in an unconscious state until Christ returns)?
- 3) How would you define in your own words *the blessed hope* which we have as believers?
- 4) How have you personally witnessed the hope of believers upon losing a loved one? What brought them the most comfort in their darkest hour?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Bruce: Presumably the Thessalonian Christians had wondered if those of their number who had died would suffer any disadvantage through not being alive to witness the Parousia and participate in its attendant glory. Since they had learned about Jesus' being raised from the dead (1:10), they had probably learned something about the eventual Resurrection of his people; but they were not sure what relation the Resurrection bore to the Parousia. If it took place after the Parousia, then the dead would miss something which the living would enjoy, even if they were eventually to be brought back to resurrection life. Hence the readers are assured that their departed friends will suffer no disadvantage when the Lord comes.

Stott: The Christian hope, however, is more than the expectation that the King is coming; it is also the belief that when he comes, the Christian dead will come with him and the Christian living will join them. For it is the separation which death causes (or seems to cause) which is so painful, both separation from Christ, since the dead have died before he comes, and separation from those who survive them, since they have gone ahead and left the living behind. It is these two bitter separations which the apostle solemnly assures his readers are neither real nor

permanent. For the dead will come with Jesus, and the living will not precede them. . .

Paul taught them the great truths of the **return** of the Lord, the **resurrection** of the Christian dead, the **rapture** of the Christian living and the **reunion** of all three with each other. With these words they could indeed comfort one another.

TEXT: 1 THESSALONIANS 5:1-11

TITLE: READY POSITION – STAY ON YOUR TOES

BIG IDEA:

**CONVICTION REGARDING GOD'S PROGRAM FOR THE FUTURE
KEEPS US SPIRITUALLY ALERT**

INTRODUCTION:

(Two-Part message)

As a baseball and softball coach for the Christian Athletic Association, we started the young kids off with the very basics. With respect to fielding the ball, we emphasized what people call “**The Ready Position**.” Comfortable crouch, up on the balls of your feet so you can move in any direction; glove down and ready to field the ball; eyes focused on the ball [This is baseball, not soccer – so we can’t talk about the secret weapon] . . . Look at major leaguers and study how each player prepares himself for the pitch – it might seem like they are nonchalant and not paying close attention . . . but by the time the ball is delivered they are ready to respond. That’s especially important for younger kids . . . some you find daydreaming out in the outfield; some you find sitting in the dirt in the infield drawing different images; some you find aimlessly wandering around. As a coach we want our players to learn to be **alert** and **focused** so that as the pitch is delivered, they can respond appropriately. You need to expect that the ball is going to be hit to you. You need to already have thought through the possibilities in your mind so that you know the situation and have in your mind where you are going to throw the ball. There is a similar Ready Position for every sport . . . Paul teaches us in this passage that there is a Ready Position for believers when it comes to our anticipation of the Return of Christ. He is going to develop that lesson by pointing out **five different contrasts** in how believers anticipate the return of Christ as opposed to unbelievers. We will look at one of those contrasts today and four others next week.

Transition from 4:13-18

Peri de – familiar introductory phrase – used by Paul to switch topics or to answer a different question that needs to be addressed

Used up in **4:9** – transitioning from the very specific topic of sanctified sex to the more general subject of love for the brethren

Here Paul switches from the very specific details of the next event on God’s prophetic calendar which is Christ’s Rapture of His church to the more general subject of the overall Day of the Lord – which is still part of the general context of the return of the Lord for which believers need to be prepared

Two different perspectives to this passage from a timing standpoint:

1. Post trib rapture position – Paul is talking about the same subject – just with a different emphasis; started out with an emphasis on believers and the blessing of Christ’s return and then moves to how the judgment aspect will impact unbelievers – otherwise why would believers be anticipating the day of the Lord if they will not even be a part of it??

2. Pre trib rapture position – Fits very nicely once you understand the two different stages of Christ’s Second Coming (the Rapture and the Revelation) with the seven year tribulation period in between – Support for this view

- makes sense from a **chronological development** of the text – talks first about the Rapture ... then moves to a discussion of the Day of the Lord which would follow (similar to chronological development in the Book of Rev.)
- gives the fullest impact to the **transitional phrase** *peri de* as we already discussed
- holds the most excitement and **anticipation** for believers since they will not experience any of the severe devastation associated with the Day of the Lord – so we can really look forward to the return of Christ
- consistent with believers being delivered out from any association or contact with the **wrath** of God – a topic for next week

No matter which view you take, the application made by **Hiebert** would apply:

Hiebert: In the preceding paragraph (4:13-18) the main cause for restlessness among the Thessalonian believers in relation to the anticipated coming of Christ was allayed. They had thought that only those who were alive at the time of the parousia would witness and share in its glories. As long as they held this view they would feel impatient at any prospect of postponement in His return since it cast a shadow upon their own hope of personal survival to share in that glory. All grounds for this feeling were removed with the assuring revelation that there will be no essential difference in the lot of those who have died and those who are alive when Christ returns for His own.

But a further word needed to be directed to the readers. The solemn truth is that the returning Lord will be the Judge of all. It is their duty to so live that they will be prepared to meet the Lord whenever He comes. In view of the uncertainty as to the time of His coming, it is imperative that they give diligence to be morally and spiritually ready. The pastoral heart of the writers leads them thus to exhort their beloved brethren.

As we continue to study eschatology:

- remember not to go beyond the text of scripture and **speculate** or be overly **dogmatic**
- remember that end times are always presented with a **practical application** of encouraging us to live holy lives for the Lord right now; not presented as an academic topic

I. (:1-3) TWO DIFFERENT DISCERNMENTS (PERSPECTIVES, EXPECTATIONS) REGARDING GOD'S PROGRAM FOR THE FUTURE (ESPECIALLY: THE COMING OF THE DAY OF THE LORD) – BELIEVER VS UNBELIEVER

Def: Discernment = the quality of being able to grasp and comprehend what is obscure

The Expectation of Believers Regarding the Coming Day of the Lord vs.

The Expectation of Unbelievers

Looked at from two angles:

- | | |
|--|-------------------------|
| What do you think is coming in the future? | Informed vs Uninformed |
| How will it affect you? | Realistic vs Delusional |

A. (:1-2) Informed vs Uninformed (or Misinformed)

1. Christian Philosophy of History as Overall Frame of Reference

“Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren”

Paul addresses these believes as “*brethren*” – they were privileged to have been the recipients of God’s explanation of the overall course of history = “His Story” – things taking place down through history should make sense to those in God’s family as they understand the *times* and *epochs* and what God is doing at different stages – fits very nicely with a dispensational systematic theology as well – this is currently the time when the fullness of the Gentiles is being completed; it is Satan’s day and man’s day when God does not immediately execute His judgment on those who rebel against Him; in fact He gives them a lot of rope even to mock Him as He patiently pleads with them not to despise His goodness and forbearance but to repent while there is still time ... But the Day of the Lord is coming and an awful day of judgment it will be

Mayhue: *Times* – quantity
 Seasons – quality or character

Robert Thomas: “*Times and dates*” . . . well known words describing the end times from two perspectives. The former conceives more of elapsed time and hence a particular date or dates when predictions will be fulfilled. The latter word, while including some reference to extent of time, gives more attention to the character of quality of a given period, i.e., what signs will accompany the consummating events. The two words together have this same eschatological connotation in Acts 1:7; 3:19-21. The latter word very frequently refers to this future period (Dan 9:27, LXX; Mark 13:33; Luke 21:8, 24; Eph 1:10; 1 Tim 6:15; Titus 1:3; Heb 9:10; Rev 1:3; 11:18; 22:10). During his first visit Paul had effectively communicated the basic features of precise times and accompanying circumstances of future events.

Wiersbe: This phrase is found only three times in the Bible, and refers primarily to God’s plans for Israel. This is the way Daniel stated it when God gave him understanding of the king’s dream (Dan. 2:21). Our Lord’s use of the phrase in Acts 1:7 indicates that times and seasons relate primarily to Israel.

* * * * *

MacArthur: There are three popular contemporary views of history. The first is the **cyclical view**, which sees history as an endless circle, spiraling back through the same things over and over again. . . But the cyclical view evacuates any meaning or purpose from history, as **John Marsh** notes:

If such a view be true, then historical existence has been deprived of its significance. What I do now I have done in a previous world cycle, and will do again in future world cycles. Responsibility and decision disappear, and with them any real significance to historical life, which in fact becomes a rather grandiose natural cycle. Just as the corn is sown, grows, and ripens each year, so will the events of history recur time after time. Moreover, if all that can happen is the constant repetition of an event-cycle, there is no possibility of meaning in the cycle itself. It achieves nothing in itself, neither can it contribute to anything outside itself. The events of history are devoid of significance. (*The Fullness of Time* [London: Nisbet, 1952], 167)

A second view of history is that of **atheistic naturalism** Unlike the cyclical view, this view sees history as linear and non-repetitive. But like the cyclical view, the naturalistic view assigns no meaning to history. History may be proceeding in a straight line instead of going around in

circles, but it is not leading anywhere; it has no ultimate goal or purpose. . . . Such a hopeless, purposeless, empty view of history reduces man to insignificance, to nothing more than a “chance configuration of atoms in the slip stream of meaningless chance history” (Francis A. Schaeffer, *Death in the City* [Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity, 1972], 18).

The **Christian view** of history stands in sharp contrast to the hopeless despair of the first two views. The Bible reveals history to be the outworking of the purposeful plan of the sovereign, creator God. . . . Jesus Christ is the central figure in history; the Old Testament points to His coming, and the New Testament describes and expounds His life, death, resurrection, and second coming.

As history continues to unfold the eternally planned purposes of God, one event looms large on the horizon: **the Day of the Lord**. That event will mark the end of man’s day, as God acts in judgment to take back direct control of the earth from the usurpers (both human and demonic) who presently rule it. It will be an unprecedented time of cataclysmic judgment on all unrepentant sinners.

* * * * *

Prov. 16:4 *“The Lord has made everything for its own purpose, even the wicked for the day of evil.”*

Tragic case: what about those unbelievers who are actually informed . . . but choose to ignore God’s warnings and do not prepare themselves for the coming of the Lord??

2. No Need for New Revelation -- Previous oral instruction
“you have no need of anything to be written to you.”

Why?

- not able to pin down the exact timetable – God has not revealed that
- no need for anymore revelation than what God has already given in order to realize the pastoral application of living a holy and alert life
- already had received instruction with clarity and sufficiency

Deut 29:29 (JW’s favorite verse) *“The secret things belong to the Lord our God; but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law.”*

Note the moral imperative associated with knowledge

Proverbs talks about how important it is that we value God’s wisdom, diligently mine it and search it out:

25:2 *“It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, but the glory of kings is to search out a matter.”*

Just dismiss any date-setters who claim to have some new revelation from God or precise understanding of the timing of when these events will occur – God is not showing all of His cards; still it is incredible that Bible teachers come out with preposterous predictions

What God has revealed is sufficient for guiding us in how we need to live right now – don't be craving something else

3. No Surprises for Believers -- Sufficient knowledge on the subject

“For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night.”

Day will not overtake believers *“like a thief”*

- Sufficiency of knowledge

- the precision of this knowledge – not just some vague truths – *akribos* – **Luke 1:3** *“having investigated every carefully (accurately)”*; Acts 18:25 accurate teaching of Apollos

- subject matter is *the day of the Lord*

- analogy is to a *thief in the night*:

- We don't know the timing – Unexpected nature of Christ's Return

- The unsaved will be caught unprepared; Believers should be prepared

- There will be bad consequences for the unbelievers – the Lord will not be defeated or thwarted as His coming from accomplishing His purposes; no bad consequences for believers – they will be delivered before that great and terrible day of the Lord

B. (:3) Realistic vs Delusional (False Security) -- Delivered vs Doomed

[Stronger than **Prepared vs Unprepared**]

1. The **False Security** of those Facing Destruction – Prepared vs Unprepared

“While they are saying, ‘Peace and safety!’

Peace – inner tranquility

Safety – freedom from attack from external forces

This has been Satan's methodology down through history – blinding men to the reality of their lost condition; pulling a veil over their eyes; hiding the truth; making them believe the lie that they want to believe – they can live as they please; there is no consequence to breaking God's Law; they are not accountable to a Just and Righteous and Holy Creator

- started back in the Garden – *“You surely will not die”* **Gen. 3:4**

You don't have to listen to what God says; He doesn't know what He's talking about ...

Just look around you at all of the death that takes place every day ...

- Look at all of the OT false prophets who promised *“Peace and Safety”*

- **Jer. 8:11** – entire context

- Look at the false teachers today who continue to promise *“Peace and Safety”*

Popular message -- **2 Peter 2** – ignoring God's warnings like people in day of Noah

2. The **Awfulness** of Coming Destruction – the harsh reality

“then destruction will come upon them”

- unpredictability

- imminence

Milligan: Destruction means utter and hopeless ruin, a loss of everything worthwhile

Mayhue: The Day of the Lord exclusively involves **judgment** either against Israel or upon the rebellious world population, individually and collectively. Where blessing is an attendant feature (and it is not always), it is a **chronological sequel** not an inherent feature. God's judgment can be either providential (Ezek 30:3, 10) or direct (2 Pet 3:10).

- Look at the images of destruction from the **Book of Revelation**

- **Rev. 6:8** Fourth Seal – fourth of the earth killed; **6:15-17**

- **Rev. 9:18** Sixth Trumpet – a third of mankind was killed

- **Rev. 16:21** Seventh Bowl – *“huge hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, came down from heaven upon men; and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail; because its plague was extremely severe”*

- **Zeph. 1:14-18**

- **Is. 13:9-13** – transition to birth pangs

3. The **Suddenness** of Coming Destruction

“suddenly like birth pangs upon a woman with child;

- seven year 70th week of Daniel fits nicely into this *“birth pangs”* imagery

- certain aspect of fear – you know you are going to have to go through the entire **painful** process of labor and delivery; even though you have been anticipating this, it still comes up **unexpectedly** and **suddenly** – when it begins to happen, ramps up quickly; pain intensifies; you don't get to pick when is a good time for labor pains to begin – whenever it happens you have to deal with it – knowing there is no escape

Showers (p. 21ff) Dead Sea Scrolls calls the severe troubles of the 7 yrs before the Messiah's Coming the birth pangs of the Messiah; travail precedes the birth of the Kingdom Age.
Jer. 30:5-7

Wiersbe: The early part of this day of the Lord was called *“the beginning of sorrows”* by the Lord Jesus (Matt. 24:8); and the Greek word translated *“sorrows”* actually means *“birth pangs.”* . . . out of the day of the Lord will come the birth of the kingdom.

4. The **Inescapability** of Coming Destruction – Armageddon will arrive in full force

“and they shall not escape.” Literally: *Flee out* (used of prisoners) *ekpheugo*

Used with respect to God's coming judgment: **Rom 2:1-11** esp v.3

Heb 2:3 *“how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation”*

Heb 12:25 *“much less will we escape who turn away from Him who warns from heaven”*

No place to hide – you will look for caves to hide in; no relief; no second chance; hearts of the Gentiles especially will be hardened; Don't put off the issue of salvation today and hope that you will be able to respond in that day – *Today is the day of salvation . . .*

CONCLUSION TO PART ONE:

As believers, are we in the **Ready Position**? We will look more closely at our mental state and our attitude of readiness next week – there are four more contrasts in vv.4-11 that drive home the application

We should be **informed** about what God has planned for the future – it is a privilege to be in the know

Make sure you are not falling prey to the schemes of Satan and believing his lie that you can escape accountability – It would be **Delusional** to live your life saying “*Peace and Safety*” when the blade of the guillotine of God’s terrible wrath hangs over your head and destruction looms in your future

You don’t want the day of the Lord to overtake you as a *thief in the night*

INTRODUCTION TO PART 2:

Overall theme of the book as we get near the conclusion:

CHURCH PLANTERS ENCOURAGE GROWING DISCIPLES TO ENDURE PERSECUTION AND WALK WORTHY OF THEIR CALLING IN ANTICIPATION OF THE LORD’S RETURN

Time to start pulling together the threads of this book so that we can see the big picture.

- **Church Planters** – Acts 17 – this book is like a manual for how to plant a church
Pure Motives and Godly character – setting themselves up as examples;
Looked at various Leadership Profiles of how to serve with unselfish love
- **Growing Disciples** – commended for their changed lives; the gospel had impacted them so that they had a good reputation throughout the region; But still encouraged to keep making progress in their faith and love and hope; 4 messages about Pressing on to Maturity – importance of family fellowship, sacrificing security, feeding on faithfulness, persevering in progress
- **Enduring Persecution** – times had gotten so bad that some are going to imagine that somehow they already were in the day of the Lord (corrected in 2 Thess);
Godliness always stirs up persecution; we need boldness in proclaiming the gospel
- **Walk Worthy of their Calling** – Sanctified Sex; Brotherly love
- **Anticipating the Lord’s Return** --

Are you anticipating the Lord’s Return?? Believers vs Unbelievers respond differently

CONVICTION REGARDING GOD'S PROGRAM FOR THE FUTURE KEEPS US SPIRITUALLY ALERT

What is your approach to God's revelation about the imminent return of His Son Jesus Christ – the one who came the first time to seek and to save the lost but is returning to deliver His elect and execute judgment on those that refuse to bow the knee to His sovereignty ...

Last week: **Contrast #1 = 2 Different Discernments** (Perspectives, Expectations) – Believer vs Unbeliever

- Informed vs Uninformed
- Realistic vs Delusional

4 remaining contrasts to study this week Paul wanted his readers to be encouraged, to be built up in their faith ... to be growing in their love and to be steadfast in their hope

II. (:4-5) TWO DIFFERENT DOMAINS (IDENTITIES OR CAMPS OR SPHERES OF EXISTENCE) – BELIEVER VS UNBELIEVER

Def: Domain = a sphere of influence or activity

Looked at through the lens of two different images from nature

What family are we in? What characterizes our nature? Who are we at our inner core?

Do you struggle with trying to find out who you are? Are you inconsistent – one way around certain groups of people and another way around others?

A. (:4) Sons of Light vs Darkness

“But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day should overtake you like a thief.”

“for you are all sons of light”

Continuing that theme of being in the know or being in the dark

Hiebert: Jesus described a person as “the son of” anything which completely dominated and controlled him.

APPLICATION: Darkness associated with 3 things:

- 1) Darkness associated with **lack of knowledge** – intellectual deficiency
- 2) Darkness is associated with **deeds of shame** – moral deficiency – check your conscience – Is there anything you are trying to hide in the darkness of your heart? Is there any area where you are shutting Christ out and not wanting His light to penetrate and expose? Is there some sinful practice or habit that you are ashamed of and have not repented of – make sure that you are living in the light
- 3) Darkness associated with **Death** – spiritual deficiency

Satan tries to counterfeit the identity of believers – **2 Cor. 11:14-15** *“for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds”*

B. (:5) Sons of Day vs Night

“and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness.”

Just look at the news and you see what types of evil take place in the darkness; when night falls, the police activity picks up dramatically; look at the looting that takes place when the power goes out in a major city and there is a virtual blackout --

What can we get away with when we think no one is watching or can see our actions?

Very similar to the message of **1 John** – are you walking in the light or in the darkness – are we confessing our sins; are we loving the brethren; are we characterized by works of righteousness

1 John 1:5 “*God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all*”

God knows who He is; no identity conflict with God; no inconsistency

Not just light some of the time or in certain circumstances

Does not take on the attribute of light from another but God is light intrinsically

1:6-7; 2:8-11

Gen. 1:3 – “*Then God said, Let there be light, and there was light. God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light day, and the darkness He called night.*”

These distinctions originated from God and got their significance from God

Light fundamentally associated with Goodness vs Evil

John 8:12 “*I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life*”

The world is a dark place apart from the light of Jesus Christ

John 3:19-21 “*men loved the darkness rather than the light, for their deeds were evil*”

God is not to blame for men rejecting the light and preferring darkness

MacArthur:

- **intellectually**, light refers to biblical truth while darkness refers to error or falsehood
(cf. Ps 119:105; Pr 6:23; Jn 1:4; 8:12)

- **morally**, light refers to holiness or purity while darkness refers to sin or wrongdoing
(Ro 13:11-14; 1 Th 5:4-7)

Constable: Christians have illumination, and they also live in a realm characterized by light, warmth, and growth

Result: the day of the Lord should not overtake us like a thief (John 12:35-36) katalambano

“*overtake*” – come upon them by surprise and lay hostile hands on them

“*For a little while longer the Light is among you. Walk while you have the Light, so that darkness will not overtake you; he who walks in the darkness does not know where he goes.*

“*While you have the Light, believe in the light, so that you may become sons of Light.*”

III. (:6-7) TWO DIFFERENT DISPOSITIONS (MINDSETS OR MENTAL STATES) – BELIEVER VS UNBELIEVER

Def: Disposition = prevailing tendency, mood or inclination; the tendency of something to act in a certain manner under given circumstances; Attitude; Response; Stage of Readiness, Dynamics

Like the **Amber Alert** color coding – be on the lookout for a missing and abducted child

Like the alert system for **air quality index** – different color codes – how dangerous is the air to breathe

Alert levels with respect to **terrorist attacks** --

Are we on the alert in terms of looking for Christ's return?

A. (:6,8a) Mindset of Believers

“so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober.”

“But since we are of the day, let us be sober,”

1. Alert

Mark 13:33-37

Rev 16:15 (*“Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his garments, lest he walk about naked and men see his shame.”*)

2. Sober (consistent with the day) – free from the influence of intoxicants; similar to the discipline and poise of athletes; free from excess, passion, rashness, confusion, etc.; used in conjunction with watchfulness (**Vines**)

Free from the type of fanaticism of those who had quit their jobs and set aside common sense and everyday responsibility to sit on a mountain and wait for the return of Christ

Look at all the NT injunctions to be **Watchful** and **Sober**:

Matt 24:42ff; 25:13; 2 Tim. 4:5; **1 Pet. 1:13; 4:7**; 5:8 – live in light of eternity

Illustration: **Air traffic controllers** – charged with monitoring the traffic of airplanes in the sky so that we don't have any disastrous collisions – must be anticipating what is coming next; cannot have any surprises – drunk and asleep on the job would not get it done

B. (:7) Mindset of Unbelievers

“For those who sleep do their sleeping at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night.”

1. Sleeping

Paul had used the imagery of sleep in chap. 4 to speak of the death of believers – here a different Gk word is used *katheudo* in a negative sense of the spiritual laziness and indifference and blindness of unbelievers

Look at the disappointment of Christ over the inability of the disciples to remain alert and watching in prayer – instead they fell asleep – at a critical point in history – Christ about to face His toughest challenge – His betrayal by Judas and crucifixion

Matt 26:40 *And He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, “So, you men could not keep watch with Me for one hour?”*

If we sleep away the daylight hours we miss our opportunity to serve the Lord ... much less be ready for His return

2. Drunk (consistent with the night)

Need to be controlled by the Holy Spirit

Brings to mind again the days of Noah and the failure to heed the warnings of coming judgment

Rom. 13:12-14 *“The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.”*

What is our Disposition or Mindset when it comes to anticipating and watching for the return of our Lord?

Hendriksen: The apostle’s exhortation, then, amounts to this: Let us not be lax and unprepared, but let us be prepared, being spiritually alert, firm in the faith, courageous, strong, calmly but with glad anticipation looking forward to the future day. Let us, moreover, do all this because we belong to the day and not to the night.

Transition: Image of a **soldier on duty** is what comes to mind (**MacArthur**)

IV. (:8b) TWO DIFFERENT DRESS CODES (TYPES OF BATTLE DRESS) – BELIEVER VS UNBELIEVER

Def: Dress Code = the required clothing for the particular activity or setting

No question that we are engaged in spiritual warfare; what types of battle fatigues are we wearing?

Football season starting up – who would be willing to go out and play without any protection?

If bullets are going to be flying, I want the bullet-proof vest and the best helmet money can buy

There are certain vital parts of the body that require special protection

A. Protected with the Armor Provided by God – Source = Holy Spirit

“having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation.”

Look at emphasis in this epistle on *faith, love and hope* (1:3, 8, 10; 3:6, 12, 13; 4:9)

Context of persecution and suffering and hardship – easy to become discouraged

How can we encourage one another and build one another up?

FAITH – Grab on to God’s promises and hold them tightly; exercise our faith; don’t be conformed to the world’s thinking with what it has to say about priorities and security and material possessions and living for self

LOVE -- (1Thess 2:7-12) PAUL’S PICTURE OF THREE ROLE MODELS THAT ILLUSTRATE PROPER CONDUCT IN THE MINISTRY –

3 LEADERSHIP PROFILES OF UNSELFISH SERVANT LOVE

- a. (:7-8) Loving Mother -- Gentleness and Tender Care
- b. (:9) Hard Worker – Church planters labor long and hard to both provide for physical needs (when necessary) and proclaim the gospel
- c. (:10-12) Faithful Father – Godly example and discipleship training of a Father with vision

Paul demonstrated that he was an excellent role model in this important area of loving the brethren; How are we doing in expending ourselves to serve our brothers and sisters?

HOPE – this epistle is all about Hope – looking for the return of Christ and the deliverance that will accomplish

Hiebert: The breastplate is pictured as being double or having two sides. Faith denotes the proper inner attitude of the believer toward Christ as his Redeemer and Lord, while love is the proper outward expression.

Ephes 6:10-17 passage about the armor of God

B. Naked and Exposed – Source = Satan

Look at Christ's condemnation of religious hypocrites in His letter to the lukewarm church at Laodicea – **Rev 3:15-18**

“you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked”

Transition: Look at the parable about those clothed in the wedding garments – just for the elect **Matt. 22:11-14** look at the **destiny** of those not protected by the righteousness of Christ

V. (:9-10) TWO DIFFERENT DESTINIES – BELIEVER VS UNBELIEVER

Def: Destiny = Final end point

A. (:9a) Unbelievers – Wrath and Destruction

“For God has not destined us for wrath”

“Destined” – clear support for God's initiative and sovereignty in our salvation; chose us for Himself before the foundation of the world; destined us to be with Him forever – spared His wrath and judgment

Does this wrath just refer to eternal judgment in hell or also to the wrath of God poured out during the day of the Lord?

Look at the context we have been studying here

Wiersbe: The nature of the tribulation: This is the time when God will judge the Gentile nations and also purge Israel and prepare her for the coming of her Messiah. The “earth-dwellers” will taste of God's wrath (Rev. 3:10) and not those whose citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20). God will judge the earth-dwellers for their iniquity (Isa. 26:20-21).

B. Believers -- Obtaining Deliverance through our Lord Jesus Christ

“but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ”

What type of deliverance is in view here? Different aspects of salvation

1. How was this salvation accomplished? Back to the fundamentals of the Gospel
Death and Resurrection of Christ and its implications for us in our daily life

“who died for us”

On our behalf – took our punishment for sin

For our benefit – so that we can live with Him

As our substitute, in our place where we deserved to die

2. What is the intended result?

“that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with Him.”

Same 2 groups talked about in chapter 4 – pointing us back to the hope of the Rapture

(:11) CONCLUSION TO 4:13 – 5:11

“Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.”

Use your conviction regarding God's program for the future to

1) encourage one another -- giving hope to the bereaved

2) build each other up -- keep each other spiritually alert

How can we do this in practical terms? Responsibility of every believer ... not just the one preaching the Word ... We want to have a balanced ministry – encourage body life; exercise of spiritual gifts; even if you don't have the gift of exhortation, you still have the responsibility of encouraging ...

But sometimes we discourage one another ...

Sometimes we tear others down ...

Contrast between believers and unbelievers in how they view the return of Christ –

2 Different:

- DISCERNMENTS – Be informed and realistic; not blinded and delusional

- DOMAINS – Live as sons of the day and sons of the light

- DISPOSITIONS – Be alert and sober and watching; not sleeping and drunk

- DRESS CODES – Be protected with the armor of God – with faith and love and hope

- DESTINIES – Be headed for deliverance rather than the wrath of God

As believers, we face the future with confidence and certainty – a blessed hope that makes us long for the soon coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Let's be encouraged and let's encourage one another.

Bruce: The eschatological hope, then, is not an excuse for idling but an incentive for action, and especially for mutual aid. Every church member has a duty to help in *“building up”* the community, so that it may attain spiritual maturity.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What would be the purpose of a posttrib rapture? Why would God allow believers to suffer through the outpouring of His wrath in the Day of the Lord (the latter part of the 70th week of Daniel) just to rapture them at the end and bring them right back down to enter the kingdom?
- 2) What should be the characteristics and lifestyle of someone who is on a high level of Alert and a constant state of readiness? (cf. our new color coded system related to alerts against possible terrorist attacks in the U.S.)
- 3) Would we have any regrets or changes we would like to make in our life if we knew Christ was coming today? Note that the emphasis of the passage is on the comfort it provides the believer ... not on the challenge to repent and make amends. The assumption seems to be that believers are already progressing in holiness.
- 4) Are we using these truths to warn unbelievers that “Today is the day of salvation”? They can have no expectation of any opportunity to repent and trust Christ in the uncertain future. They need to prepare themselves for His coming right now. No second chances!

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Bruce: The salvation in view here includes salvation from eschatological “*wrath*” (cf. Rom. 5:9) but positively it involves being raised to life with Christ. It is that definitive and consummated salvation which, as Paul says in another epistle, “*is nearer to us now than when we first believed*” (Rom 13:11, in a context where the same call for vigilance is sounded).

Stott: Here, then, are two affirmations about judgment, each enforced by a vivid simile. First, the day of the Lord will come like a thief (2). Secondly, destruction will come like labour pains. Both illustrations teach that Christ’s coming will be sudden. Suddenly, in the middle of the night, a burglar breaks in. Suddenly, in the pregnancy of an expectant mother, labour begins. At the same time, there is an obvious difference between them. For although both are sudden, the burglar is unexpected, whereas labour (once pregnancy has begun) is expected. So putting the two metaphors together, we may say that Christ’s coming will be (1) sudden and unexpected (like a burglar in the night), and (2) sudden and unavoidable (like labour at the end of pregnancy). In the first case there will be no warning, and in the second no escape.

Life Application Bible Commentary: As you near the end of a long race, your legs ache, your throat burns, and your whole body cries out for you to stop. This is when friends and fans are most valuable. Their encouragement helps you push through the pain to the finish line. In the same way, Christians are to encourage one another. A word of encouragement offered at the

right moment can mean the difference between finishing well and collapsing along the way. Look around you. Be sensitive to others' need for encouragement, and offer supportive words or actions.

Hendriksen: Note the combination of *suddenness* and *unpreparedness*. Note also the striking sentence-order, retained in our translation, making both the adjective *sudden* and the noun *destruction* very emphatic. The world in general will be eating and drinking, buying and selling, building and planting, marrying and giving into marriage, when Jesus comes again. Of course, in themselves not any of these things is wicked. . . . But when the soul becomes entirely wrapped up in them, so that they become ends in themselves, and so that the higher, spiritual needs are neglected, they are a curse and no longer a blessing. "All for the body and its enjoyments, nothing for the soul," was the slogan of the wicked contemporaries of Noah and of Lot; and that too will be the outstanding characteristic of the human race in the evil days to come.

Don White: Living in the Light of the Day of the Lord

Not going to answer questions here about times and epochs; *Times* = specific amount of time; how long will it be; *Epochs* = seasons; Transition from the coming of the Lord and the encouragement it brings to believers to teaching about the effects this coming will have on both believers and unbelievers; introduces the theme of the *Day of the Lord* here; an OT concept that emphasized day of judgment on the nations and on Israel itself; Joel 1:15ff – when we see Christ in the NT as the one orchestrating events = testimony to His deity; a day of darkness and gloom; also sense of hope associated for those who are trusting in the Lord; day of deliverance and vindication – of realizing all that God has promised; day of great fear and wrath for unbeliever; like a "thief in the night" – unexpectedness; will happen suddenly; thief wants to come when he is least expected; he waits to catch everyone by surprise; general attitude of the people similar to days of Noah – "peace and safety" – all is going well; ignoring the warnings delivered by Noah and continuing in wickedness; Eph 5:8-14 image of light and darkness; implications of the Day of the Lord for believers: don't be indifferent or in state of spiritual lethargy but be alert and awake; don't be controlled by impulses of the flesh; be able to think clearly; sense of urgency; put forth diligence; be ready and faithful; Rom. 13 – *already the hour for you to awaken from sleep* . . . ; Put on the new man; Eph. 6 and the armor we are to put on to make us ready for the day of battle, of temptation, of evil; breastplate covers from the chest to the waist and covers the vital organs of the body; helmet helps us withstand the attacks of the enemy = the doubts and fears about the future; the confidence in what God has done and has promised to do; God cannot lie; Jesus Christ took upon Himself God's wrath; Responsibility to one another to encourage and admonish and remind one another about these truths and their implications; encourage when we are discouraged; comfort when we are grieving; how do we build one another up? Involve ourselves in each other's lives;

Andy Bloom: Pre Trib Rapture (vv.9-11)

Soldiers' **dress** (vs.8), **destination** (vs.9 – to meet Him in the clouds), **deliverance** (vs. 10 -- from the wrath to come, the tribulation), **delight** (vs. 11);

Rapture does not start the seven year tribulation period but the signing of the covenant; "Time of Jacob's Trouble" is day of wrath; 2 Cor. 4:4 – Satan already doing a destructive work; day of the Lord is God's day, not Satan's day. Satan's wrath is manifested in opposition to God's wrath – has been that way all along; Christ not going to leave His bride here to face His

wrath – cf. example of **Noah** and of **Lot**; judgment cannot come until Lot is taken out of the city; *Flee the wrath to come*; there is a day coming when God will shut the door and no man will be able to open it; some people who have had opportunity to be saved now will not have opportunity in tribulation period; but others who have not had the same opportunity may have the opportunity in that time period; Heb 12:5-8; When war begins, an ambassador is called home; God doesn't want his ambassadors hurt by His weaponry; we are to be doing the work of the Lord until He returns; is God angry with the last generation of Christians and has just them go through the tribulation? What comfort would there be if we are destined to go through any part of the tribulation period?

Dr. Ken Casillas: Understanding the Day of the Lord (vv.2-5) – Recapping that subject

20% of NT is predictive in nature; give eschatology its due attention;

3 Cautions / Recommendations in studying eschatology:

- avoid speculation that goes beyond the scripture as well as unwarranted dogmatism in areas that are not specifically addressed in the bible; we come to pre-trib rapture position by systematic understanding and inference ...not by direct statement; not a fundamental doctrine
- keep in mind the practical application of eschatology or it turns into just an academic discussion; the goal is not to satisfy our curiosity or enable us to fill out a chart
- always connect eschatology with the gospel – or the debate will become distasteful; not something tacked on to the end of the bible so that history can finish with a flourish; not separate from the redemptive flow of scripture

3 Questions:

1. What is this Day of the Lord that Paul mentions in vs.2

Used often in the OT so that it is a technical expression with a specific reference

Negatively:

- not the same as the Lord's Day = the first day of the week
- not always restricted to a 24 hour period every time; refers to a number of different periods of differing lengths
- not limited to one particular time period or event – not only one time period in history

Positively:

- a variety of periods of direct divine intervention in human affairs – it is obvious, dramatic, overwhelming that God is working – His fingerprints are all over it
Most of the time we don't see what God is doing behind the scenes even though he is always active
- typically a time when God steps in to judge wickedness; often His own people – such as Northern and Southern kingdoms – harbingers (advanced warning or announcement that something bigger is coming)

2. How will unbelievers relate to the Day of the Lord?

Where do they fit into this picture; how does it affect them? They will be destroyed; utter and hopeless ruin; the loss of all that gives worth to existence; details are in book of Rev; look at seal judgments = just the first wave of judgments; devastating experience for all Christ rejectors; Jer. 6:14 – thinking there is peace when there is no peace; **unexpected** and **sudden** (when it begins to happen it will all be over very quickly); like a mighty army that could consummate a military campaign in just a day; **inescapable** – you can't stop the labor pains; Is there any hope for deliverance?

3. How will believers relate to the Day of the Lord?

“*But*” – don’t you be alarmed or concerned; not be overtaken by the Day of the Lord – 2 possibilities:

- prepare yourself so that you would be spared while in the midst of this tribulation =
Post-trib view
- or they won’t even be around = Pre-trib view – favor this view – Why?
- because of the **progression of thought** in this passage; had already talked about the rapture; now started a new topic – “*now concerning*” – something substantially distinct; chronological progression; moving on to the topic of the Day of the Lord as it relates to the wicked
- concept of **deliverance from wrath** of the time of the tribulation

Doesn’t get into a lot of timing issues in this passage; but focuses on their identity and destiny; drastic difference between those who are consumed by the Day of the Lord and those who are delivered; sons of the light and of the day; the son normally takes on the character of the father; light speaks of holiness, moral purity, the character of God being reproduced in people; Jesus is the light of the world; came to shine His light on people; Ephes. 5; is my life characterized by darkness or light? Not saying that God expects us to be perfect; not saying we are saved by our own goodness;

Responding to the Day of the Lord (vv. 6-11)

Presenting things in military terms; need to be alert; there is a war going on; need for a helmet for protection; we respond by engaging seriously in this spiritual warfare; Christian life is not supposed to be a picnic; not a time for relaxing; we are under attack;

3 Commands with a gospel motivation that gives you grace and energy to follow through

1. Watch (:6-7)

The tendency that we all have to become inattentive or indifferent to threats against our spiritual life; don’t be apathetic, cold, sluggish

Stay Alert

No indication of signs that we should be watching for; cf. sense of panic after you doze off at the wheel – makes you pay attention

Be Sober

Dealing with the spiritual attitude here; not under some influence that would dull your sensibilities

What types of **attacks** should I be watching out for?

- warning against falling into immorality (chap. 4)
- don’t limit it to that area; evil one might attack in many areas – anything that would threaten our purity or compromise our integrity or make us friends of the world so that we would not stand out as different and as disciples of Christ

Act what you are already in Christ = a person of the day;

2. Protect Yourself (:8-10)

Participle of manner -- be sober by putting on this protective armor; what did the armor consist of: faith, love and hope; 1 Thess. 1:3; Motivation = vv. 9-10 – takes us back to the gospel; this wrath has double entendre – both wrath of tribulation and eternal wrath

3. Minister to One Another (:11)

Corporate command; same way he ended chap. 4; encourage one-on-one kind of ministry; take truths like this and minister them back to specific individuals; when have you done this? Would you be open to someone ministering to you along these lines? Motivation is implicit = the gospel privilege of being together in the new community of the body of Christ

TEXT: 1 THESSALONIANS 5:12-15

TITLE: PROMOTING BODY LIFE WHILE PREVENTING BODY STRIFE

BIG IDEA:

**THE HEALTH AND PEACE OF THE LOCAL CHURCH DEPENDS UPON EACH MEMBER FULFILLING 4 KEY RESPONSIBILITIES THAT GOVERN OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH ONE ANOTHER --
4 RESPONSIBILITIES FOR MAINTAINING HEALTHY CHURCH RELATIONSHIPS**

INTRODUCTION:

Paul has charged church planters and spiritual leaders with some heavy responsibilities in this short epistle. We looked at the type of motives and conduct that leaders must exemplify. We studied various profiles in leadership – what it means to function as a loving Mother, a servant Father, a hard laborer. Now as Paul closes his letter with some final instructions and exhortations, he turns to every member of the local church and puts the responsibility for church health and church peace and church unity and church growth squarely on the shoulders of each member. It all depends on how you treat others. You can't look to someone else; you must make sure you are responding to others as you should. There is still much in this passage by inference to challenge the leadership – but that is not the thrust of the passage. The burden is the responsibility that each of us must bear to make sure that our church is a loving and harmonious body. How important is it to you to have a healthy and peaceful church – to promote body life and prevent body strife? Here is what you need to do.

In each case we want to examine **HOW** to fulfill that responsibility and **WHY** we need to step up to the plate

I. (:12-13a) WHAT IS OUR RESPONSIBILITY TOWARDS OUR SPIRITUAL LEADERS?

APPRECIATE YOUR SPIRITUAL LEADERS

Cf. “**Pastor appreciation month**” – rolls around in October every year – searched Google for the background on this day and creative ideas on how to observe this day – assumption is that you are honoring your one senior pastor or your paid clergy --

- inaugurated in **1992** by the non-profit group, Under His Wing Ministries
- Over the years, the national holiday has grown more popular. The demand for gift cards has led **Hallmark** to print National Clergy Day cards since 2001.

I always reacted against it because so often it did not properly recognize the contributions of the **plurality of leadership**

Paul did not target this exhortation at a one day or one special month type of observance

You cannot adequately understand and apply this paragraph without a functioning NT biblical model of **plurality of eldership** leadership in the local church

That structure is assumed here – “*those*” plural – not some special deference shown to a senior pastor; it is the consistent example presented in the NT – it is a normative example that we must follow

- If your structure is that of a dictator ruling over the church – this is not the text that Paul would point you to in order to have a healthy and peaceful church ... He would point you to the necessity of confronting and exposing the pride and selfish ambition of a Diotrephes as John did in 3 John.

- If the church involved false teachers and false apostles undermining the legitimate authority of his own apostleship and ministry as was the case in 2 Corinthians, Paul would not have used this text; he would have warned these deceptive shepherds to clean up their act before Paul would come in person to expose them and bring down the hammer.

But if your church situation is one where the biblical model is in place and is functioning as God intended, then this passage rightly places the burden on every member to follow through with their responsibility to contribute to the well-being of the assembly.

Erwtwmen de. umaj(adel foi

“*But we request of you, brethren*” – applies to every believer

Request: beg, urge, request urgently: 1 Thess 4:1; 2 Thess. 2:1

A. HOW? Give Them Their Due

Don't deflate them with criticism but encourage them with appreciation – 2 Main Verbs used:

1. Know them– acknowledge and recognize them and respond to them as leaders

eidenai touj kopiwh taj en umih

“*that you appreciate those who . . .*”

Know, Acknowledge, appreciate, show proper respect to (1 Thess 4:4)

Know fully and personally by experience – must have some context where they get to know these men – not just listening to them lecture

Implies a clear distinction between the leaders and those who are benefiting from their ministry

Shepherd knows each sheep individually ... but sheep are commanded to know their shepherds as well

2. Respect and Value them

kai. hgei sqai autouj uperekperissou/en agaph| dia. to. ergon autwh

“*and that you esteem them very highly in love. . .*”

Don't dismiss the significance of their role; be responsive to them; support them with loyalty and affection and appreciation

Alex Strauch: *Esteem them very highly in love* – 2 terms:

1) “*superabundantly*” or “*most exceedingly*” – very deep and warm affection; intensifies the word with two prepositions; the magnitude of the esteem; don't take leaders for granted; don't disregard all of the good things they have done

2) “*in love*” – you cannot lead people if you don't love them; you will be criticized and treated harshly; a sacrificial giving of yourself; a commitment on your part to give to them; Tell the leaders you love them in return; How can I help you; they will never change if you attack them; you can pick apart any leader; they all have flaws;

B. WHY? Based on their Ongoing Ministry Among You – “because of their work”

1. For Their Hard Work

“diligently labor among you”

Acts 20:35 “In everything I showed you that by **working hard** in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

1 Timothy 5:17 “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who **work hard** at preaching and teaching.”

Colossians 1:29 “And for this purpose also I **labor**, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.”

1 Corinthians 4:12 “and we **toil**, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure;”

2 Timothy 2:6 “The hard-working farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops.”

Some people desire **recognition** as a leader but shrink back from the **hard work** that is involved ... that is why we don’t start with a position or a title and call someone to perform that; instead we start with the work of the ministry and then recognize those who step up and perform in sacrificial and servant ways to build up the body

2. For Their Responsible Oversight – heavy responsibility

kai. proištamenouj umwh en kuriw

“and have charge over you **in the Lord**” not in every detail of your personal and family lives; you don’t need to check with the elders for permission about what type of car or home to purchase or what school to attend or what job to pursue – although there might be some biblical principles that would be helpful in those decisions

Lit. “to stand before” – **MacArthur**: Pastors stand in the place of the Chief Shepherd as His delegated undershepherds exercising oversight and authority in His name (cf. 1 Peter 5:1-4).

Providing: Guidance
Correction
Accountability
Discipline

This is a helpful, servant-oriented type of oversight; not an overbearing, intrusive, overly authoritative sense of control; the goal is to get you to live a life that is pleasing to the Lord and to be a faithful disciple of Him

3. For Their Helpful Teaching

kai. nouqetouhtaj uma

“and give you instruction”

Look at the dominant role that instruction plays in spiritual ministry; doctrine is important – not something that we no longer need in this stage of 21st century Christianity

Word from which we get *nouthetic* – teaching that is applied to the life in a practical sense to accomplish productive change of character and conformity to the character and purposes of God; The goal of our instruction is love ... not storing up knowledge; we have been called to a life of holiness and of conformity to Jesus Christ

II. (:13b) WHAT IS OUR RESPONSIBILITY TOWARDS ONE ANOTHER IN GENERAL?

ABIDE IN PEACE WITH ONE ANOTHER -- GET ALONG WITH ONE ANOTHER

eirhneuete en eautoijÅ

“Live in peace with one another.”

MacArthur takes this phrase to apply very specifically to the relationship between the sheep and their shepherds. So the application would be to submit to our leaders, to obey them so that there would not be conflict or strife in the church. But it is also possible that this separate sentence has a more general application in terms of how all of us need to live in peace with everyone else within the body. Because that would serve as a nice transition to the next verse which speaks to our mutual responsibilities to one another in the body.

We sinners have a tendency to fight; to insist on our rights; to think that we are always right; to cause division; to want to go our own way

Psalms 34:14 *“Depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.”*

Mark 9:50 *“Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.”* By means of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God and Christian character, serve as a preservative in a wicked world. Then Jesus takes up the matter of the permanence of marriage in chap. 10

Rom. 14:19-20 *“So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another. Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food.”*

Rom. 12:3-21 context is the exercise of spiritual gifts; be humble; be aggressive in using your gift for the good of the body; *let love be without hypocrisy; If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.*

2 Cor. 13:11 *“live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.”*

A. HOW? can we live in peace with one another

At the heart of the passage! Not just an afterthought ... short sentence ... but says a lot

Hendriksen: Stop your carping. Instead of continually criticizing the leaders, follow their directions, so that peace (here: absence of dissension) results.

If there is not peace, there is a problem that needs to be addressed.

Don't make a big deal out of something that shouldn't be a big deal ...

Love should cover a multitude of sins ... we don't need to address every issue and be overly confrontational ... but we do need to address certain issues – requires discernment and sensitivity and the leading of the Holy Spirit – no formula that we can rely on

Our **motivation** is key – must be to build up rather than to tear down

B. WHY? do we need to live in peace with one another?

- impacts the enjoyment of our fellowship – contrast a home where the prevailing tone is one of peace vs one of turmoil
- impacts the health and growth of our body – Does it make sense for the eye to be at war with the hand?
- impacts the effectiveness of our ministry and testimony
- pleases our Lord who is Head over His Body

Psalm 133 “Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity”

Somewhat of a transition from looking at how we relate to leaders in the church to looking at how we relate to everyone in the church.

III. (:14) WHAT IS OUR RESPONSIBILITY TOWARDS THOSE WHO ARE STRUGGLING?

APPROACH ONE ANOTHER IN LOVE AND SENSITIVITY – BUILDING UP PEOPLE WHO ARE STRUGGLING

HOW can we help those who are struggling and WHY do we need to help them?

parakaloumen de. umaj(adel foi

A. 3 Different Approaches for 3 Different Groups

- 1. Correct** – They need Discipline, Self-control, Accountability
nouqeteite touj ataktouj
“*admonish the unruly*”

Military connotation of soldiers who are out of shape; in general, disorderly, possibly rebellious
Especially the loafers, the slackers, the ones not pulling their weight

- 2. Encourage** – They need Courage, Boldness, Hope
paramuqeisqe touj ol igoyucouj
“*encourage the fainthearted*” -- (“*small-souled*”)

Morris: exercising tenderness towards the discouraged ... a tender concern, quite in the spirit of “*a bruised reed will he not break*” (Isa. 42:3). There are those who are not naturally bold, or who are temporarily overwhelmed by the stress of things. Such should not be condemned by

their more robust brethren, but consoled and encouraged, so that they may be fitted for the battle once more.

Stedman: Then, second, "encourage the faint-hearted"; literally the "small-souled" person, one who feels inadequate and ungifted. We would call them the introverts among us. "Help them find their place," says the apostle. This is addressed to everybody. People who feel out of it, who think they do not belong and cannot contribute anything, must be helped to find their place because they do have a place. In the wonderful picture of the body at work, in First Corinthians 12, the apostle says, "The ear cannot say, 'Because I am not an eye I am not part of the body.' No," says Paul, "even if it says that, it does not make it any less a part of the body," {cf, 1 Cor 12:16}. There are people who feel that way. They think, "I cannot do anything. I do not have any gifts." That is wrong thinking. God has equipped all his people with gifts. We are to help each other find our place, give them something to do and encourage them in the work that they are doing.

3. Support – They need Strength, Support, Fellowship
antesqeq twh asqenwh
"help the weak"

Life Application Bible Commentary: Paul's advice is simply to use the right medicine. For example:

- 1) It would not work to "take tender care" of a "lazy" person; that person would not appreciate it and would remain unchanged.
- 2) It would not work to "warn" a "timid" person; that person is of fragile self-esteem anyway, and a warning would only scare him or her away.
- 3) It would not work to "encourage" a truly "weak" person to press on to greater things; that would show callousness to the person's real need. The one trying to encourage may be doing so because it takes far less effort and involvement than taking "tender care" of that person as Paul prescribed. . .

Don't loaf around with the idle; warn them. Don't yell at the timid and weak; encourage and help them. At times it's difficult to distinguish between idleness and timidity. Two people may be doing nothing – one out of laziness and the other out of shyness or fear of doing something wrong. The key to ministry is sensitivity; sensing the condition of each person and offering the appropriate remedy for each situation. You can't effectively help until you know the problem. You can't apply the medicine until you know what is causing the pain.

B. 1 Universal Approach for Dealing with All
makroqumeite proj pantaj
"be patient with all men"

these people may annoy you; may be slow to change; may be resisting of the ministry;

Hiebert: *Longsuffering* is that admirable quality which refuses readily to yield to anger and retaliation in the face of provocation or irritation.

Remember that God is patient with each one of us every day

IV. (:15) WHAT IS OUR RESPONSIBILITY TOWARDS THOSE WHO HAVE HURT US?

AGGRESSIVELY LOVE THEM

- A. Negatively – Avoid a spirit of Retaliation – of Vengeance or Revenge
orate mh, tij kakon anti. kakou/ tini apodw
“*See that no one repays another with evil for evil*”

Look at how little children naturally respond – He hit me .. so I hit him; he said this about me ... so I said that about him

Our natural tendency is to lash out; to extract our pound of flesh; to make them pay for how they have hurt us; but we are called to live a supernatural life under the power of the Holy Spirit – Very difficult

Do we long to see them suffer? To see bad things happen to them?
Love even your enemies was the clear teaching of Christ

Very important advice in a context where the early church faced significant persecution.
But probably harder to obey within the context of believers where we hurt one another ...

Mayhue: Same lesson taught by Jesus (Matt 5:38-39), Peter (1 Pet 3:9) ... This is an absolute statement with no loopholes as Paul says *no one ... to anyone*.

- B. Positively – Love them and actively seek their good
al |a. pantote to. agaqon diwkete |kai| eij al |h| ouj kai. eij pantajA
“*but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all men.*”

Seek after; pursue – very aggressive term; not being passive or just ignoring these folks and not wishing them harm or doing them harm

Paul has covered HOW we should aggressively love even those who have hurt us ... but WHY do we need to act in this way?
The Lord knows all things and has reserved all Vengeance for Himself; don't try to play God and be Judge and Executioner ... we have been called to love even our enemies
Must have an eternal perspective

Even Christ Himself came the first time to seek and to save the lost ... He will come the second time for judgment.

Rom. 5:6-8 “*For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us*”

CONCLUSION:

This picture of a harmonious local church might sound too good to be true ... but that is what we

have been called to in the body of Jesus Christ. Make sure you are stepping up to the plate to fulfill your four areas of responsibility:

- to **Appreciate** your Spiritual Leaders
- to **Abide** in Peace with one another
- to **Approach** One Another in Love and Sensitivity
- and to **Aggressively Love** even those who have hurt you

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Were the Thessalonian believers not responding properly to their appointed church leaders? Why did Paul feel it necessary to remind them of their responsibility to appreciate and show respect? How could we better respond to our leaders?
- 2) What are the obstacles to peace in our church fellowship? How have we sought to be part of the solution rather than part of the problem?
- 3) Do we take our responsibilities seriously regarding building up other believers or do we excuse ourselves by shifting that activity over to the paid staff?
- 4) Identify one person at work or in the church that you have trouble getting along with. What action plan can you develop to actively seek their good in some concrete fashion?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Hendriksen: The watchfulness and soberness enjoined in the immediately preceding paragraph (5:1-11) must become evident in every walk of life. That is the gist of the present section. Detailed directions follow. They are striking because of their brevity. Paul knows how to say much in few words.

MacArthur: Paul's approach to church growth was in sharp contrast to present-day "church growth" experts' concerns about cultural demographics and homogeneity, subtle schemes to make the church more "seeker friendly," sophisticated entertainment methodologies to make worship services "more relevant," and glib marketing techniques to attract new members. Rather than relying on such man-made strategies or concepts, the apostle focused on the sinful obstacles to the Thessalonian church's spiritual growth. In so doing he identified five types of struggling sheep that the healthy sheep needed to deal with: the **wayward**, who needed to get back in line; the **worried**, who needed to have more courage, faith, boldness, and confidence; the **weak**, who needed to be more disciplined in holiness; the **wearisome**, who needed to keep pace in obedience; and the **wicked**, who needed to behave righteously. The church's lack of spiritual progress is usually due to the sinful behavior of people in those problem categories, and Paul earnestly desired that the Thessalonians know how to adequately deal with those in each category, as necessary.

Alex Strauch: Assembly Relationships

Want to follow the spirit and practice of the NT church; endings of the epistles are helpful in studying this; Context: be alert and sober in a world that is involved in spiritual warfare; cf. instructions regarding our sexual conduct, our love for one another and proper work relationships because there was confusion about the coming of the Lord; returning to instructions about how we are to live together

I. (:12-13) Instructions regarding How to treat Your Spiritual Leaders

Usual emphasis is the responsibility of the leaders; don't know of any book about the congregation's responsibilities to its leaders;

A. Respect those who labor among you -- this church is very young; community of brand new believers; very little has been done in terms of formal structure; recognize those who are voluntarily providing you leadership; has naturally arisen within this small congregation; laboring = strong word, used for manual labor – work to the point of fatigue; stressful, time consuming, emotionally draining, involves sacrifice; not easy leading other people; have to literally give of yourselves to others; lack of respect for church leadership is main cause of church splits or church fighting;

Specifically doing 2 things:

1) Over you in the Lord; going before you, leading in the church; spiritual gift of leadership; 1 Tim. 5:17; hard decisions have to be made; endless phone calls; writing up policies; dealing with complaints; people can call you any time day or night; some people want to be a leader but don't want the hard work;

2) Admonish you – idea of warning people, instructing people with nuance of ethical behavior and its consequences; keeping you on the straight and narrow way

B. Esteem them very highly in love – 2 terms:

1) “superabundantly” or “most exceedingly”

2) “in love”

Reason: “because of their work” – not all leaders are cuddly or personable; Thomas Jefferson said people loved him as VP but turned against him when he became President; effective leadership demands effective following;

C. Live at Peace Among Yourselves – both congregation and leaders
As sinners we tend to fight and divide and disagree;

D. (Heb. 13:17) Obey Your Leaders and Submit to Them

No absolute obedience; just obedience in the Lord – in the sphere of God's things; if they are teaching wrong things or acting wrong you are not to follow; it's not going to help you if you don't listen to them and if you run off to another church

E. (1 Tim. 5:17-18) Honor Your Leaders with Double Honor

Gal. 6:6 – you have a financial responsibility to those who are leading and teaching you and watching over your souls – especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching; vs.19 – protect them from false accusations; if you are in a public role you will be criticized; some of

these will be false charges

Aside: Plurality of Leaders – does not address “the pastor” here – but assumes the model of the plurality; we have no senior pastor here but Jesus Christ; there is no one elder who calls the final shots;

3 Benefits of a plurality leadership:

(the Bible teaches this model; never one in the local church; always a corporate body)

1) Balancing people’s weaknesses – all leaders have blind spots; fatal flaws – everybody sees it but the person himself (like halatosis) – Why don’t they tell me?? They try but you don’t listen; extreme ideas are tempered; doctrine is balanced;

2) Lighten the workload – most people want their pastor to walk on water; one man single pastor system is very cruel; everybody puts the spotlight on the one senior pastor; he is responsible for everything; we are friends and we pastor one another; “two are better than one” says Solomon; we need each other; people are insane for loving titles

3) Providing accountability – we are easily corrupted; absolute power corrupts absolutely; you put people up on a pedestal and too much authority in their hands and it will corrupt them; even leaders are sinners; you need the check and balance on one another so you don’t play God over people

Note: among the plurality (equal in authority and call from God and responsibility) there is a diversity in giftedness and calling and experience; each elder has his own circle of influence; a lovely system of governance

II. (:14-15) Mutual Responsibilities to One Another

You are made to serve; you must be fulfilling your role in the assembly; speaking to the entire body; every member must be functioning

A. (:14) How to address 3 Groups of believers --

- the idle – Admonish them

- the fainthearted – discouraged – Encourage them (don’t call the elders to do this)

- the weak – Help them – morally, physically, financially weak, etc. – going through deep troubles

Be patient with them all; not easy dealing with people = first description of love; opposite of retaliation or anger

B. (:15) Prohibition Against Personal Retaliation

It is natural to seek revenge; very instinctive – but Christian life is supernatural – put everything into God’s hands; “always” – not just when you feel like it; overcome evil with good actions; bless them instead of curse them; pray for them; you think you are the only one who has been hurt? Apply this to all conflicts – in the home, at the job as well; look at the subtle ways we try to get revenge by speaking against others; can only do this by the Holy Spirit; we are so self consumed

Dr. Ken Casillas: Relationships in the Church

Paul ends up his letter with rapid fire practical exhortations; our country has so many options in terms of churches that we have a consumer mentality – we change frequently based on what we want to experience at the time; going to get something for myself and choosing what I like; What should be our attitude towards our local church? Not just picking and choosing what we want

and changing on a whim; the church is a body – what does that imply? Seamless; organic unity; interdependence; knitting together for a purpose

3 Different Relationships in the Local Church:

I. (:12-13) Relationships Towards Those Who Lead Us

Some topics are more awkward than others to preach; there is a lot implicit here about how a leader is supposed to function; plurality of eldership (pastoral leadership) is the pattern in the NT;

A. The Duties of the Leaders

No official titles given here; leadership here described in terms of what these men do; it is an activity;

1. To Labor among you – not just putting in your 8 hours a day and checking off your duty; but laboring to the point of exhaustion (2:9); no surprise when we find ourselves worn out by the ministry; not a sign that something is wrong; it is the nature of ministry;

2. To Lead – there is an authority structure; “over you in the Lord” – not taking it upon themselves or abusing it for their own benefit;

3. To Admonish you – more than just giving you theological information or teaching; addressing people more directly and personally; dealing with problems in their lives; getting them to commit to some type of change; nouthetic counseling – apply the Word to their lives to deal with issues and promote change

B. The Duties of the Followers = the focal point of the passage

Church is still very young; some people have risen to positions of leadership; don't be concerned about the level of formal organization at this point; who is bearing the burden of the ministry to take leadership; they have a heart and a gift to work; some of these men might have been their relatives or friends – difficult to show them the respect they should; no jealousy or spirit of competition;

1. To Respect them – to know them – to acknowledge them as leaders; I recognize you as leaders; put them in that special category in your mind; more than just a brother in Christ; I don't minimize them or challenge them; I voluntarily subject myself to them

2. To Esteem them – respect them – not a forced submission because you have to; beyond all measure

C. The Duties of Both = Be at Peace – Preventing Conflict and Division in the Church

Don't promote your guy over another guy; *Blessed are the peacemakers*;

II. (:14) Relationships Towards Those Who Are Struggling

You can think of people who fall into these categories; we ourselves at some point will fall into one of these categories; we are imperfect Christians; church = a society of sinners; membership based on being unworthy of membership

A. Admonish the Unruly – same word used as far as responsibility of pastor; we all have this ministry going on at different levels; dealing with people refusing to be gainfully employed; term here is broader than that = out of step or uncontrolled; a soldier who was not keeping rank; undisciplined; unwilling to get in step with what God has commanded; demands the most serious of the responses in this passage; Sad thing = 2 Thess 3:6 – situation has gotten worse and church discipline needs to be exercised; proof that a church loves you = they are willing to kick you out if necessary; not helping when you are tolerant of sin

B. Encourage the Fainthearted – for different reasons – maybe grieving because they lost loved ones and were confused about the future

C. Help the Weak = the most general term; maybe someone who had fallen in a moral area (chap. 4) – encouraging words; praying with them and for them; holding them accountable; providing alternative courses of action that would protect them

You have to make some discerning judgment calls to know how to respond based on what category the person is in; not to have a judgmental spirit but there are right judgments that must go on all the time (like a doctor making a diagnosis); you must have a relationship with those people; be in touch with their lives so you know their needs; not just showing up to listen to one person talk for 40 mins each week; Be patient with them all; these people may annoy you; may be slow to change; may be resisting of the ministry; Patience is a fruit of the Spirit; develop longsuffering

III. (:15) Relationships Towards Those Who Hurt Us

– whether intentionally or unintentionally

If you get involved in church to this extent, people will hurt you – you have to make yourself open and vulnerable to others if we are going to help them; once burned, people are slow to reconnect and take on their responsibility again; you had better expect to get hurt; How do you deal with it? How do you respond?

A. With an attitude of Non-retaliation

Don't lash out or try to get even;

B. Proactively pursue what is good – not just passive, I'm not going to hurt them; you must actively do good even to those who have hurt you; Rom. 5:10 – this is how the Lord has treated us

Mayhue: True Love

1. “*Love suffers long.*” Therefore, I will bear with a person's worst behavior, without retaliation, regardless of the circumstances.
2. “*Love is kind.*” Therefore, I will diligently seek ways to be actively useful in another person's life.
3. “*Love does not envy.*” Therefore, I will delight in the esteem and honor given to someone else.
4. “*Love does not parade itself.*” Therefore, I will not draw attention to myself exclusive of others.
5. “*Love is not puffed up.*” Therefore, I know I am no more important than others.
6. “*Love does not behave rudely.*” Therefore, I will not engage any person in ungodly activity.
7. “*Love does not seek its own.*” Therefore, I will be others oriented.
8. “*Love is not provoked.*” Therefore, I will not resort to anger as a solution to difficulties between myself and others.
9. “*Love thinks no evil.*” Therefore, I will never keep an account due on others.
10. “*Love does not rejoice in iniquity.*” Therefore, I will never delight in another's unrighteous behavior, nor will I join its expression.
11. “*Love rejoices in the truth.*” Therefore, I will find great joy when truth prevails in another's life.
12. “*Love bears all things.*” Therefore, I will be publicly silent about another's faults.
13. “*Love believes all things.*” Therefore, I will express unshakeable confidence and trust in others.

14. "*Love hopes all things.*" Therefore, I will confidently expect future victory in another's life, regardless of the present imperfections.

15. "*Love endures all things.*" Therefore, I will outlast every assault of Satan to break up relationships.

TEXT: 1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-18

TITLE: CONSISTENT CHRISTIANITY – PERPETUALLY PRACTICING PIETY
(religious devotion and reverence to God – including both corporate and private)

BIG IDEA:

3 PERPETUAL PRACTICES TO ENSURE SPIRITUAL VITALITY AND DEVOTION

INTRODUCTION:

We are going to introduce today's message with a **creative skit**. Not something we have done before ... but if we can keep a straight face ... should be effective for our topic for today ... We have borrowed this material from a funny YouTube video clip from MadTV that I have already shown to some of you ... Bob Newhart plays the role of a psychologist; a distraught woman comes into his office for her initial counseling session ... pay close attention to their interaction ... If you heard this before, just bear with us ...

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BYLMTvxOaeE>

Seems insensitive and way too simplistic ... but there is a lot of truth to this approach ... Going to look at 3 simple commands today that could be used as the positive counterpart to any type of "Stop It" counseling message ... sort of like a Put off ... Put on approach to whatever your problem area is ..

Are you struggling with anxiety, with fear, with relationship difficulties, with financial hardship, with uncertainty about your health, with tension in your job situation, with pressure over life being too busy, with feelings of hatred or guilt or envy, with a lack of contentment

Look at the simple approach that Jesus took so often: "Fear Not!" ... "Trust Me"

After we make a commitment to STOP whatever our wrong thought process is ... here are 3 positive areas where we need to focus our energy:

3 PERPETUAL PRACTICES TO ENSURE SPIRITUAL VITALITY AND DEVOTION

We tend to think of these exhortations in the context of our own personal spiritual walk ... like the counseling skit ... but here they seem to fit within the corporate context of the public worship of the assembly – this is what should characterize us as we gather together

Stott: At first reading one might not think that this section relates to the nature and conduct of public worship. But there are clear indications that this is primarily what Paul has in mind. To begin with, all the verbs are plural, so that they seem to describe our collective and public, rather than individual and private, Christian duties. The prophesying of verse 20 is obviously public. The holy kiss of verse 26 presupposes a meeting (you cannot kiss people at a distance!). And verse 27 envisages the reading of the letter when "*all the brothers*" are present. It is this context, then, which suggests that the rejoicing, the praying and the thanksgiving of verses 16-18 (like Eph. 5:19-20 and Col. 3:15-17) are also meant to be expressed when the congregation assembles. Dr. Ralph Martin goes further and considers that these short, sharp commands read like the "headings" of a Church service.

Application: Take our **corporate** attitude and practice this same attitude in our **individual** piety

We will look at the example and teaching of the **life of Christ** and of the **Apostle Paul** in each of these 3 key areas

I. (:16) REJOICE ALWAYS

A. Explaining the Command

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On the surface this command seems as absurd and impossible as the “Stop It” counsel we highlighted in our skit. Given all of life’s difficult circumstances and the complexity of what each person faces – How can believers be expected to obey this command? It is that little word “*always*” that gets us. Put first in the Greek for emphasis – the same for each of the three phrases we are studying. All-inclusive; no exceptions; not dependent on our feelings??

Stott: Paul is issuing not an order to be happy but an invitation to worship (“*rejoice in the Lord always*”), and to joyful worship at that. Yet many church services are unforgivably gloomy and boring. Although, to be sure, it is always appropriate to worship Almighty God with awe and humility, yet every service should also be a celebration, a joyful rehearsal of what God has done and given through Christ.

5 Principles we must understand about this command to *Rejoice Always*:

1. Understand that such Joy is **supernatural**
 - it is a gift / fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22; Rom. 14:17)

MacArthur: biblical joy comes from God, not merely from a superficial emotional response to positive circumstances

Makes believers different; we stand out from the crowd; we have something that others don’t have; we have something that makes us attractive to others

2. Understand that such Joy is not dependent on our **circumstances** (which constantly change) – but on **God’s character** (which never changes)
 - What do we know to be true about God? Love, goodness, power, providence, wisdom, Righteousness, fairness, holiness
 - What do we know to be secure about our salvation? Our relationship with this God?
 - children of God; co-heirs with Christ
 - What do we understand about the spiritual blessings we already possess?
 - What do we believe about the future?

3. Understand that such Joy can be present at the same time as human emotions of sorrow and pressure – they are not mutually exclusive

2 Cor. 6:10 “*sorrowful yet always rejoicing*”

Paul understood that he had been called to a life of suffering for Christ; the Thessalonian believers had already experienced much persecution and pressure ... but these experiences (fellowship in suffering) increased their appreciation of their sharing in the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ

It would be sinful for a Christian to be down in the mouth and miserable and

gloomy – we are commanded to *Rejoice in the Lord – Always*

4. Understand the such Joy is associated with **spiritual progress, spiritual service** and ultimate **glory** = completed sanctification –

That is why **James 1** instructs us to consider it all joy when we encounter various trials – God will use those trials to accomplish something positive in our character

Tied to our confidence and our hope

Stedman: (**Neh. 8:10** “*The joy of the Lord is your strength*”) Joy takes the burden out of service

5. Understand that such Joy is the response of a heart that finds its **sufficiency in Jesus Christ** alone – nothing else is needed; He is our lot; our portion; we are complete in Him = secret of true contentment – not the next job, the next relationship, the next fun thing you plan to do ...

Morris: It is natural for men to rejoice when things go well with them. But it is not this natural joy, dependent on circumstances, that is characteristic of the Christian. It is the joy that comes from being “*in Christ.*” Thus it is that the New Testament is full of exhortations to joyful living – startlingly so, if we fix our attention on the outward circumstances of the Christian community. Persecution was always threatening and often actual. The believers were usually in straitened circumstances and compelled to work hard for their living. Their lot can rarely have been other than hard. But if we fasten our attention on these things we put our emphasis in the wrong place. They thought more of their Lord than of their difficulties; more of their spiritual riches in Christ than of their poverty on earth; more of the glorious future when their Lord should come again than of their unhappy past.

Ask the **Experts** ... like lifeline on So You Want to be a Millionaire – Call a Friend ..

B. Example and Teaching of Christ – Where should we find Joy??

1. Rejoice in salvation (of yourself and others): **Makes salvation precious**

a. Salvation of yourself

In your secure salvation (as opposed to rejoicing in your ministry successes – those may vary)

Luke 10:20 “*Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven.*”

b. Salvation / Rescue / Deliverance of Others -- Parable of the Lost Sheep

Luke 15:1-7 “*And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. . . there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.*” (those Pharisees who think they are already righteous)

Followed by Parable of the Lost Coin and the Lost Son

2. Rejoice in future rewards -- When you are persecuted: **Makes suffering tolerable**

Matthew 5:12 “*Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*” Same context in 1 Thess 5 of ministering to those who have hurt you and maligned you

3. Rejoice in Bringing Blessing to Others – **Makes Sacrifice worthwhile**

Heb. 12:2 “fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the **joy** set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

4. Key = Having Christ’s Joy Reproduced in His Disciples – **Makes Sanctification easy**
John 15:11 context of love and obedience; basis of Christ’s joy = His **obedience** to the Father
John 16:20-24 – believer’s joy related to privilege and promise of answered **prayer**
John 17:13 “*But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves*” – embracing the **Word of God**

C. Example and Teaching of the Apostle Paul

Sharing joy with the **Philippians** – concept of Rejoicing permeates this epistle:

TRUE JOY COMES FROM FELLOWSHIP AND UNITY IN FURTHERING THE GOSPEL (IN DEPENDENCE UPON GOD) AS WE SEEK TO FULLY KNOW CHRIST

Philippians 1:18 “*What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice, yes, and I will rejoice.*” Joy that Christ is Proclaimed to Others (regardless of motives involved)

Philippians 2:18 “*And you too, I urge you, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me.*”
(;17-18) FELLOWSHIP IN JOY MUST ALWAYS DOMINATE OUR FELLOWSHIP IN SACRIFICIAL SERVICE AND SUFFERING

Need to be constantly reminded of this priority

Philippians 3:1 “*Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you.*”

(3:1-7) REJOICING IN CHRIST MEANS TURNING OUR BACK ON EVERYTHING THAT WOULD EXALT OUR FLESH

Philippians 4:4 “*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!*”

Fundamental for maintaining Peace in our relationships with our fellow believers

What robs us of our JOY??

- looking at our circumstances instead of looking at Jesus Christ

TRANSITION: Phil. 4:4-8

Romans 12:12 “*rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer,*”

If by some small chance you thought you were doing well with this command ... to Rejoice Always ... Paul follows up with a second imperative that makes us all feel **sheepish** (embarrassed by consciousness of a fault) – Fortunately we are sheep of the Good Shepherd

Morris: Prayer and rejoicing are closely related, for often the believer finds in prayer the means of removing that which was the barrier to his joy. Prayer is not to be thought of only as the offering of petitions in set words. Prayer is fellowship with God. Prayer is the realization of the

presence of our Father. Though it is quite impossible for us always to be uttering the words of prayer it is possible and necessary that we should always be living in the spirit of prayer. . . Prayer was as natural to Paul as breathing.

II. (:17) PRAY WITHOUT CEASING

A. Explaining the Command

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How can we possibly obey this command? Don't we have other responsibilities in life ... can't be face down all day in our prayer closet ..

Hybels: Too Busy Not to Pray – [Quoting from beginning and end of this helpful book]

Prayer is an unnatural activity. From birth we have been learning the rules of self-reliance as we strain and struggle to achieve self-sufficiency. Prayer flies in the face of those deep-seated values. It is an assault on human autonomy, an indictment of independent living. To people in the fast lane, determined to make it on their own, prayer is an embarrassing interruption. . . Prayer is alien to our proud human nature . .

The purpose of prayer is not simply to draw up one's requests and praises and present them in an acceptable fashion to God. It is not simply to become aware of God's answers and guidance. . . The purpose of prayer goes deeper than that. Prayer is a way to maintain constant communion with God the Father and God the Son through God the Holy Spirit. It is the means of living out our intimate relationship with the Triune God

Describes his own journey to more effective prayer times ...

Common acronym = ACTS– Adoration / Confession / Thanksgiving / Supplication

4 Keys to Praying Without Ceasing:

1. Position = Prostrate in Spirit -- Spirit of Dependence and Humility

Not a function of where we are; or our posture

Little decisions, big decisions; we are powerless apart from our union with Christ and His power

2. Persistent Pattern -- Unbroken and Consistent

Should not be uneven gaps where we drift away from communion with God; not just informal on-the-run casual exchanges ... but concentrated times of prayer

Hiebert: In the Christian life the act of prayer is intermittent but the spirit of prayer should be incessant. It is not in the moving of the lips, but in the elevation of the heart to God, that the essence of prayer consists. But such a spirit of prayer will manifest itself in repeated utterances of prayer to God.

3. Perseverance – Don't Give Up

Easy to lose focus; drift off into daydreaming; wonder what is the use ... does prayer really matter?

4. Power -- Confidence that Prayer Works

How often are we praying because we know we are supposed to ... rather than because we are convinced that prayer makes a difference; that prayer works; that God responds

and answers

James 5:16 *“the effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much”*

B. Example and Teaching of Christ

[Matt 14:23; Mark 1:35; 6:46; Luke 9:18, 28-29; John 6:15; 17:1-26; Luke 21:37-38; John 8:1-2]

Often went off to a private place in the mountains to pray to His Heavenly Father – for extended periods of time – that was a regular pattern; then there were those special seasons of prayer – such as in preparation for His temptation in the wilderness – 40 day period of spiritual concentration and focus

Look at **intensity** when he sweated drops of blood in the Garden (Luke 22:41, 44)

1. Teaching us How to Pray

Luke 11:1-13 introduction of the Lord’s Prayer – teaching disciples how to pray; must understand much about the gracious character of God ... who delights to give good gifts to His children

2. Teaching us How to Pray Without Ceasing

Luke 18:1 *“Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart,”*

Short parable – we are not like the poor widow with no status; and God is nothing like this unjust judge – this is a parable of contrasts – what an incentive to keep on praying to a God to whom we have direct access as our Heavenly Father and one who delights to do what is best for us

C. Example and Teaching of the Apostle Paul

- Solicited prayers for the effectiveness of his ministry; for boldness; etc.

5:25 *“Brethren, pray for us”*

- Constantly prayed for open doors for the gospel and for the spiritual growth of the believers

Rom. 1:9 *“For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you, always in my prayers making request ..”*

1 Thess 1:2-3 *“making mention of you in our prayers, constantly bearing in mind ...”*

3:10 *“as we night and day keep praying most earnestly ...”*

TRANSITION:

Colossians 4:2 *“Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving”*

III. (:18) GIVE THANKS IN EVERYTHING

How is this different from the earlier command to Rejoice always??

Rejoice in the Lord = emphasis on our attitude of inner delight – more of a relationship focus

Thanksgiving to God = emphasis on response to specific acts of kindness and answers to prayer

A. Explaining the Command

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4 Insights:

1. Thanksgiving distinguishes believers from pagans

Bruce: Ingratitude is one of the features of pagan depravity in Rom 1:21; the children of God are expected to “*abound in thanksgiving*” (Col. 2:7; cf. Col. 3:15, 17; 4:2 Eph 5:4, 20).

2. Thanksgiving is the one sacrifice we all can bring to God

Psalm 50:14-15

- Give Thanks -- *Offer to God a sacrifice of Thanksgiving*
- Obey – *And pay your vows to the Most High.*
- Trust – *And call upon Me in the day of trouble;*
 - God’s Part = *I shall rescue you*
 - Our Response = *and you will honor Me.*

3. Thanksgiving brings specific focus to each of God’s many Blessings

Remember the distinctions in roles:

Creator vs Creature
Father vs Children
Redeemer vs Redeemed

Ps. 103:2 “*Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget none of His benefits.*”

The company that pays your salary is also very interested that you appreciate their total **benefits package**.

4. Thanksgiving solves a multitude of problems

Cf. **Sports:** Winning solves all kinds of problems – chemistry issues, discontent over various issues ...

Examine how things work in your **home**; when the children have a thankful spirit, it is like oil that causes all of the machinery to work in harmony – no groaning and complaining

B. Example and Teaching of Christ

Matthew 15:36 “*and He took the seven loaves and the fish; and giving thanks, He broke them and started giving them to the disciples, and the disciples in turn, to the multitudes.*”

Thanksgiving for provision of our daily needs for sustenance and health

Matthew 26:27 “*And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you;’*” Reflect on significance of Christ giving thanks for the symbol of His broken body and spilled blood in His death poured out to accomplish the redemption of sinners; He was grateful for the opportunity to be a blessing for us; to be our Savior at His expense

John 11:41 “*And so they removed the stone. And Jesus raised His eyes, and said, ‘Father, I thank Thee that Thou hearest Me.’*” Thanksgiving for answered prayer; for communion with the Father

Luke 17:11-19 – Christ heals 10 lepers, but only 1 returns to give thanks for miracle of healing
Connection between giving thanks and glorifying God vs taking Him for granted

C. Example and Teaching of the Apostle Paul

(Ro 1:8; 1 Co 1:4; Eph 1:16; 5:20; Phil 1:3; Col 1:3, 12; 3:17; Phile 4)

Acts 16:25 – look at example of Paul in prison at Philippi

Liked to open his epistles with a word of thanksgiving for the believers – commending them where possible for their spiritual growth

1 Thessalonians 1:2 “*We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers;*”

2 Thessalonians 1:3 “*We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is only fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater;*”

Ephesians 5:4 “*and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.*”

Ephesians 5:20 “*always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father;*”

CONCLUSION:

"for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus"
touto gar qelhma qeou/en Cristw/Vhsou/eij umajÅ

This phrase applies to all 3 of the simple commands we have studied today –

Are we practicing these 3 commands as a local church when we gather together?

How will my life be different this week if I practice these 3 commands more consistently?
Start with the “Stop It” approach ... and then follow through with these positive ways to focus and channel our spiritual energy – recognizing that it is our personal relationship with Christ that is crucial ...

- We are **rejoicing** in the Lord Jesus Christ
- We are **praying** to God the Father because we have the Lord as our great High Priest
- We are **giving thanks** to God continually for His lovingkindness and His mercy and His goodness endures forever

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Is my life characterized more by joy or more by tension and anxiety and discontent? How can I use the Psalms to help put myself in the rejoicing frame of mind each day?
- 2) Is prayer more of an isolated activity or woven throughout the entire framework of my everyday living? Is Paul here giving exhortations related to our personal devotional walk with the Lord or exhortations centered around the public meetings of the assembly (cf. Stott)?
- 3) How is my prayer life balanced when it comes to thanksgiving vs making requests? Would others describe me as evidencing a thankful spirit?
- 4) Does my desire to know God's will for my life start with these fundamental areas or do I immediately jump to the desire to see God lead with regard to specific decisions?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

MacArthur: Re "*Rejoice Always*"

The phrase translated rejoice always literally reads "at all times to be rejoicing" and emphasizes that truly joyful Christians will always have a deep-seated confidence in God's sovereign love and mighty power on behalf of His own, and in His providential working of all things according to His perfect plan (Matt. 6:33-34; Rom. 8:28-30; 11:33; Phil. 1:12; cf. Gen. 50:20; Os. 139:1-5). Therefore, no event or circumstance in the Christian's life, apart from sin, can or should diminish his true joy.

A proper perspective on biblical joy provides numerous reasons for believers to rejoice.

- 1) in appreciation for God's righteous character, which, even in trouble, He demonstrates so faithfully to believers. . .
- 2) they should have constant joy out of appreciation for Christ's redemptive work, which derives from a gracious, loving, merciful, and compassionate God . . . and for His infallible instruction . . .
- 3) in appreciation of the Holy Spirit's ministry on their behalf . . .
- 4) because of the vast array of spiritual blessings they possess . . .
- 5) they should have joy in God's providence as He orchestrates everything for their benefit . . .
- 6) out of gratitude for the promises of future glory . . .
- 7) answered prayer should always be a source of joy . . .
- 8) appreciation for the gift of God's Word . . .
- 9) the privilege of genuine fellowship . . .
- 10) joy at the saving proclamation of the gospel . . .

Hiebert: Uttered without any connecting particles, these crisp injunctions ring out with arresting terseness, delineating the attitude that must characterize their inner life. In each of these commands, which Moffatt calls "diamond drops," the modifier stands emphatically before the verb . . . The present tense in all of these imperatives marks them as continuing duties. Here are attitudes that must be characteristic of their lives.

Stedman: James insists that we should even consider ourselves fortunate when hard times come: *“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds”* (James 1:2). Do not take it as an attack. Do not moan and groan and say, “What have I done to deserve this?” Be glad! It’s good for you! Trials stretch you – make you face yourself and learn things about yourself you didn’t know before. Trials lead to maturity, so *“That you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything”* (v. 4).

Mayhue: Seeing that joy is both a sovereign act of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22-23; 1 Thess 1:6) but also commanded as human responsibility (Phil 4:4; 1 Thess 5:16), how is this produced? To understand, compare Colossians 3:16-17 with Ephesians 5:18-20. One emphasizes the ministry of God’s Word; the other focuses on the Holy Spirit, but with the same results. The combination of Scripture intake along with the Holy Spirit produces joy in the believer’s life. All believers have the Holy Spirit, but they do not always have equal involvement with the Word.

Compare this spiritual process to starting a car. God’s Spirit is the engine, one’s will serves as the ignition key, and God’s Word acts as fuel. Having an engine without fuel, one can turn the ignition key repeatedly but the car will not start. Without the Word, the power of the Holy Spirit will go unfueled.

Piper: What does it mean to pray without ceasing?

I think it means three things. First, it means that there is a **spirit of dependence** that should permeate all we do. This is the very spirit and essence of prayer. So, even when we are not speaking consciously to God, there is a deep, abiding dependence on him that is woven into the heart of faith. In that sense, we “pray” or have the spirit of prayer continuously.

Second - and I think this is what Paul has in mind most immediately - praying without ceasing means **praying repeatedly and often** [unbroken pattern of prayer] I base this on the use of the word “without ceasing” (adialeiptos) in Romans 1:9, where Paul says, “For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you.” Now we can be sure that Paul did not mention the Romans every minute of his prayers. He prayed about many other things. But he mentioned them over and over and often. So “without ceasing” doesn’t mean that verbally or mentally we have to be speaking prayers every minute of the day. But we should pray over and over and often. Our default mental state should be: “O God . . .”

Third, I think praying without ceasing means **not giving up on prayer**. Don’t ever come to a point in your life where you cease to pray at all. Don’t abandon the God of hope and say, “There’s no use praying.” Go on praying. Don’t cease.

Spurgeon: Rejoice Evermore—

Introduction:

This is a sunny precept; because Jesus has suffered we are encouraged, commanded and enabled to rejoice. Personal present permanent duty to always be carried out by the people of God. Rejoicing is for all times. You have never done with rejoicing. Our text is set in the midst of many precepts. We have plenty to do ... but this thing we have always to do. Enter upon your sacred duties with delight. Don’t let the performance of your other Christian duties rob you of your joy in the Lord. cf. Martha cumbered with much serving but robbed of a cheerful countenance. Christ wants His joy fulfilled in us. Let your hearts be sanctified ... but don’t let them be troubled. Don’t be overburdened. The command to rejoice is set in the midst of duties.

It is put there to teach us how to fulfill them all. You may have slanderous reports spread about you ... but still we must rejoice evermore. Even rejoice in the persecution and the slander. When are you to be wretched and despondent and depressed? Never. [listing of various trials ... but rejoice evermore] There is no limit to the exhortation; it is ever in season. Not constant but intermittent as some would say ... not just the general tenor of our life; that will not do for the interpretation of the text. Never leave off rejoicing – in every place, time and circumstances. There is to be about the Christian a constancy of joy. Some think they have a sacred duty to be gloomy. It cannot be a wise and prudent thing to reject this plain precept of Scripture. God puts no restriction on happiness. Groan in the Lord always?? It is a sin not to rejoice. Why do your faces wear those gloomy covers?

I. The Quality of This Rejoicing

- A. Not a carnal rejoicing; if it were it would be impossible to keep it up evermore; not the joy of wealth or health or harvest ... those are not forever; If your joy springs from earthly fountains, those fountains will dry up; a heavenly joy based on things that will last forever
- B. Not a presumptuous rejoicing on the part of those who have departed from God's way or never submitted to His Lordship; many are ignorant of their ruin; some rejoice in their own righteousness; hypocritical formality and vain pretense; there must be sound reasons for rejoicing now or there will be no reason for rejoicing forever more; are you a partaker of the life that is in Christ?
- C. Not a fanatical joy; some people never feel good unless they are half out of their minds; they cry "Hallelujah" at everything and nothing; our joy must come out of a clear understanding of the things of God; based on truth; truthful, reasonable, logical principles – sanctified common sense – not fanaticism
- D. Not the mountaintop joy of special occasions – not living on Mt of Transfiguration in some rapturous state = physically impossible to maintain such excitement and tension; the ordinary joy of the Christian is that which is commanded here; not the joy of Jubilee but of every year; all days are not holidays and wedding days

Instead: this joy is confidence in the goodness and providence of God; silent song in the soul

II. The Object of This Rejoicing

We can always rejoice in the Triune God; every attribute of God is a gold mine of rejoicing; "Jesus the very thought of Thee with sweetness fills my breast;" reflect on the covenant of grace; reflect on every spiritual blessing; every doctrine of the gospel will make us glad; rejoice in each fruit of the Holy Spirit (hope, faith, love, patience ...); prayer will make the darkening cloud disperse so that you can rejoice; then give yourself to the praise of songs; give yourself to fellowship and Christian labors – these will spur rejoicing; if you fret, take heavenly medicine from the Word of God; we must rejoice; all things are ours

III. The Reasons for This Rejoicing

We shouldn't need arguments for rejoicing;

- A. Rejoicing wards off temptation; when you are happy in the Lord you are not susceptible to temptation; what can the devil offer the joyous Christian?
- B. Rejoicing Shuts off worldly mirth and entertainment from the heart – we cannot enjoy the things that swine enjoy; fish of the sea live in a different element – we are not inclined to pursue what they desire; worldlings pursue questionable amusements

Ken Casillas: Walking with God 24/7/365

How to summarize the Christian life:

- becoming in experience what you already are
- it is life before the face of God; in His presence; in the awareness of and response to that fact

We are not our own; we are God's own; let us live and die to Him; let His wisdom and will dominate our actions; reckoning with God in every moment of life

Looking at what should characterize our interaction with the Lord Himself throughout our daily life; universal, all-the-time emphasis; the modifiers are first before the imperatives each time; This is especially convicting when you consider the circumstances faced by the Thessalonians; their very lives were on the line because of their discipleship to Christ; people out to kill them; the only thing we do all the time is breathe – but we do that unconsciously; think of stores that are open 24/7/365 –

I. How to Walk With God in this continual mode

A. Constant Joy – interwoven with our emotional life; how can you make yourself happy?

Don't think on purely an emotional level; the essence here is not feeling happy all the time; *“sorrowful yet always rejoicing”* – how does that work? *“in all our affliction I am overflowing with joy”*; *“I am content with weaknesses ... [negative experiences that have a dampening effect on the emotions]”* – How does this work – emotionally and circumstantially you may be low ... but there is a joy that persists

1 Thess 3:8-9 – God is helping these believers to persevere; that truth ministers joy to Paul

2:19 – you experience this type of joy as a result of reflection and meditation on God's truth; the theological and spiritual realities that far exceed the disturbing circumstances; What should I fill my mind and heart with? Heb. 12:2; James 1; etc.

1 Pet 1:6-8 – choosing to direct your mind towards such truth instead of concentrating on the negative

1 Thess 1:6 – the Holy Spirit is the one from whom the joy comes; a supernatural work; fruit of the Spirit; but coupled with human responsibility – get yourself on the road of the Word where the Spirit travels = the means the Spirit uses to produce joy in our hearts; we can rejoice always because the relationship is always the same

B. Constant Prayer – primary ways of addressing God (ACTS acronym) –

- praying consistently; a recurring pattern in my life – example of Daniel;
- praying spontaneously – not limited to a specific devotional time; throughout my day's activities I am in a default mode where I turn my attention to God and express my dependence; look at Paul's epistles and see how he keeps interjecting prayers; Neh. 1 – formal prayer and informal; fellowship with God as an activity will issue in fellowship with God as an attitude
- praying perseveringly – stick with these prayers; don't give up

C. Constant Thanksgiving – some overlap here with joy and prayer; not totally distinct; but this needs special emphasis; we don't need to be told to God to pray about problems and burdens; sometimes we overlook expressing our gratitude; look at how ingratitude is a mark of lost people; Rom. 1 -- blind to the abundance of the grace of God around them; in last days people will be *“ungrateful”* – not *“give thanks for all circumstances”* – but look at parallel passages Eph 5:20 *“for everything”* – pretty demanding; masc pronoun?? People vs things?? How do I do that? Bible not encouraging enjoying the experience of pain; but in spite of the pain you see the

bigger picture of the providence of God at work to accomplish bigger goals as part of His will for your life; advancing the purposes of God for your life

II. Why to Walk this way

“this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” – in the redemptive purposes of God, those 3 expressions of dependence upon God – you get to do this; this is why God redeemed you to make you able to respond in these ways; this is one of God’s gifts to you; people who don’t have Christ are not able to live this way; natural tendency is to become bitter and complain; instead we rejoice in God’s sovereignty, address ourselves to Him and thank Him for His working; I don’t have to live depressed like the rest of the world

TEXT: 1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-18

TITLE: CONSISTENT CHRISTIANITY – PERPETUALLY PRACTICING PIETY
(religious devotion and reverence to God – including both corporate and private)

BIG IDEA:

3 PERPETUAL PRACTICES TO ENSURE SPIRITUAL VITALITY AND DEVOTION

INTRODUCTION:

We are going to introduce today's message with a **creative skit**. Not something we have done before ... but if we can keep a straight face ... should be effective for our topic for today ... We have borrowed this material from a funny YouTube video clip from MadTV that I have already shown to some of you ... Bob Newhart plays the role of a psychologist; a distraught woman comes into his office for her initial counseling session ... pay close attention to their interaction ... If you heard this before, just bear with us ...

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BYLMTvxOaeE>

Seems insensitive and way too simplistic ... but there is a lot of truth to this approach ... Going to look at 3 simple commands today that could be used as the positive counterpart to any type of "Stop It" counseling message ... sort of like a Put off ... Put on approach to whatever your problem area is ..

Are you struggling with anxiety, with fear, with relationship difficulties, with financial hardship, with uncertainty about your health, with tension in your job situation, with pressure over life being too busy, with feelings of hatred or guilt or envy, with a lack of contentment

Look at the simple approach that Jesus took so often: "Fear Not!" ... "Trust Me"

After we make a commitment to STOP whatever our wrong thought process is ... here are 3 positive areas where we need to focus our energy:

3 PERPETUAL PRACTICES TO ENSURE SPIRITUAL VITALITY AND DEVOTION

We tend to think of these exhortations in the context of our own personal spiritual walk ... like the counseling skit ... but here they seem to fit within the corporate context of the public worship of the assembly – this is what should characterize us as we gather together

Stott: At first reading one might not think that this section relates to the nature and conduct of public worship. But there are clear indications that this is primarily what Paul has in mind. To begin with, all the verbs are plural, so that they seem to describe our collective and public, rather than individual and private, Christian duties. The prophesying of verse 20 is obviously public. The holy kiss of verse 26 presupposes a meeting (you cannot kiss people at a distance!). And verse 27 envisages the reading of the letter when "*all the brothers*" are present. It is this context, then, which suggests that the rejoicing, the praying and the thanksgiving of verses 16-18 (like Eph. 5:19-20 and Col. 3:15-17) are also meant to be expressed when the congregation assembles. Dr. Ralph Martin goes further and considers that these short, sharp commands read like the "headings" of a Church service.

Application: Take our **corporate** attitude and practice this same attitude in our **individual** piety

We will look at the example and teaching of the **life of Christ** and of the **Apostle Paul** in each of these 3 key areas

I. (:16) REJOICE ALWAYS

A. Explaining the Command

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On the surface this command seems as absurd and impossible as the “Stop It” counsel we highlighted in our skit. Given all of life’s difficult circumstances and the complexity of what each person faces – How can believers be expected to obey this command? It is that little word “*always*” that gets us. Put first in the Greek for emphasis – the same for each of the three phrases we are studying. All-inclusive; no exceptions; not dependent on our feelings??

Stott: Paul is issuing not an order to be happy but an invitation to worship (“*rejoice in the Lord always*”), and to joyful worship at that. Yet many church services are unforgivably gloomy and boring. Although, to be sure, it is always appropriate to worship Almighty God with awe and humility, yet every service should also be a celebration, a joyful rehearsal of what God has done and given through Christ.

5 Principles we must understand about this command to *Rejoice Always*:

1. Understand that such Joy is **supernatural**
 - it is a gift / fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22; Rom. 14:17)

MacArthur: biblical joy comes from God, not merely from a superficial emotional response to positive circumstances

Makes believers different; we stand out from the crowd; we have something that others don’t have; we have something that makes us attractive to others

2. Understand that such Joy is not dependent on our **circumstances** (which constantly change) – but on **God’s character** (which never changes)
 - What do we know to be true about God? Love, goodness, power, providence, wisdom, Righteousness, fairness, holiness
 - What do we know to be secure about our salvation? Our relationship with this God?
 - children of God; co-heirs with Christ
 - What do we understand about the spiritual blessings we already possess?
 - What do we believe about the future?

3. Understand that such Joy can be present at the same time as human emotions of sorrow and pressure – they are not mutually exclusive

2 Cor. 6:10 “*sorrowful yet always rejoicing*”

Paul understood that he had been called to a life of suffering for Christ; the Thessalonian believers had already experienced much persecution and pressure ... but these experiences (fellowship in suffering) increased their appreciation of their sharing in the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ

It would be sinful for a Christian to be down in the mouth and miserable and

gloomy – we are commanded to *Rejoice in the Lord – Always*

4. Understand the such Joy is associated with **spiritual progress, spiritual service** and ultimate **glory** = completed sanctification –

That is why **James 1** instructs us to consider it all joy when we encounter various trials – God will use those trials to accomplish something positive in our character

Tied to our confidence and our hope

Stedman: (**Neh. 8:10** “*The joy of the Lord is your strength*”) Joy takes the burden out of service

5. Understand that such Joy is the response of a heart that finds its **sufficiency in Jesus Christ** alone – nothing else is needed; He is our lot; our portion; we are complete in Him = secret of true contentment – not the next job, the next relationship, the next fun thing you plan to do ...

Morris: It is natural for men to rejoice when things go well with them. But it is not this natural joy, dependent on circumstances, that is characteristic of the Christian. It is the joy that comes from being “*in Christ.*” Thus it is that the New Testament is full of exhortations to joyful living – startlingly so, if we fix our attention on the outward circumstances of the Christian community. Persecution was always threatening and often actual. The believers were usually in straitened circumstances and compelled to work hard for their living. Their lot can rarely have been other than hard. But if we fasten our attention on these things we put our emphasis in the wrong place. They thought more of their Lord than of their difficulties; more of their spiritual riches in Christ than of their poverty on earth; more of the glorious future when their Lord should come again than of their unhappy past.

Ask the **Experts** ... like lifeline on So You Want to be a Millionaire – Call a Friend ..

B. Example and Teaching of Christ – Where should we find Joy??

1. Rejoice in salvation (of yourself and others): **Makes salvation precious**

a. Salvation of yourself

In your secure salvation (as opposed to rejoicing in your ministry successes – those may vary)

Luke 10:20 “*Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven.*”

b. Salvation / Rescue / Deliverance of Others -- Parable of the Lost Sheep

Luke 15:1-7 “*And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. . . there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.*” (those Pharisees who think they are already righteous)

Followed by Parable of the Lost Coin and the Lost Son

2. Rejoice in future rewards -- When you are persecuted: **Makes suffering tolerable**

Matthew 5:12 “*Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*” Same context in 1 Thess 5 of ministering to those who have hurt you and maligned you

3. Rejoice in Bringing Blessing to Others – **Makes Sacrifice worthwhile**

Heb. 12:2 “fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the **joy** set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

4. Key = Having Christ’s Joy Reproduced in His Disciples – **Makes Sanctification easy**
John 15:11 context of love and obedience; basis of Christ’s joy = His **obedience** to the Father
John 16:20-24 – believer’s joy related to privilege and promise of answered **prayer**
John 17:13 “*But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves*” – embracing the **Word of God**

C. Example and Teaching of the Apostle Paul

Sharing joy with the **Philippians** – concept of Rejoicing permeates this epistle:

TRUE JOY COMES FROM FELLOWSHIP AND UNITY IN FURTHERING THE GOSPEL (IN DEPENDENCE UPON GOD) AS WE SEEK TO FULLY KNOW CHRIST

Philippians 1:18 “*What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice, yes, and I will rejoice.*” Joy that Christ is Proclaimed to Others (regardless of motives involved)

Philippians 2:18 “*And you too, I urge you, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me.*”
(;17-18) FELLOWSHIP IN JOY MUST ALWAYS DOMINATE OUR FELLOWSHIP IN SACRIFICIAL SERVICE AND SUFFERING

Need to be constantly reminded of this priority

Philippians 3:1 “*Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you.*”

(3:1-7) REJOICING IN CHRIST MEANS TURNING OUR BACK ON EVERYTHING THAT WOULD EXALT OUR FLESH

Philippians 4:4 “*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!*”

Fundamental for maintaining Peace in our relationships with our fellow believers

What robs us of our JOY??

- looking at our circumstances instead of looking at Jesus Christ

TRANSITION: Phil. 4:4-8

Romans 12:12 “*rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer,*”

If by some small chance you thought you were doing well with this command ... to Rejoice Always ... Paul follows up with a second imperative that makes us all feel **sheepish** (embarrassed by consciousness of a fault) – Fortunately we are sheep of the Good Shepherd

Morris: Prayer and rejoicing are closely related, for often the believer finds in prayer the means of removing that which was the barrier to his joy. Prayer is not to be thought of only as the offering of petitions in set words. Prayer is fellowship with God. Prayer is the realization of the

presence of our Father. Though it is quite impossible for us always to be uttering the words of prayer it is possible and necessary that we should always be living in the spirit of prayer. . . Prayer was as natural to Paul as breathing.

II. (:17) PRAY WITHOUT CEASING

A. Explaining the Command

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How can we possibly obey this command? Don't we have other responsibilities in life ... can't be face down all day in our prayer closet ..

Hybels: Too Busy Not to Pray – [Quoting from beginning and end of this helpful book]

Prayer is an unnatural activity. From birth we have been learning the rules of self-reliance as we strain and struggle to achieve self-sufficiency. Prayer flies in the face of those deep-seated values. It is an assault on human autonomy, an indictment of independent living. To people in the fast lane, determined to make it on their own, prayer is an embarrassing interruption. . . Prayer is alien to our proud human nature . .

The purpose of prayer is not simply to draw up one's requests and praises and present them in an acceptable fashion to God. It is not simply to become aware of God's answers and guidance. . . The purpose of prayer goes deeper than that. Prayer is a way to maintain constant communion with God the Father and God the Son through God the Holy Spirit. It is the means of living out our intimate relationship with the Triune God

Describes his own journey to more effective prayer times ...

Common acronym = ACTS– Adoration / Confession / Thanksgiving / Supplication

4 Keys to Praying Without Ceasing:

1. Position = Prostrate in Spirit -- Spirit of Dependence and Humility

Not a function of where we are; or our posture

Little decisions, big decisions; we are powerless apart from our union with Christ and His power

2. Persistent Pattern -- Unbroken and Consistent

Should not be uneven gaps where we drift away from communion with God; not just informal on-the-run casual exchanges ... but concentrated times of prayer

Hiebert: In the Christian life the act of prayer is intermittent but the spirit of prayer should be incessant. It is not in the moving of the lips, but in the elevation of the heart to God, that the essence of prayer consists. But such a spirit of prayer will manifest itself in repeated utterances of prayer to God.

3. Perseverance – Don't Give Up

Easy to lose focus; drift off into daydreaming; wonder what is the use ... does prayer really matter?

4. Power -- Confidence that Prayer Works

How often are we praying because we know we are supposed to ... rather than because we are convinced that prayer makes a difference; that prayer works; that God responds

and answers

James 5:16 *“the effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much”*

B. Example and Teaching of Christ

[Matt 14:23; Mark 1:35; 6:46; Luke 9:18, 28-29; John 6:15; 17:1-26; Luke 21:37-38; John 8:1-2]

Often went off to a private place in the mountains to pray to His Heavenly Father – for extended periods of time – that was a regular pattern; then there were those special seasons of prayer – such as in preparation for His temptation in the wilderness – 40 day period of spiritual concentration and focus

Look at **intensity** when he sweated drops of blood in the Garden (Luke 22:41, 44)

1. Teaching us How to Pray

Luke 11:1-13 introduction of the Lord’s Prayer – teaching disciples how to pray; must understand much about the gracious character of God ... who delights to give good gifts to His children

2. Teaching us How to Pray Without Ceasing

Luke 18:1 *“Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart,”*

Short parable – we are not like the poor widow with no status; and God is nothing like this unjust judge – this is a parable of contrasts – what an incentive to keep on praying to a God to whom we have direct access as our Heavenly Father and one who delights to do what is best for us

C. Example and Teaching of the Apostle Paul

- Solicited prayers for the effectiveness of his ministry; for boldness; etc.

5:25 *“Brethren, pray for us”*

- Constantly prayed for open doors for the gospel and for the spiritual growth of the believers

Rom. 1:9 *“For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you, always in my prayers making request ..”*

1 Thess 1:2-3 *“making mention of you in our prayers, constantly bearing in mind ...”*

3:10 *“as we night and day keep praying most earnestly ...”*

TRANSITION:

Colossians 4:2 *“Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving”*

III. (:18) GIVE THANKS IN EVERYTHING

How is this different from the earlier command to Rejoice always??

Rejoice in the Lord = emphasis on our attitude of inner delight – more of a relationship focus

Thanksgiving to God = emphasis on response to specific acts of kindness and answers to prayer

A. Explaining the Command

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4 Insights:

1. Thanksgiving distinguishes believers from pagans

Bruce: Ingratitude is one of the features of pagan depravity in Rom 1:21; the children of God are expected to “*abound in thanksgiving*” (Col. 2:7; cf. Col. 3:15, 17; 4:2 Eph 5:4, 20).

2. Thanksgiving is the one sacrifice we all can bring to God

Psalm 50:14-15

- Give Thanks -- *Offer to God a sacrifice of Thanksgiving*
- Obey – *And pay your vows to the Most High.*
- Trust – *And call upon Me in the day of trouble;*
 - God’s Part = *I shall rescue you*
 - Our Response = *and you will honor Me.*

3. Thanksgiving brings specific focus to each of God’s many Blessings

Remember the distinctions in roles:

Creator vs Creature
Father vs Children
Redeemer vs Redeemed

Ps. 103:2 “*Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget none of His benefits.*”

The company that pays your salary is also very interested that you appreciate their total **benefits package**.

4. Thanksgiving solves a multitude of problems

Cf. **Sports:** Winning solves all kinds of problems – chemistry issues, discontent over various issues ...

Examine how things work in your **home**; when the children have a thankful spirit, it is like oil that causes all of the machinery to work in harmony – no groaning and complaining

B. Example and Teaching of Christ

Matthew 15:36 “*and He took the seven loaves and the fish; and giving thanks, He broke them and started giving them to the disciples, and the disciples in turn, to the multitudes.*”

Thanksgiving for provision of our daily needs for sustenance and health

Matthew 26:27 “*And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you;’*” Reflect on significance of Christ giving thanks for the symbol of His broken body and spilled blood in His death poured out to accomplish the redemption of sinners; He was grateful for the opportunity to be a blessing for us; to be our Savior at His expense

John 11:41 “*And so they removed the stone. And Jesus raised His eyes, and said, ‘Father, I thank Thee that Thou hearest Me.’*” Thanksgiving for answered prayer; for communion with the Father

Luke 17:11-19 – Christ heals 10 lepers, but only 1 returns to give thanks for miracle of healing
Connection between giving thanks and glorifying God vs taking Him for granted

C. Example and Teaching of the Apostle Paul

(Ro 1:8; 1 Co 1:4; Eph 1:16; 5:20; Phil 1:3; Col 1:3, 12; 3:17; Phile 4)

Acts 16:25 – look at example of Paul in prison at Philippi

Liked to open his epistles with a word of thanksgiving for the believers – commending them where possible for their spiritual growth

1 Thessalonians 1:2 “*We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers;*”

2 Thessalonians 1:3 “*We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is only fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater;*”

Ephesians 5:4 “*and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.*”

Ephesians 5:20 “*always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father;*”

CONCLUSION:

"for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus"

touto gar qe|hma qeou/en Cristw/Vhsou/eij umajA

This phrase applies to all 3 of the simple commands we have studied today –

Are we practicing these 3 commands as a local church when we gather together?

How will my life be different this week if I practice these 3 commands more consistently?

Start with the “Stop It” approach ... and then follow through with these positive ways to focus and channel our spiritual energy – recognizing that it is our personal relationship with Christ that is crucial ...

- We are **rejoicing** in the Lord Jesus Christ
- We are **praying** to God the Father because we have the Lord as our great High Priest
- We are **giving thanks** to God continually for His lovingkindness and His mercy and His goodness endures forever

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Is my life characterized more by joy or more by tension and anxiety and discontent? How can I use the Psalms to help put myself in the rejoicing frame of mind each day?
- 2) Is prayer more of an isolated activity or woven throughout the entire framework of my everyday living? Is Paul here giving exhortations related to our personal devotional walk with the Lord or exhortations centered around the public meetings of the assembly (cf. Stott)?
- 3) How is my prayer life balanced when it comes to thanksgiving vs making requests? Would others describe me as evidencing a thankful spirit?
- 4) Does my desire to know God's will for my life start with these fundamental areas or do I immediately jump to the desire to see God lead with regard to specific decisions?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

MacArthur: Re "*Rejoice Always*"

The phrase translated rejoice always literally reads "at all times to be rejoicing" and emphasizes that truly joyful Christians will always have a deep-seated confidence in God's sovereign love and mighty power on behalf of His own, and in His providential working of all things according to His perfect plan (Matt. 6:33-34; Rom. 8:28-30; 11:33; Phil. 1:12; cf. Gen. 50:20; Os. 139:1-5). Therefore, no event or circumstance in the Christian's life, apart from sin, can or should diminish his true joy.

A proper perspective on biblical joy provides numerous reasons for believers to rejoice.

- 1) in appreciation for God's righteous character, which, even in trouble, He demonstrates so faithfully to believers. . .
- 2) they should have constant joy out of appreciation for Christ's redemptive work, which derives from a gracious, loving, merciful, and compassionate God . . . and for His infallible instruction . . .
- 3) in appreciation of the Holy Spirit's ministry on their behalf . . .
- 4) because of the vast array of spiritual blessings they possess . . .
- 5) they should have joy in God's providence as He orchestrates everything for their benefit . . .
- 6) out of gratitude for the promises of future glory . . .
- 7) answered prayer should always be a source of joy . . .
- 8) appreciation for the gift of God's Word . . .
- 9) the privilege of genuine fellowship . . .
- 10) joy at the saving proclamation of the gospel . . .

Hiebert: Uttered without any connecting particles, these crisp injunctions ring out with arresting terseness, delineating the attitude that must characterize their inner life. In each of these commands, which Moffatt calls "diamond drops," the modifier stands emphatically before the verb . . . The present tense in all of these imperatives marks them as continuing duties. Here are attitudes that must be characteristic of their lives.

Stedman: James insists that we should even consider ourselves fortunate when hard times come: *“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds”* (James 1:2). Do not take it as an attack. Do not moan and groan and say, “What have I done to deserve this?” Be glad! It’s good for you! Trials stretch you – make you face yourself and learn things about yourself you didn’t know before. Trials lead to maturity, so *“That you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything”* (v. 4).

Mayhue: Seeing that joy is both a sovereign act of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22-23; 1 Thess 1:6) but also commanded as human responsibility (Phil 4:4; 1 Thess 5:16), how is this produced? To understand, compare Colossians 3:16-17 with Ephesians 5:18-20. One emphasizes the ministry of God’s Word; the other focuses on the Holy Spirit, but with the same results. The combination of Scripture intake along with the Holy Spirit produces joy in the believer’s life. All believers have the Holy Spirit, but they do not always have equal involvement with the Word.

Compare this spiritual process to starting a car. God’s Spirit is the engine, one’s will serves as the ignition key, and God’s Word acts as fuel. Having an engine without fuel, one can turn the ignition key repeatedly but the car will not start. Without the Word, the power of the Holy Spirit will go unfueled.

Piper: What does it mean to pray without ceasing?

I think it means three things. First, it means that there is a **spirit of dependence** that should permeate all we do. This is the very spirit and essence of prayer. So, even when we are not speaking consciously to God, there is a deep, abiding dependence on him that is woven into the heart of faith. In that sense, we "pray" or have the spirit of prayer continuously.

Second - and I think this is what Paul has in mind most immediately - praying without ceasing means **praying repeatedly and often** [unbroken pattern of prayer] I base this on the use of the word "without ceasing" (adialeptos) in Romans 1:9, where Paul says, "For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you." Now we can be sure that Paul did not mention the Romans every minute of his prayers. He prayed about many other things. But he mentioned them over and over and often. So "without ceasing" doesn't mean that verbally or mentally we have to be speaking prayers every minute of the day. But we should pray over and over and often. Our default mental state should be: "O God . . ."

Third, I think praying without ceasing means **not giving up on prayer**. Don't ever come to a point in your life where you cease to pray at all. Don't abandon the God of hope and say, "There's no use praying." Go on praying. Don't cease.

Spurgeon: Rejoice Evermore—

Introduction:

This is a sunny precept; because Jesus has suffered we are encouraged, commanded and enabled to rejoice. Personal present permanent duty to always be carried out by the people of God. Rejoicing is for all times. You have never done with rejoicing. Our text is set in the midst of many precepts. We have plenty to do ... but this thing we have always to do. Enter upon your sacred duties with delight. Don't let the performance of your other Christian duties rob you of your joy in the Lord. cf. Martha cumbered with much serving but robbed of a cheerful countenance. Christ wants His joy fulfilled in us. Let your hearts be sanctified ... but don't let them be troubled. Don't be overburdened. The command to rejoice is set in the midst of duties.

It is put there to teach us how to fulfill them all. You may have slanderous reports spread about you ... but still we must rejoice evermore. Even rejoice in the persecution and the slander. When are you to be wretched and despondent and depressed? Never. [listing of various trials ... but rejoice evermore] There is no limit to the exhortation; it is ever in season. Not constant but intermittent as some would say ... not just the general tenor of our life; that will not do for the interpretation of the text. Never leave off rejoicing – in every place, time and circumstances. There is to be about the Christian a constancy of joy. Some think they have a sacred duty to be gloomy. It cannot be a wise and prudent thing to reject this plain precept of Scripture. God puts no restriction on happiness. Groan in the Lord always?? It is a sin not to rejoice. Why do your faces wear those gloomy covers?

I. The Quality of This Rejoicing

- A. Not a carnal rejoicing; if it were it would be impossible to keep it up evermore; not the joy of wealth or health or harvest ... those are not forever; If your joy springs from earthly fountains, those fountains will dry up; a heavenly joy based on things that will last forever
- B. Not a presumptuous rejoicing on the part of those who have departed from God's way or never submitted to His Lordship; many are ignorant of their ruin; some rejoice in their own righteousness; hypocritical formality and vain pretense; there must be sound reasons for rejoicing now or there will be no reason for rejoicing forever more; are you a partaker of the life that is in Christ?
- C. Not a fanatical joy; some people never feel good unless they are half out of their minds; they cry "Hallelujah" at everything and nothing; our joy must come out of a clear understanding of the things of God; based on truth; truthful, reasonable, logical principles – sanctified common sense – not fanaticism
- D. Not the mountaintop joy of special occasions – not living on Mt of Transfiguration in some rapturous state = physically impossible to maintain such excitement and tension; the ordinary joy of the Christian is that which is commanded here; not the joy of Jubilee but of every year; all days are not holidays and wedding days

Instead: this joy is confidence in the goodness and providence of God; silent song in the soul

II. The Object of This Rejoicing

We can always rejoice in the Triune God; every attribute of God is a gold mine of rejoicing; "Jesus the very thought of Thee with sweetness fills my breast;" reflect on the covenant of grace; reflect on every spiritual blessing; every doctrine of the gospel will make us glad; rejoice in each fruit of the Holy Spirit (hope, faith, love, patience ...); prayer will make the darkening cloud disperse so that you can rejoice; then give yourself to the praise of songs; give yourself to fellowship and Christian labors – these will spur rejoicing; if you fret, take heavenly medicine from the Word of God; we must rejoice; all things are ours

III. The Reasons for This Rejoicing

We shouldn't need arguments for rejoicing;

- A. Rejoicing wards off temptation; when you are happy in the Lord you are not susceptible to temptation; what can the devil offer the joyous Christian?
- B. Rejoicing Shuts off worldly mirth and entertainment from the heart – we cannot enjoy the things that swine enjoy; fish of the sea live in a different element – we are not inclined to pursue what they desire; worldlings pursue questionable amusements

Ken Casillas: Walking with God 24/7/365

How to summarize the Christian life:

- becoming in experience what you already are
- it is life before the face of God; in His presence; in the awareness of and response to that fact

We are not our own; we are God's own; let us live and die to Him; let His wisdom and will dominate our actions; reckoning with God in every moment of life

Looking at what should characterize our interaction with the Lord Himself throughout our daily life; universal, all-the-time emphasis; the modifiers are first before the imperatives each time; This is especially convicting when you consider the circumstances faced by the Thessalonians; their very lives were on the line because of their discipleship to Christ; people out to kill them; the only thing we do all the time is breathe – but we do that unconsciously; think of stores that are open 24/7/365 –

I. How to Walk With God in this continual mode

A. Constant Joy – interwoven with our emotional life; how can you make yourself happy?

Don't think on purely an emotional level; the essence here is not feeling happy all the time; *“sorrowful yet always rejoicing”* – how does that work? *“in all our affliction I am overflowing with joy”*; *“I am content with weaknesses ... [negative experiences that have a dampening effect on the emotions]”* – How does this work – emotionally and circumstantially you may be low ... but there is a joy that persists

1 Thess 3:8-9 – God is helping these believers to persevere; that truth ministers joy to Paul

2:19 – you experience this type of joy as a result of reflection and meditation on God's truth; the theological and spiritual realities that far exceed the disturbing circumstances; What should I fill my mind and heart with? Heb. 12:2; James 1; etc.

1 Pet 1:6-8 – choosing to direct your mind towards such truth instead of concentrating on the negative

1 Thess 1:6 – the Holy Spirit is the one from whom the joy comes; a supernatural work; fruit of the Spirit; but coupled with human responsibility – get yourself on the road of the Word where the Spirit travels = the means the Spirit uses to produce joy in our hearts; we can rejoice always because the relationship is always the same

B. Constant Prayer – primary ways of addressing God (ACTS acronym) –

- praying consistently; a recurring pattern in my life – example of Daniel;
- praying spontaneously – not limited to a specific devotional time; throughout my day's activities I am in a default mode where I turn my attention to God and express my dependence; look at Paul's epistles and see how he keeps interjecting prayers; Neh. 1 – formal prayer and informal; fellowship with God as an activity will issue in fellowship with God as an attitude
- praying perseveringly – stick with these prayers; don't give up

C. Constant Thanksgiving – some overlap here with joy and prayer; not totally distinct; but this needs special emphasis; we don't need to be told to God to pray about problems and burdens; sometimes we overlook expressing our gratitude; look at how ingratitude is a mark of lost people; Rom. 1 -- blind to the abundance of the grace of God around them; in last days people will be *“ungrateful”* – not *“give thanks for all circumstances”* – but look at parallel passages Eph 5:20 *“for everything”* – pretty demanding; masc pronoun?? People vs things?? How do I do that? Bible not encouraging enjoying the experience of pain; but in spite of the pain you see the

bigger picture of the providence of God at work to accomplish bigger goals as part of His will for your life; advancing the purposes of God for your life

II. Why to Walk this way

“this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” – in the redemptive purposes of God, those 3 expressions of dependence upon God – you get to do this; this is why God redeemed you to make you able to respond in these ways; this is one of God’s gifts to you; people who don’t have Christ are not able to live this way; natural tendency is to become bitter and complain; instead we rejoice in God’s sovereignty, address ourselves to Him and thank Him for His working; I don’t have to live depressed like the rest of the world

TEXT: 1 THESSALONIANS 5:19-22

TITLE: BE FREE . . . BUT ALSO . . . BE CAREFUL

BIG IDEA:

ENCOURAGE AND VALUE THE MINISTRY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT WHILE EXERCISING CAREFUL DISCERNMENT THAT PROMOTES GODLY MORALITY

INTRODUCTION:

Illustration: I want you to think about a NASCAR driver. Maybe you have someone you like in mind ... but even if you think the sport is about driving in meaningless circles ... picture a driver who is absorbed in winning the race. His mechanical team has been working feverishly to help him qualify with the fastest time and make sure everything in the car is finely tuned for the conditions he will face that day. Now comes that adrenaline charge as the race begins, “Gentlemen, start your engines!” What if the crew chief shouted instructions in his ear to just floor the car and run it full out – through all the turns – never throttling it down. Throw all caution to the winds. Or what if went the other direction and for safety sake asked the driver to stay a few lengths back of the entire pack of cars so he would never get caught up in one of those spectacular crashes. Not much chance of winning the race either way. The driver must use his skill and all the resources of his car to navigate the track with both objectives of speed and safety and mind.

The Christian life is all about **balance**. Some people can be real free spirits – anything goes; they don’t have a critical or analytical bone in their body. They are purely driven by their emotions and by their intuition. They revel in spontaneity. They can make life very interesting ... but also very dangerous when they are fanatical and unrestrained. They are like a NASCAR driver trying to operate at full throttle around even the most dangerous turns. The charismatic movement grows out of this emotional and experience-oriented approach to spirituality. Others want to see life completely regulated by rules and detailed guidelines (the legalists and formalists). They can’t tolerate surprises. Everything must function in their life like clock-work. Change is anathema. They can be very boring and predictable. They would be slow to take risks and would have trouble in the high energy dangerous NASCAR arena. These are the intellectuals who must have everything proven to them beyond a shadow of a doubt before they take any steps forward. The Apostle Paul speaks against both extremes – against overly restricting the ministry of the Holy Spirit and against being careless and not discerning truth from error. He seems to be focusing primarily on the context of our worship and ministry when we come together as believers.

Robert Thomas: Control is necessary, but overcontrol is detrimental. So it is the responsibility of leadership and the whole community to find the **right balance**.

What is your **approach to the ministry of the Holy Spirit** – Corporately in our meetings together for worship and prayer and instruction and fellowship? -- as well as Privately in your own walk with the Lord Jesus – trying to be filled with the Spirit, to walk in the Spirit, to be led by the Spirit of God?

Paul teaches us to *BE FREE . . . BUT ALSO . . . BE CAREFUL*
ENCOURAGE AND VALUE THE MINISTRY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT WHILE EXERCISING CAREFUL DISCERNMENT THAT PROMOTES GODLY MORALITY

Special emphasis on the **Word of God**, the Word of Truth – encouraging and valuing its proclamation, its reception and its application in our lives – requires careful discernment that promotes godly morality

I. (:19-20) BE FREE – ENCOURAGE AND VALUE THE MINISTRY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT -- LIBERTY IN MINISTRY

A. (:19) In General: Are we Encouraging or Quenching the Ministry of the Holy Spirit?

“Do not quench the Spirit” -- the Spirit, stop quenching??
o. pneuma mh. sbennute

Let the Holy Spirit do His thing; don't put handcuffs and unnecessary restrictions on the ministry of the Holy Spirit

“Quench” – extinguish, put out, restrain (the Spirit), suppress, stifle

The Holy Spirit is omnipotent; like the wind it blows where it wills (**John 3**) and we can see its effects but we can't control it; we certainly can't extinguish it ... but we can suppress or stifle His ministry through us

Don't put restrictor plates on your car that slow it down and won't allow it to operate at full efficiency.

[Other **NT usages** are in the physical sense of quenching something:

Matthew 25:8 *"And the foolish said to the prudent, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.'"*

Mark 9:48 *"where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED."*

Eph 6:16 *"extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one"]*

Cf. the Imagery of God as a **powerful fire**

OT imagery: **Ezekiel's** vision of divine glory in chap. **1:27**

"Then I noticed from the appearance of His loins and upward something like glowing metal that looked like fire all around within it, and from the appearance of His loins and downward I saw something like fire; and there was a radiance around Him"

(Ex. 13:21; Mal. 3:2-3)

Remember when the Holy Spirit came upon the believers in power on the Day of Pentecost the imagery was of **tongues of fire** (**Acts 2**) as they were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues

Wiersbe: Fire speaks of purity, power, light, warmth, and (if necessary) destruction. When the Holy Spirit is at work in our lives and churches, we have a warmth of love in our hearts, light for our minds, and energy for our wills. He "melts us together" so that there is harmony and cooperation, and he purifies us so that we put away sin.

Hiebert: The Spirit's fire is quenched whenever His presence is ignored and His promptings are suppressed and rejected, or the fervor which He kindles in the heart is dampened by unspiritual attitudes, criticisms, or actions. Certainly any toleration of immorality and idleness, against which they have been warned (4:1-12), would quench the Spirit's working in their midst. They must not allow the operations of the Spirit to be suppressed either through yielding to the impulses of the flesh or by imposing a mechanical order upon the services which would hamper the free movements of the Spirit.

Think of the children's Sunday School song: "this little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine" – it is possible for us to pour cold water on the flame of the Holy Spirit's ministry and what He is trying to accomplish in us and through us for the glory of God

Similar command to: **Eph. 4:30** "*Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God*" – but this relates more directly to sin as opposed to ministry

Application specifically to prophesying we will look at in the next verse: Don't forbid God's truth to be proclaimed; or don't hold back from proclaiming God's truth, no matter how unpleasant the message.

But keeping it more general for now -- What does the Holy Spirit want to do in our lives and in our church and through our ministry?

Practical Contrasts in Promoting vs Quenching the Ministry of the Holy Spirit:

1. not pursue the development and exercise of my spiritual gift
 - 2 Tim. 1:6** "*Stir up the gift of God which is in thee*" stir the fire again into life
2. not allow the free expression of spiritual gifts in the assembly; make people jump through too many hoops so that we control the ministry – example of **Diotrephes** (3 John)
3. not responding to the leading of the Holy Spirit to witness to a person or to meet their needs – positive example would be **John 4** and the divine appointment that Jesus Christ kept with the women at the well who desperately needed His love and forgiveness
 - **Rom 8:14** "*For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God*"
 - But it might get messy if I actually get involved in peoples' lives . . .
4. pour cold water on someone's passion or fervency for Christ and for spiritual ministry; instead of encouraging people to walk by faith we actually are more comfortable when people don't take any risks = walking by sight
5. stand in opposition to the **objectives pursued by the Holy Spirit** – must understand what those are:
 - our sanctification – **1 Thess 4:7-8** "*For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification. So, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you*"
 - peace and unity of the body of Christ – **Eph 4:3** "*being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*"
 - fellowship of the gospel – act as an isolationist – **Phil. 2:1** "*fellowship of the Spirit*"
 - love of the brethren – "*the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace*" **Gal. 5:22**
 - proper expression of rejoicing and celebration of worship – **2 Sam. 6:14** – "*And David was dancing before the Lord with all his might, and David was wearing a linen ephod*" – 2 key expressions of worship: The Presence of God should evoke holy

reverence and exuberant celebration – Who are we to judge others in this regard?
Lots of issues come up here regarding Liberty ... vs Decorum (what is proper);

Principle: Be Free . . . But also . . . Be Careful

Walvoord: Yieldedness to the Spirit includes, then, submission to the plain teachings of the Word of God, obedience to the guidance of the Spirit, and acceptance in faith of the providential acts of God. All of these are a part of the moment-by-moment experience of living in the will of God with an indwelling Spirit who is unquenched.

The Holy Spirit is an incredible resource with which God has gifted us ... How foolish of us if we quench the ministry of the Holy Spirit

B. (:20) Specifically: Are we Valuing or Despising the Ministry of the Word of God by the Holy Spirit?

“Do not despise prophetic utterances”
profhteiaj mh. ekouqeneite

“Despise” – Despise, to make of no account, to regard as nothing, treat with contempt, look down on; count as nothing; reject

“Prophetic Utterances”

Paul specifically says in 1 Corinthians 14 that prophets receive *“revelation”*: “Let two or three prophets speak, and let the other judge. But if anything is **revealed** to another who sits by, let the first keep silent” (1 Cor. 14:30; cf. v. 26, *“has a revelation”*).

Revelation (*apokalupsis*), [is] a disclosure of something that was before unknown; and divine revelation is the direct communication of truths before unknown from God to men. The disclosure may be made by dreams, visions, oral communication or otherwise (Dan. 2:19; 1 Cor. 14:26; 2 Cor. 12:1; Gal. 1:12; Rev. 1:1).

<http://www.reformedonline.com/view/reformedonline/charismt.htm>

Other NT usages of “Despise”

Luke 23:11 “*And Herod with his soldiers, after treating Him with contempt and mocking Him; dressed Him in a gorgeous robe and sent Him back to Pilate*”

1 Corinthians 1:28 “*and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are,*”

Acts 4:11 “*He is the STONE WHICH WAS REJECTED by you, THE BUILDERS, but WHICH BECAME THE VERY CORNER stone.*”

Romans 14:3 “*Let not him who eats regard with contempt him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats, for God has accepted him.*”

1 Cor. 16:11 let no one despise the ministry of Timothy when he comes to visit

Gal 4:14 do not *despise or loathe* Paul on account of his unpleasant physical affliction but receive him as an angel of God

Look at OT for examples of despising the ministry of the Word of God:

1) example of the prophetic ministry of the prophet Jeremiah – 2 Chron. 36:11-16

2) example of the prophetic ministry of the prophet Ezekiel – Ezek 2:7 “*But you shall speak My*

words to them whether they listen or not, for they are rebellious.”

This text in 1 Thess. 5:20 is used by charismatics to criticize those of us who take the view that the gift of prophecy (and healing and tongues and the office of apostleship) was limited to the foundation period of the NT church. [We have had teaching on that subject earlier.]

Hiebert: Today the prophetic ministry in the church is not the disclosure of new revelation directly from the Spirit but rather the proclamation of God’s message for His people as gathered from the inspired Scriptures under the illumination of the Spirit and made relevant to the contemporary situation.

Young disciples at Thessalonica probably had some **bad experiences** with some false prophecies that might have disillusioned them – caused them to be jaded so that they no longer were as open to God’s prophetic ministry; 2 specific errors we know about:

- “The Lord told me to quit my job because He is coming any day” – failing to live a responsible lifestyle
- We are already in the day of the Lord – that is why we are experiencing such severe persecutions – wrong understanding of end times events

Specific ways we tend to despise the ministry of the Word of God:

- Put-your-head-in-the-sand approach -- ignore God’s truth and fail to respond to it
 - look at how the unbeliever does that – turns a deaf ear to all of the warning passages: *“Today is the day of salvation”* -- Is that so?? I think not ... not for me ...
 - look at how the believer does that ... Isn’t the preacher through yet ... I have other things I would rather be doing; that was a nice message ... but no follow through; Or maybe your wife points some area out where you need to change and you shut her down
- Know-it-all approach -- thinking that we know it all and have no need for God to continue to teach us His truth
- Throw-the-baby-out-with-the-bath-water approach -- reject truth because of some fault in the life of the messenger
- Cafeteria approach -- choose for ourselves what commands of God we will obey or give attention to

How are we showing God today that we **value** the ministry of His Word in our lives? What a privilege the access we have to His Word and to faithful teaching – But Paul goes on to teach us that we cannot just accept that teaching uncritically – we cannot assume that everything we hear is accurate and helpful

II. (:21-22) BE CAREFUL – WHILE EXERCISING CAREFUL DISCERNMENT THAT PROMOTES GODLY MORALITY -- DISCERNMENT IN MINISTRY

A. (:21a) Careful Doctrinal Discernment

“But examine everything carefully”
panta de dokimazete

“Examine” – test, examine, interpret, discern, discover, approve, prove, demonstrate

The right type of critical spirit – not judging motives ... but judging words and actions and comparing them to the objective biblical standard

Casillas: A favorite word of Apostle Paul; process to check out whether coin is genuine; to determine whether someone is fit for political office; 1 John 4:1; Somebody might say, Who am I to test?? I haven't studied the original languages ... 1 John 2 – reference to anointing of Holy Spirit which we have all received; that will keep us from being deceived; you have the written Word of God; you have the resources you need to put it to the test; don't place too much authority in the preacher; he needs to be held accountable; needs to voluntarily subject oneself to that type of scrutiny

In our age, there is a **reaction** against the need for this type of careful examination – you are being too critical; unloving; not promoting the unity of the Body –

Remember our key principle: **Be Free** (there is great liberty in the Spirit) . . . but also ... **Be Careful** – there must be **balance**

MacArthur: The church's de-emphasis of the Holy Spirit's working through the Word has led to a pronounced **lack of spiritual discernment**. **6 Basic Symptoms of this Deficiency:**

[Titles in bold are mine; content is from Dr. MacArthur]

- 1) **Wishy-washy** -- a general weakening of doctrinal clarity and conviction within the church. Many Christians no longer think biblically and theologically, and they consider it wrong and unloving to be dogmatic, even on the most basic doctrines such as the inerrancy of Scripture and the definition of the gospel
- 2) **Fogginess** -- much of the church is no longer antithetical in its thinking. It does not make sharp distinctions between true and false, right and wrong, but instead embraces subjectivity, relativity, and pragmatism
- 3) **Marketing distortion** -- image and influence have replaced the proclamation of the truth as the essence of evangelization. The church is reluctant to risk offending unbelievers with a clear, convicting gospel message. Instead, it relies on marketing philosophy to present a seeker-friendly message that focuses on people's felt needs.
- 4) **Dumbing Down** -- the church has ceased valuing sound hermeneutics. Many preachers no longer work diligently at the careful and accurate interpretation of the Word. They have substituted anecdotes, psychology, and subjectivity for the objective exposition of Scripture
- 5) **Compromise with Sin** -- the church has mostly ceased exercising church discipline against those members who persist in sin and error. As a result, the world's philosophy and practice enters the church and it stops being distinct from the surrounding pagan culture
- 6) **Self-Absorption** -- all of the preceding features produce and are characteristic of a spiritually immature church. The self-absorbed church, preoccupied with attaining personal comfort, success, and achieving man-centered solutions to life's problems, possesses a superficial faith that cannot discern between good and evil, or truth and error.

How do we conduct this examination?

If someone claims, "the Lord told me to do ..." – how can we examine that type of subjective claim??? Must always get back to the biblical principles; beyond that it is a wisdom choice; you can claim the Spirit's individual leading; but you cannot enforce that on anyone else

[Wayne Grudem and Sovereign Grace approach to prophecy]

Be especially careful of new or novel doctrines ... or changes from a sound, fundamental foundation – look at how churches and seminaries and Christian institutions started off doctrinally sound but then fell away over time ... people were not examining everything carefully; allowing error to creep in ... it doesn't take over all at once; it happens very subtly over time – because we are too cowardly or lazy to confront error

1 John 4:1 *“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”*

Example of the believers in Berea: **Acts 17:10-11** *“for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so”*

Example of the church meetings at Corinth: **1 Cor. 14:29** *“Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment”*

Believers today are so gullible – will believe whatever they hear; lack discernment; do not want to take the time to study, to evaluate, to examine everything carefully

Pastors often react very poorly, very defensively when people want to critically examine what they have taught – They should be interested in pursuing truth in fellowship, in partnership – not trying to exalt themselves as the scholar that everyone should worship [not examine everything with a critical, suspicious spirit]

Pastors/Elders especially are charged with this function of being a checks and balance so that truth is protected

Mayhue: If the test was limited to prophecies alone, the standard would be truth and error, but this is not the language used here.

Our doctrine has practical consequences; leads to our morality

- How serious is **lying to the Holy Spirit** – Ananias and Sapphira in **Acts 5:1-11** – but they were just stretching the truth; or maybe withholding some important details to make the situation seem something that it was not – look at how severe God judged them – yet people see things that are in error and fail to address them; choose to overlook sin; not my responsibility to confront the person

B. (:21b-22) Discernment that Promotes Godly Morality

1. Positively

“hold fast to that which is good”

to. kal on katecece

“hold fast” – embrace wholeheartedly; take possession of

Paul is not just calling for some type of intellectual response to the truth; he wants a life change; revelation demands a response – one that embraces truth in a practical and moral sense so that

our lives become more like the Lord Jesus Christ in how we relate to God and how we relate to others

What have you judged to be good that you have committed yourselves to hold fast ... to embrace wholeheartedly?

“*that which is good*” – what is inherently genuine, true, noble, and right (Rom. 7:16; 1 Tim. 1:8, 18; 2:3; 4:4; 6:12-13, 19; 2 Tim.4:7; Titus 3:8), not just what might be beautiful in appearance. When believers find what is **good**, they must embrace it and make it their own (cf. Rom. 12:9; 16:19; Phil. 4:8). **MacArthur**

2. Negatively

“*Abstain from every form of evil.*”

apo. pantoj eidouj ponhrou/apecesqel

“*Abstain*” – not play around with or thing that it is not impacting you

2 Possibilities

- every appearance of evil

- every form or kind of evil

Especially every kind of evil that tries to counterfeit itself as appearing to be true and helpful

MacArthur: Evil refers to something that is actively harmful or malignant. Such evil, which includes lies and distortions of truth as well as moral perversions, appears in many forms.

In fact the most dangerous kinds of perversions are things that are very close to the truth ... just off by a little bit ... that is how apostasy occurs. Satan is very deceptive and tricky.

Amazing lack of discernment: This week in the news -- convent of 10 Episcopal nuns in Catonsville – upset by the church embracing ordained leaders who are openly homosexual ... have decided to switch allegiance to the Roman Catholic Church Drawn to their liturgy and the emphasis on the sacraments ... What about the truth of the Word of God??

CONCLUSION:

Once again Paul has packed a ton of meaning and application into a very few short commands as he concludes his exhortations to these believers at Thessalonica.

We need to promote the Liberty and the full ministry of the Holy Spirit – especially that all-important ministry of the Word of God ... but we must exercise careful discernment and act on the judgments that we make – embracing the good and rejecting that which is evil.

Run the race in such a way that you pursue the balance between being free (and promoting the ministry of the Holy Spirit) and being careful to exercise proper discernment so that you don't wreck in the end.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Are cessationists (those who believe that the special sign gifts such as healing and prophecy and speaking in tongues were intended only for the early foundational period of the Church and are not part of God’s program for today) guilty of *quenching the Spirit* and *despising prophetic utterances*?
- 2) Do we examine doctrinal teaching ourselves and develop our own convictions before the Lord or do we rely on others to spoon feed us so that our dependence is on our spiritual leader?
- 3) What have we chosen to cling to as good?
- 4) What have we chosen to abstain from as evil?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Life Application Bible Commentary: Checklist for Encouragers (5:11-23)

- :11 Build each other up. Point out to someone a quality you appreciate in him or her.
- :12 Respect leaders. Look for ways to cooperate.
- :13 Hold leaders in highest regard. Hold back your next critical comment about those in positions of responsibility. Say thank you to your leaders for their efforts.
- :13 Live in peace. Search for ways to get along with others.
- :14 Warn the idle. Challenge someone to join you in a worthwhile project.
- :14 Encourage the timid. By reminding them of God’s promises.
- :14 Help the weak. Support those who are weak by loving them and praying for them.
- :14 Be patient. Think of a situation that tries your patience, and plan ahead of time how you can stay calm.
- :15 Resist revenge. Instead of planning to get even with those who mistreat you, do good to them.
- :16 Be joyful. Remember that even in the midst of turmoil, God is in control
- :17 Pray continually. Talk to God – he is always with you.
- :18 Give thanks. Make a list of all the gifts God has given you, giving thanks to God

for each one.

- | | | |
|-----|--|--|
| :19 | Do not put out the Spirit's fire. | Cooperate with the Spirit the next time he prompts you to participate in a Christian meeting. |
| :20 | Do not treat prophecies with contempt. | Receive God's Word from those who speak for him. |
| :22 | Avoid every kind of evil. | Avoid situations where you will be drawn into temptation. |
| :23 | Count on God's constant help. | Realize that the Christian life is to be lived, not in your own strength, but through God's power. |

Stott: Paul's injunction to us is to treat with respect and not with contempt any utterance which claims to come from God. Indeed, we are neither to reject it outright, nor to accept it outright. We are rather to listen to it, and as we do so to test everything, to sift it, to weigh carefully what is said. How are we to evaluate it, however? Paul does not answer this question here, but we can do so from the teaching of Jesus and his apostles elsewhere. Although discernment is a spiritual gift, we are nevertheless given certain tests to apply to teachers. The first test is the plain truth of Scripture. Like the inhabitants of Berea, we are to examine the Scriptures to see if what any Christian teacher says is true. The second test is the divine-human person of Jesus. If we are to test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world, this is how we are to discern between the true and the false: Every spirit [i.e. prophet claiming inspiration] that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of antichrist. The third test is the gospel of God's free and saving grace through Christ. Anybody who perverts this gospel . . . deserves to be eternally condemned. The fourth test is the known character of the speaker . . . The fifth test is the degree to which what is said edifies, that is, builds up and benefits the church.

Bruce: The use of God's gift of reason is a corrective to unrestrained enthusiasm. There is a saying widely ascribed to Jesus by writers in the early Christian centuries: "Become approved moneychangers." This was sometimes explained in terms of 1 Thess 5:21, 22. For example, Clement of Alexandria quotes it in the form: "Become approved moneychangers, who reject much, but retain the good." The distinguishing of genuine from counterfeit coinage is a good figure of speech for the distinguishing of true from false prophecy – or any other kind of religious teaching.

Wiersbe: (def of worship from **William Temple**, a late Archbishop of Canterbury) For to worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open up the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God.

David Silversides: Truth and Error

The Holy Spirit is the spirit of Truth; what should be our relationship to the Holy Spirit?

1. (:19) The right use of truth

A general principle followed by a specific application of that principle in vs. 20; It is our responsibility to make the right use of the truth made known to us; if we are given understanding in the truth of God's Word, we must follow that which we understand; we quench the Spirit when we fail to act on the discernment we have been given; Spirit of God is not impotent; but we must act on our responsibility; truth must never be rejected; don't harden our hearts against the truth of God; be sensitive to the knowledge of the truth and live by it; don't be careless about the application; don't decay in our commitment to following the truth; non-Christian becomes more hard-hearted against the gospel; but there is even a decaying aspect in the life of a believer who does not act on truth; all truth is to be eagerly followed; follow the truth carefully; Abraham was told to walk before God and be perfect; walk in the light even as Jesus is in the Light; more light will be given if you follow the light you have

2. (:20) Look out for Truth

Eph 2:20 – there were prophets in the NT church; 1 Cor. 12:28 – the position in the list indicates that these prophets were organs of direct revelation from God; Satan always counterfeits the truth – false apostles, prophets and teachers – maybe Thessalonians became disillusioned because of false prophets; perhaps the unruly lazy ones thought they needed no instruction so they despised prophecies; Paul commands them to pay attention to God's Word; the truth of God is to be valued; the opportunities of hearing the preaching of the truth are to be valued as well; not prophecies for us, but the teachers expounding the written word of God; access to the ministry of the Word must be valued; many Christians do not have the access we enjoy

3. (:21) Sifting out Error

Is this man a true prophet or a charlatan – claiming to be what he isn't: 1 Cor. 14:29; Is what the preacher is saying consistent with the Scriptures; Acts 17:11 – Bereans commended for checking things out; Search the Scriptures; don't be inattentive or gullible when listening to preaching; lay hold of everything that is consistent with the Scriptures; cleave to it; cling to it; all that you know to be Scriptural is precious; God does not want us to treat His truth as if it is of no account; don't squander it; have an iron grip on it; act upon the truth

4. (:22) Hold Off the Evil

“Abstain” – opposite of “hold fast” – hold off from ... a deliberate contrast; pushing away from us... “appearance of evil” – not possible to avoid everything that could possibly be construed as evil in the eyes of others; look at how Christ was charged with evil and wrong motives in many instances (healing on the sabbath, etc.); every time evil shows itself we are to hold it off; not what might seem evil; but whenever evil appears and shows itself; especially every time evil appears under the guise of truth! Live according to the truth.

Conclusion:

We cannot honor God without being truth-sensitive – in doctrine and in practice. Truth not practiced becomes an occasion of pride. God cannot lie; He has given us His truth.

Dr. Ken Casillas: Responding to the Spirit's Word

Review: some of the key ideas in the epistle

Good summary of the epistle: Life and Ministry – salvation past and salvation future – characterized by faith, love and hope – persevered under great persecution; they had received the Word of God with a certain spirit of joy produced by the Holy Spirit; became an example to other believers; defends his ministry and gives a philosophy of his ministry – not self-oriented but serving others like a mother and father; worried about the danger of apostasy; wants to make sure they continue to grow in their faith; Chaps. 1-3 = Historical; Chaps 4-5 = Practical; you need to be on guard against spiritual dangers; closes out with a few final exhortations; What has been our attitude in listening to 19 hours of preaching on this epistle? What has been our response on a practical level to the Word of God?

3 Possible Responses:

- ignoring, rejecting God's Word – just going on with my life
- received it with a teachable spirit; thankful for learning something new; maybe even challenged or convicted about some area; but no change in your life
- value the Word and obey it; live out the truths we have encountered here

Very close tie to vs 19 and 20 – Our response to the proclamation of God's Word is an important indication of your response to the Holy Spirit – pretty serious connection

To despise prophecying is to quench the Spirit

I. 2 Negative Commandments (:19-20) Wrong responses to the Spirit's Word

A. Do Not Quench the Spirit

- Illustration: importance of putting out campfire when you leave the site; but don't put it out right after you work so hard to get it started;

Is.42:3; don't quench your wife; makes you want to back off and get away from them; presents a roadblock in your relationship with them;

Why would we be so concerned not to Quench the Spirit?

- because of His identity = Who He is = a person of the godhead
- because of His Work = What He does; for unbelievers = regenerates, gives people life; illuminates believers and sanctifies them; don't cut yourself off from the only source of power there is to resist sin and have victory; don't pull the plug on the power cord; Spirit also gives us Assurance (Rom. 8:14-16); learn to think of the Holy Spirit as a fire: illuminates us; warms us; purges us and makes us clean

How do we quench the Spirit?

- when you are convicted of sin, warned and you resist that work of the Spirit
Grieving the Spirit – hardness, coldness develops
- here, Paul is talking about corporate level – confronted in assembly with the prophecies of God proclaimed – don't reject what we are hearing

B. Do Not Despise Prophecying

What is prophecying?

- (cf. book by Wayne Grudem) – spontaneous thoughts from the Spirit ... but confusing when he tries to separate it from revelation; supported by Sovereign Grace family of churches; evidence for that view is very slim in Scriptures – very dangerous approach

- Direct revelation from God – authoritative and inspired; coupled with gift of discerning of spirits; miraculous things taking place in NT gathering during this transition period; inaugurating new periods of God's working to confirm God's spokesmen and God's truth; 2 Cor. 12:12; Heb 2:3-4; but now we have the completed canon; foundation has already been laid; God no longer

working in this way

Then how does this command apply to us (cessationists) today? General sense of proclaiming something that God said – preaching, teaching, etc.

“*Despise*” – to treat something as though it were nothing; to reject it; treat it with disdain, contempt; more than just apathetic attitude; 2 Thess 2:1 – these people were subject to a lot of false teaching (“Thus saith the Lord”); had become jaded – Why should I listen to you?

Disillusioned by false prophecies so they were tempted to reject prophecies altogether; plenty of people today misrepresenting the Word of God; don’t cut yourself off from vital ministry of Holy Spirit in your life

II. 3 Positive Commandments (:21-22) Right responses to the Spirit’s Word

A. Test Everything

A favorite word of Apostle Paul; process to check out whether coin is genuine; to determine whether someone is fit for political office; 1 John 4:1; Somebody might say, Who am I to test?? I haven’t studied the original languages ... 1 John 2 – reference to anointing of Holy Spirit which we have all received; that will keep us from being deceived; you have the written Word of God; you have the resources you need to put it to the test; don’t place too much authority in the preacher; he needs to be held accountable; needs to voluntarily subject oneself to that type of scrutiny

B. Hold Fast to What is Good

Keep it, embrace it; assimilate it; apply it

C. Abstain from Every Form of Evil

Evil takes a lot of different forms; can be the preacher; the worst forms of wickedness consist of perversion of the truth by those in positions of spiritual leadership;

Wayne Grudem interview: (coming from a position of continuationism instead of cessationism)
<http://www.challies.com/archives/interviews/continuationism.php>

In fact, in people’s actual prayer lives as well as in the personal conversation of the pastor in the pulpit to the congregation, people talk about the Lord leading them and guiding them in specific ways. Sometimes in ways it sounds very much like the gift of prophecy to me, but they don’t call it prophecy. They call it prompting or leading. I am thankful for all of that and I am very comfortable being in a home fellowship group where people pray and are willing to say how they think the Lord is leading them and guiding them as they pray and what He brings to their minds. And they don’t call it prophecy. But I’m thinking, “That sure looks like prophecy to me!” . . .

I think we have to recognize that there is a segment of the cessationist community that is ready to pounce on anyone who speaks of subjective forms of guidance; ready to pounce on anyone who speaks of dealing with promptings of the Lord in one way or another; that is highly suspicious of any emotional component in worship or prayer. I don’t know that that is representative of all of cessationism but there is a segment of the cessationist community that is so suspicious of any emotional component, any subjective component in all of our relationship with God and with others that it tends to quench a vital aspect of the personal relationship with God in the lives of ordinary believers. And that can tend to a dry orthodoxy in the next generation that abandons that faith and the church spiritually becomes dry and static, and I’m concerned about that.

[wrote book: *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today.*]

Brian Schwertley: The Charismatic Movement: A Biblical Critique

Thus far we have seen that most Charismatics have redefined prophecy as something less revelational and authoritative than what occurred in the days of the apostles. This unbiblical redefining of prophecy allows Charismatics to do two things. First, they avoid the objective verification that the biblical prophets were subject to by giving vague exhortations or nonspecific prophecies (which could easily be made up on the spot by any Christian; their nonspecific prophecies cannot be proven either true or false). Second, by claiming that prophecy is less revelational and authoritative than Scripture, they can claim that they are not adding to Scripture. We have noted that the office of New Testament prophet is a continuation of the Old Testament office. The exhortations and prophecies of the New Testament prophet are Spirit-inspired and equal in authority to Scripture. Furthermore, the Bible teaches that prophecy serves a distinct foundational function in the church because of unique historical circumstances (i.e., an open canon). When the New Testament canon was completed, prophecy ceased, because it was no longer needed.

The description given thus far of the beliefs of Charismatics regarding prophecy does not convey the full truth regarding how bad things are within the Charismatic movement. It would be one thing if Charismatics had a few “prophets” in each church blurting out vague exhortations and nonspecific prophecies. But in actuality, *most Charismatics believe that God speaks to each Spirit-filled Christian directly*; that He leads people to do things apart from the Holy Scriptures. Phrases common in Charismatic circles are “God told me to do this,” “The Spirit led me to do that,” “Jesus spoke to me and told me such and such.” Such thinking leads to subjectivism and mysticism; it clearly contradicts God’s Word. In the days of the apostles, when all the supernatural gifts were being practiced, direct revelation came only by the apostles and prophets (tongues and their interpretation are a form of revelation also). The Apostle Paul specifically says that *not* all had the gift of tongues and that only *some* were prophets (cf. 1 Cor. 12:30; Eph. 4:11). The idea, common in our day, that God leads people directly or communicates with people directly is unbiblical and dangerous. While the majority of Charismatics believe in biblical inerrancy and claim to love the Bible, many are being led about by subjective feelings, impressions and experiences rather than the clear teaching of God’s Word.

Our responsibility as believers is not to follow our feelings or impressions but to study the Word of God and apply it to our lives. Everything we need in life for all our decisions can be learned from scriptural principles. Christians must stop believing in mystical impressions and start learning how to deduce truths from Scripture and apply them to ourselves, our families, jobs, schools, civil government, and so on. The Charismatic movement and its implicit subjectivism have caused untold harm to thousands of Christians. The author personally knows of horror stories where immature believers were “led” to do unbiblical and stupid things (e.g., “God led me to quit my job and live in a tent,” “God led me to leave my wife,” “God told me to marry Mary,” “God told me to invest in such and such,” etc.). If someone says to you that God spoke to them, say, “Show me in the Bible.” When a Christian tells you that God led him to do something, tell him to prove it from the Word of God. *Our freedom from dictatorial pastors, oppressive governments and subjective nonsense is the objective, infallible, sufficient Word of God, the Bible.* <http://www.reformedonline.com/view/reformedonline/charismt.htm>

TEXT: 1 THESSALONIANS 5:23-28

TITLE: THE SANCTIFICATION AND PRESERVATION OF THE SAINTS -- BENEDICTION / CLOSING REQUESTS

BIG IDEA:

(:23-24) BENEDICTION -- ANTICIPATE COMPLETE SANCTIFICATION AT THE LORD'S RETURN BECAUSE OF GOD'S FAITHFULNESS IN PRESERVING HIS SAINTS

INTRODUCTION:

Emphasis last week was on **our responsibility** to be discerning – in doctrinal areas and in moral areas so that we would be sanctified as we “*hold fast to that which is good*” and “*abstain from every form of evil.*” It could be overwhelming as we think back through the epistle and consider all that we have been charged to do. [Review the epistle]

Today we are looking at **God's role** in our sanctification. That is where the encouragement and the enablement comes into play. Our sanctification depends ultimately on the gracious work of God in our life. He both initiates our salvation and consummates our sanctification. It is all a work of **God's grace** through faith. This passage is meant to be a tremendous encouragement to all of us who are truly trusting in the work of God.

Theme of the epistle:

CHURCH PLANTERS ENCOURAGE GROWING DISCIPLES TO ENDURE PERSECUTION AND WALK WORTHY OF THEIR CALLING IN ANTICIPATION OF THE LORD'S RETURN

Prayer at the end of chap. 3:13 “*so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.*”

We have talked many times about the precious doctrines of God's amazing grace – sometimes labeled the five points of Calvinism or the fundamentals of the Reformed faith – but better known as Scriptural truths supporting **Sovereign Grace**

T = **Total Depravity** – Inability of man to save or sanctify himself; Impact of the Fall and Original Sin; every person is enslaved to sin and incapable on his own of responding to God in repentance and faith

U = **Unconditional Election** – God chose specific ones for salvation; all of His initiative God's choice from eternity of those whom he will bring to himself is not based on foreseen virtue, merit, or faith in those people. Rather, it is unconditionally grounded in God's mercy alone.

L = **Limited Atonement** – Particular Redemption

Calvinists do not believe, however, that the atonement is limited in its value or power (in other words, God could have elected everyone and used it to atone for them all), but rather that the atonement is limited in the sense that it is designed for some and not all. Hence, Calvinists hold that the atonement is sufficient for all and efficient for the elect.

I = **Irresistible Grace** – Efficacious grace; those whom God has elected to save and intends to save, He actually saves – doesn't lose any of them

P = **Perseverance of the Saints** / Preservation of the Saints – Eternal Security --

Those who are genuinely saved (not just those professing faith in Christ) will endure to the end and enjoy eternal security. No one can ever pluck them out of God's hand. He does the work of sanctifying and preserving His elect.

Other NT verses supporting this doctrine of Preservation of the Saints:

1 Peter 1:5 *"By God's power we are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."*

Jude 24,25 *"Now to him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you without blemish before the presence of his glory with rejoicing, to the only God, our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen."*

Philippians 1:6 *"And I am sure that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."* Yet we are charged with the responsibility to *work out our salvation in fear and trembling (2:12)*

1 Corinthians 1:8-9 *"Jesus Christ will sustain you to the end; guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."*

2 Thess 2:14 *"It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."*

* * * * *

We are charged in Hebrews with the responsibility to *"Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord"* (12:14)

How much sanctification do we need? We know that we are not saved by our own good works or by our own level of holiness ...

It is the righteousness of God that has been imputed to our account ... but then God does the work of sanctifying us and eventually making us completely righteous – but we still must pursue this sanctification as well

1 Cor 1:30 *"But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption,"*

Sanctification has **3 different phases**:

- Past phase = a settled reality at the moment of Justification

Heb. 10:10,14 *"We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all . . . For by one offering He has perfected for all times those who are sanctified"*

- Present phase = Here the focus for us is on the ongoing process of daily being conformed more to the image of Christ and His holiness of character and conduct; that process will be brought to completion in our lives at the moment that Christ returns; until that point God is working in us to progressively sanctify us; we are looking at that process that will issue in our ultimate completed sanctification

- Future phase = the anticipation is of the consummated sanctification at that moment of

the return of Christ when we will all be completely glorified

Tough to separate these final two phases – the present and the future -- in our text for today ... because the present process issues in the future consummation – God is the one who keeps us on the road to sanctification, enables us to make progress and gets us to our final destination

I. (:23) ENCOURAGEMENT IN ANTICIPATING COMPLETE SANCTIFICATION

[II. (:24) ASSURANCE OF COMPLETE SANCTIFICATION]

A. Encouragement as we consider **the Agent** -- God Himself = “*the God of Peace*”

Autoj de. o qeoj thj eirhnhj

Emphasis on “*Himself*” – the one with all of the resources to help us – He is the Agent of our Sanctification

God has **not delegated** the important function of assuring our salvation to some underling who has limited powers; the emphasis here in the Greek is that God Himself is the Agent preserving His saints and assuring our sanctification

This is the God of Peace – who has already won the final victory and will usher us into that perfect peace where we are delivered even from the presence of sin

Sin wages war against God; the unbeliever has no peace with God and no internal peace where he knows it is well with his soul

The believer sometimes finds himself in the type of conflict against sin that Paul described in **Rom. 7** – very disturbing – How can we continue to struggle with sin when we have been delivered and indwelt by the Holy Spirit?

“Like a river glorious is God’s Perfect Peace”

The New Covenant is described as a covenant of Peace (Ezek. 37:26)

Barton: cf. how Paul closes other letters with reference to *God of peace* – Rom. 15:33; 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:11; Phil. 4:9; 2 Thess. 3:16 . . . Unlike worldly peace, which is usually defined as the absence of conflict, this peace is confident assurance in any circumstance; with Christ’s peace, no believer needs to fear the present or the future

Be on guard against sin in your life –

- affects your peace with God – the enjoyment of that relationship
- affects your internal peace with yourself – all types of conflicts within
Fears, worries, anxieties, bitterness, depression
- affects your peace in your relationships with others

If you are not at peace – ask God to search your heart and expose your sin – your lack of trusting Him completely – He is the God of Peace

B. Encouragement as we consider **the Scope**

umwh to. pneuma kai. h' yuch. kai. to. swma

1. spirit
2. soul
3. body

Big theological debate over whether man has been designed by God to have 3 basic parts [Trichotomy] or only 2 basic parts [Dichotomy] – material and immaterial

No need to get overly technical here –

- words are piled up for emphasis – not to delineate separate and distinct parts of man
(Mk 12:30 – four parts specified here: heart, soul, mind, strength);
- sometimes man is referenced as *body and soul*; sometimes *body and spirit*
- both soul and spirit have the same emotional descriptions associated with them

Point is that the **entirety of man** is going to be preserved in holiness and ultimately completely sanctified

Interesting that Paul includes the “body” – Greeks sometimes made a distinction where the body was viewed as inherently evil and not subject to sanctification – believers are to glorify God in the body (1 Cor. 6: 13-20)

Cannot **compartmentalize your life – sanctification must flow through your entire life

Sott: Emphasis is on the **thoroughness** of God’s sanctifying work

Van Paranak: The object of the overseer's watching is the believer's *soul* (Heb. 13:17). Today we speak glibly of the “soul” as the spiritual and eternal part of man, that which lives on beyond the grave. But in the Bible, the lines are not so sharply drawn. The whole person can be termed a “soul” (Acts 7:14; 1 Pet. 3:20). Or “soul” can refer to a man's physical life, without reference to spiritual salvation or damnation (Acts 15:26). It may refer to the inner self, which experiences the whole gamut of sensations to which man is subject: satisfaction (Luke 12:19), sorrow (Matt. 26:38), pleasure (Heb. 10:38), pain (Luke 2:35), even being well-fed (Matt. 6:25). The overseer, in watching for the soul of the believer, guards far more than his spiritual well-being. He is responsible for every aspect of the believer's welfare.

C. Encouragement as we consider the **Process**

1. "*sanctify you entirely*" – set apart from sin to God for His purposes and for His service
agiasai umaj olotel eij

Hoke: Throughout the Old Testament, you find God setting things apart for His use — thus making them holy. The priests were set apart. The Tabernacle and all its utensils were set apart. When the Tabernacle was set apart the shekinah glory of God appeared between the cherubim inside the Holy of Holies and the cloud appeared outside. God was in it. The reality of His presence on the inside appeared on the outside. So God also wants that to happen in our lives as well.

You see, sanctification is a door into communion with God. God desires for our lives to be progressively more set apart to Him. This process means that He makes more of a difference in my life today than yesterday. I should be more yielded to Him. I should experience a greater awareness of His presence. My behavior should be impacted. Jesus should make more of a difference in how I live my life. And if those things are true, then I will experience a greater communion with God, a greater sense of His presence and power.

Rom. 12:1 “Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service”

Bruce: This is the only place in the NT where ol otel eij occurs. . . cf. an inscription recording Nero’s announcement of “complete exemption from taxation” to all Greeks at the Isthmian Games of A.D. 67.

Hiebert: a compound of *holos*, “whole, entire,” and *telos*, “end.” Its basic connotation is “wholly attaining the end, reaching the intended goal,” hence has the force of no part being left unreached. The prayer is that the divine sanctification may extend to every part of their being, leaving no area untouched by the pervasive power of divine holiness. It is tragically true that “many are satisfied with a partial Christianity, some parts of their life are still worldly.” (**Lenski**)

2. "preserved" – thrhqei h\alpha Guarded
 $\text{kai. ol okl hron amemptwj}$
 - a. "complete"

Morris: The word “entire” does not differ very greatly from that rendered “wholly” in the earlier part of the verse, though there is probably some difference of emphasis. Whereas the former word brought us the thought of “that which has attained its end,” this one signifies “that which is complete in all its parts.” It has interesting associations with sacrifice in the Greek Old Testament and elsewhere. It describes the “whole” stones that were used in making the altar. It is used also of the victims that were offered. If Paul has this sacrificial usage in mind it would fit in very well with the entire surrender of the man to God which is involved in sanctification.

- b. "without blame"

Those that emphasize that this passage deals only with the progressive aspect of salvation have difficulty with this phrase – make it parallel to an elder being *blameless* as he is judged by men; but here we stand in judgment before God; He is the one making the evaluation – does this mean that God finds in us enough fruit so that we have at any point in time the brand of Christianity on our life?? I think it goes beyond that to God causing us to *Abide in Christ* ... to remain in living connection with the holiness and righteousness of Christ so that He looks on us and sees Christ and ultimately transforms us completely into the image of Christ in terms of holiness and sanctification

D. Encouragement as we consider the **Timeframe** -- "*at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*"
 $\text{en th\prime parousi\alpha| tou/ kuriou hmw\eta V\etasou/ Cristou}$

Don’t expect complete sanctification before this timeframe – those who hold to sinless perfectionism need to consider this verse
Not **Sinless Perfection** right now – that is a pipedream

Much emphasis in 1 Thess on the imminent return of Jesus Christ – something we are looking forward to with great anticipation – uncertain about the exact time – but it is soon and drawing closer

Are we prepared for Christ to return? Are we encouraged that God will sanctify us completely?

Here Paul goes beyond Encouragement to Assurance!

II. (:24) ASSURANCE OF COMPLETE SANCTIFICATION

A. Based on the Faithfulness of God in Calling You

“Faithful is He who calls you”

pistoj o kalwh umaj

2:12 *“so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory”*

4:7 *“for God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification”*

God’s Faithfulness to His Word is what is at stake here – but is He able to carry out this promise?

B. Based on the Sovereignty of God in Completing His Work in You

“and He also will bring it to pass”

oj kai poihseiā

God is a Doer; He is the Sovereign Worker -- no one can hinder or thwart His plans

Num. 23:19 *“God is not a man that He should lie; nor a son of man that He should repent; Has He said and will He not do it? Or has He spoken and will He not make it good?”*

God is no Indian giver; not going to go back on His promises; not going to drop us halfway along the road to heaven

Rom. 8:30 – impossible to get off the train of God’s Sovereign Salvation before we reach the final destination

(:25-28) FOUR CLOSING REQUESTS – DO YOUR PART WHILE DEPENDING ALWAYS ON THE SOVEREIGN GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

I. (:25) PRAY FOR THE MISSIONARY TEAM – FOR PERSEVERANCE IN HOLINESS AND THE SPREAD OF THE GOSPEL

“Brethren, pray for us.”

∇Adel foi(proseucesqe ikai∅ peri. himwhā

Paul and the missionary team had been praying for them; these prayers should be reciprocal; Paul stands in need of prayer himself;

II. (:26) MAINTAIN CLOSE FELLOWSHIP (CONTEXT OF LOVE AND HOLINESS) WITH ALL BELIEVERS

“Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss.”

∇Aspasasqe touj adel fouj pantaj en filhmati agiwhā

Avoid discrimination and favoritism; no Christian cliques; no elitism; no personal favoritism as

James warned against
Accompanied by a culturally appropriate physical gesture of fellowship
[College fellowship group tried to apply this literally at one point – awkward]

Ryrie: For the kiss as a symbol of welcome in Jewish life see Luke 7:45; 22:48. As a symbol of Christian fellowship . . . Paul uses the phrase in Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; and 2 Cor. 13:12.

Hiebert: While defining its spirit, there is no indication that these words were intended to inaugurate a new Christian practice. The kiss upon the cheek was a common form of Oriental greeting among friends. The custom, common in non-christian circles, was taken over by the Christian church, but purified and sanctified. It was exchanged among believers as they assembled for worship. Apparently at this time the sexes were segregated in the assembly and the men kissed the men and the women the women. The kiss was exchanged on the basis of brotherly love among members of one spiritual family.

III. (:27) COMMUNICATE THE TRUTH

“I adjure you by the Lord to have this letter read to all the brethren.”
WEnorkizw umaj ton kurion anagnwsqhai thn epistolhn pasin toij adel foijs

Never forget the privilege we have of such great access to the Word of God – we get to quibble over which translation to use; we have our large study Bible and then our smaller Bible to carry around

God’s Truth is precious and needs to be communicated to all the brethren
This was not just some message intended for the leaders of the church

IV. (:28) GROW IN GRACE

“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.”
H carij tou kuripou hmwh Whsou/ Cristou/ meqlj umwhs

Closes the epistle how he had opened it: **1:1** “*Grace to you and peace*”
We have at our disposal all of God’s resources to enable us to live the Christian life

CONCLUSION: CHURCH PLANTERS ENCOURAGE GROWING DISCIPLES TO ENDURE PERSECUTION AND WALK WORTHY OF THEIR CALLING IN ANTICIPATION OF THE LORD’S RETURN

- Times may be difficult; persecution may increase in this country
- We have a high calling
- Christ is coming soon

The Lord’s message to us is one of Holiness and Sanctification
The encouraging news is that the God of Peace has promised to sanctify and preserve His saints

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How can we best have assurance regarding our ultimate entire sanctification?
- 2) What are some of the specific things you request of God for the missionaries you support? What would the Apostle Paul want people to request on his behalf?
- 3) Why would the church leaders have to give special effort to make sure that “*all the brethren*” heard the reading of this epistle?
- 4) Why did Paul make “*God’s grace*” the opening and closing emphasis?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Piper: How can you have the assurance of salvation if holiness is necessary?

Vast portions of the Christian church today in America seek assurance by making holiness of life unnecessary. If holiness of life is not necessary to get to heaven then an unholy person can have assurance that he will get there. They don't just deny that perfection is not required for entering heaven (which is true; we do not attain practical perfection in this life); but they go beyond that and say that no degree of obedience or holiness or purity or goodness or love or repentance or transformation is required for entering heaven. They say that if God required any measure of practical obedience or holiness it would do three terrible things: 1) nullify grace and 2) contradict justification by faith alone and 3) destroy assurance.

But that is not true. The Bible teaches that none of those things happen when the Biblical necessity for holy living is rightly understood. There is a glorious assurance in the Christian life! But it is not found by denying the demand for holiness. . .

The human mind might reason like this: if some measure of holy living is required and if it cannot be precisely quantified--if you can't tell me exactly how much is necessary--then that requirement will always leave me unsure if I have enough. So any requirement for holiness or obedience at all destroys assurance.

But this is simply not the reasoning of the Bible. The Bible shows abundantly that there is a "holiness without which we will not see the Lord" and we are told in Hebrews 12:14 to "pursue" it. But it does not imply that this destroys assurance. And the reason it doesn't is what today's sermon is about. Namely, God's commitment to sanctify us--to make us as holy as we need to be in this life--is as sure as his election and his predestination and his justification and his call. What gives us assurance in this matter is not primarily focusing on the measure of our holiness, but on the measure of God's faithfulness to do the sanctifying work he promises to do. There's the key.

Thomas: Re vs. 27

The third parting word is more than just a request. The formula “*I charge you before the Lord*” shows an unusual concern on Paul’s part regarding the possibility of his letter’s urgency. He may have feared that the contents of the letter might be limited to those interested in a particular issue . . . Perhaps he was aware that some were already at work attributing wrong teaching to his name and authority (2 Thess 2:2) . . . Or he could have feared a breakdown in communications between the church’s leadership and some of the communicants within the church (4:11, 12; 5:12, 13) (Frame, p. 217). Very probably Paul sensed the far-reaching import of the teaching of the Epistle and its binding authority as part of a canon of Scripture (1 Cor 14:37). Whatever the case, this charge has implications of divine punishment for failure to comply. The first recipients of the letter, probably the church leaders, were bound under oath “*to have this letter read to all the brothers.*”

Matthew Slick: You cannot lose your salvation. Because the Father has elected, the Son has redeemed, and the Holy Spirit has applied salvation, those thus saved are eternally secure. They are eternally secure in Christ. Some of the verses for this position are John 10:27-28 where Jesus said His sheep will never perish; John 6:47 where salvation is described as everlasting life; Romans 8:1 where it is said we have passed out of judgment; 1 Corinthians 10:13 where God promises to never let us be tempted beyond what we can handle; and Phil. 1:6 where God is the one being faithful to perfect us until the day of Jesus’ return.

<http://www.calvinistcorner.com/tulip.htm>

Stott: This “wholeness” is further emphasized in the expression “*spirit, soul and body.*” Over this passage **Findlay** writes, “the Trichotomists and Dichotomists wage war, that is, those who think that human beings have three parts (spirit, soul and body) and those who think we have only two (whether ‘*soul and body*’ as in Mt. 10:28 or ‘*spirit and flesh*’ as in 2 Cor. 7:1). It must certainly be agreed that usually the New Testament describes us as having two parts, the one material and the other immaterial. Moreover, ‘*spirit*’ and ‘*soul*’ are often synonymous in Scripture as when Mary said ‘*My soul glorifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.*’” In fact, only twice, apart from this verse in 1 Thessalonians, are “spirit” and “soul” clearly distinguished in the New Testament.

If, on the other hand, Paul is here affirming a tripartite view of our humanness, as the early fathers mostly believed, then Lightfoot’s expression seems best. The spirit is “the ruling faculty in man . . . through which he holds communication with the unseen world;” the soul is “the seat of all his impulses and affections, the centre of his personality;” while the body “links him to the material world and is the instrument of all his outward deeds.” But we should not press Paul’s formulation into a precise scientific or theological statement of human beings; it surely has a rhetorical element, as when we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.

MacArthur: Paul’s concluding benediction points to the only source of power for obeying all the exhortations of 4:1–5:22 – God, who alone sanctifies the obedient believer. Sanctification is inseparably linked to saving faith, because those whom God justifies He also sanctifies (cf. Rom. 8:28-29). . . His prayerful benediction for them in these verses reveals several essential elements of sanctification: its nature, source, and extent; its human components its goal and culmination; and its final security.

David Silversides: The God of Peace Will Do It

The apostle has declared various responsibilities to man – some related to our response to the Word of God. Now he expresses our dependence on the grace of God in everything.

1. The Very God of Peace

God is the author of sanctification = making His people holy; Justification = declaring them righteous; Why this title of God of Peace in this context of sanctification? The God who has reconciled us to Himself in Christ will also complete the work of salvation by making us fit for fellowship with Christ in heaven. Christ accomplished our peace with God by His sacrifice for sins on our behalf. In due time this God who has forgiven us of the guilt and penalty of sin will deliver us from even the presence of sin.

2. Entire Sanctification

Sanctify you “*wholly*” = in all our parts; in the whole of our being; in all areas of life; so that we should live entirely for the glory of God; godliness should be across the board; God performing this work as a process rather than instantaneously; the goal in God’s purpose ought to be the aim of the Christian in this world – even though we always fall short in this life; we should never aim at less than complete holiness; discontent with present level of lack of conformity to Christ

3. The Whole Man is to be Preserved

Not that we would be blameless in our course in this world (like from the human eye the elder should be so viewed in this world) and be kept from great sin and falling; Instead: be kept in this world so that at the coming of Christ they would be found to be blameless in His Holiness and the body would then be free from all the effects of sin and would never again be the instrument of sin (Rom. 6)

4. What the Whole Man Is

Spirit and soul and body – arguments for trichotomy vs dichotomy – how many parts to man?
- the mere use of a number of terms does not automatically mean that they are distinct parts of man (Mk 12:30 – four parts specified here: heart, soul, mind, strength); can be different aspects of the same part

- sometimes *body and soul* and *body and spirit* are used to refer to the complete person (1 Cor. 7:34)

- the disembodied dead are described both as *souls* and as *spirits* in different places (Rev. 6:9; Heb. 12:23; 1 Pet. 3:19)

- both terms are used in connection with the same description of emotion (John 12:27; Matt. 26:38; Mark 8:12; John 13:21; Acts 17:16; 2 Pet. 2:8) – joy and rejoicing; trouble and vexation (Luke 1:46-47 – Hebrew parallelism in poetic form)

That is not to say that sometimes they don’t have a slightly different emphasis

- soul – more passive aspects
- spirit – more active principle

Even then they are two sides of the one thing; not two distinct parts of men; usually used interchangeably; Here multiplied words are used to express completeness – not only all parts, but all aspects of all parts are to be perfected

5. The Grounds of Confidence – it is the work of God to sanctify – does that guarantee it

will be done?

Grounds = In the **faithfulness** of God = the guarantee of glory

God puts this obligation upon Himself – He will glorify every sinner that He has effectually called; God has spoken and He is a God of truth

Arminians don't believe that God has made such a promise – you might trust Christ and have your sins forgiven today; but God hasn't promised to keep you in the faith or that you will certainly make it to heaven; for the Arminian: prolonging of days is just prolonging of risk = an increased hazard of slipping away into hell; an insult to God's grace

For us: prolonged journey to the destination does not decrease certainty of arrival; God has guaranteed He will keep His people – whether the thief on the cross or the Apostle John had the same guarantee of certain and complete sanctification

Ken Casillas: God the Sanctifier

You might be overwhelmed by the spiritual pressure of this epistle in terms of all of the exhortations to holiness – especially in chaps. 4-5. [Review all of the direct imperatives. Look at the example of the missionary team.] We have a lot to do. We could feel weighed down by this. Paul ends this section the same way he ended the first section in chap. 3. God is the one who must cause the growth to happen. God will answer these prayers and enable these people to grow in holiness and persevere.

Himself, God is the one who is going to do this work. *“The God of peace”* – He has done everything necessary to establish peace between Himself and us. God poured out His wrath on His own Son Jesus so that God can be at peace with us. God has put down our own rebellion against Him so that we can be at peace with Him. Will He not as well remove the remnants of sin that right now keep us from being totally at one with Him? He will deepen the peace, remove obstacles, etc. *“Sanctify”* – separated unto God and from sin and the world; pulled away from that which is contrary to the character of God; this is something which God does in stages; *“Completely”* – not perfect in this life; but reaching an intended goal successfully; all that He has determined for you on earth

Big Idea: Because God is the Sanctifier, we can pursue sanctification with confidence

I. the Extent of God's Sanctifying Work (:23b)

A. It is complete with reference to human nature

Paul is a little redundant here because he wants to make the point; piling up words that have to do with human nature; however you define every last part of you; there would not be an area that is untouched by God's sanctifying work (Deut. 6:5)

“blameless” – so that we cannot be charged with not being one of God's children; even though we will not be sinless here on earth

B. It is complete with reference to time

He wants us to be blameless all the way until the end of this church age; that holiness of life is not the basis for our salvation; there should be holiness growing in them that is consistent with their justification; there should be enough demonstration in your life of conformity to Christ that you evidently belong to Him

II. The Certainty of God's Sanctifying Work (:24)

No waffling here; Paul is dogmatic; everybody called will be sanctified; God's faithfulness is on the line as to whether His people persevere in holiness unto the end; God will sanctify His people; therefore, get going; everybody who is called, He is going to sanctify unto the very end; the encouragement to work out our own salvation because God works in us to accomplish it; all of the energizing grace and power is of God; the more you work, the more evidence there is that God is working

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TITLE: ESCHATOLOGY OVERVIEW – PreMill / PreTrib Dispensational Position

We are taking a short break from studying 1 Thessalonians. We will pick up next week in 4:13. This **Eschatology Overview** provides the framework for understanding Paul's teaching in chapters 4 and 5.. I have recently been reading from the Book of **Isaiah** for devotions. I have discovered lots of application to our study on last day events.

Is. 34:8 – lots of references to the **day of the Lord** – we will be looking at that topic today ...both references to judgment upon the world and blessing for God's covenant people. Notice what the prophet says in vs. **16-17** – the Lord is going to fulfill all of the details of these prophecies of future events. Every detail of every prophecy will have its "mate" in terms of fulfillment.

Seek from the book of the LORD, and read: Not one of these will be missing; None will lack its mate. For His mouth has commanded, And His Spirit has gathered them. And He has cast the lot for them, And His hand has divided it to them by line. They shall possess it forever; From generation to generation they shall dwell in it.

Keep in mind a couple of important features of biblical prophecy:

- Remember the important principle of telescoping prophecy – two future events viewed as one; or what seems to be a single event turns out to have multiple phases
- Also one partial, near-term historical reference like a foreshadowing ... with complete fulfillment in the last days

Quick Primer– can't cover all of the details; refresher for most of us; don't lose sight of **Practical Implications** for holy living and watchfulness and worldwide evangelism; look at importance Scripture gives to this subject;

Be fair-minded about the problem passages for your view and gracious towards others of differing views;

Taking just a very high level approach to define some terms and get some background – not trying to prove anything – that would require a course in itself;

Are you interested in when Christ is coming back???

OVERVIEW OF 5 MAJOR ISSUES:

I. DISTINCTION BETWEEN ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH = Huge =

Essence of Dispensationalism– God then has some unique aspects to His overall program in dealing with such differing groups; OT saints are not members of the church and NT Gentile believers are not members of national Israel; the church has not replaced Israel so that God is finished fulfilling His promises to the nation; that is why the current existence of the nation Israel is so significant (even though it is not yet the regathered and converted nation that is prophesied in the OT) – God will still keep all of His promises; that is why we talk about a literal hermeneutic or system of interpreting the Bible rather than one of allegory or symbolism; such a literal system includes the proper use of symbolism (like Jesus saying "*I am the door*") and typology as in any other literature – but does not sacrifice the intended historical application of God's promises

Many things can be similar without two things being identical; look at the qualifications for elder and for deacon – many similarities – but not the same office; Then look at diff words for elder, pastor, bishop – yet all refer to the same person – So you have to look at both points of similarity and points of distinction; You have to make a complete study – don't just pick up on a couple of verses that stress continuity and then jump to the conclusion that the church has replaced Israel; With respect to Israel and the church -- you have continuity of the **people of God** – but a distinction between national Israel and the Church; saved Gentile believers in the church age can be called children of Abraham (Rom. 4:11) and children of faith in a spiritual sense ... speaking of spiritual Israel . . . but not in the national sense

- Israel defined as a nation and treated as such by God in the OT – with specific promises made to the nation that still will find fulfillment in the future
- formation of the church at Pentecost – did not exist until then; Christ spoke of the church as future – *“I will build my church”*
- mystery nature of the church in terms of OT revelation
- Christ presented as the Head of the Church and the Church as His Body
 - Strange: OT believers not part of the body of Christ??? Isn't there one body of Christ??
- church as the Bride of Christ with marriage feast celebrated
- we enter the Church Universal by being baptized by the Holy Spirit into the Body; the Holy Spirit now indwells all church believers permanently – not true in the OT economy
- specific passages that distinguish the church from natural Israel and from spiritual Israel
- Practical implications –
 - view of OT prophecy is vastly different
 - infant baptism vs believer baptism; whole issue of covenant theology
 - view of OT law; observance of the Sabbath, etc.

Ezekiel 36:22ff

NT says there is no distinction now between man and woman ... between Jew and Gentile in the church – in terms of equal sharing in the spiritual blessings of the New Covenant ... doesn't mean that God no longer sees a distinction between men and women; doesn't mean that there is no future for the nation of Israel in God's program ... Expansion of the New Covenant promise to include Gentile believers in the church does not mean cancellation of those earlier commitments to the Jewish nation

Yet – there is **continuity in the program of God** – church is much more than a parenthesis – not an afterthought because of the rejection of the kingdom by the Jews at the time of Christ; but part of God's overall program for the ages

Progressive Dispensationalism – **Darrell Bock** – vs **classical** dispensationalism – since we see the spiritual promises of the New Covenant being fulfilled in part in the church today – we see more of a **unified view** of eternal salvation. God will save humankind in its ethnic and national plurality. But, He will bless it with the same salvation given to all without distinction; the same, not only in justification and regeneration, but also in sanctification by the indwelling Holy Spirit. These blessings will come to all without distinction through Jesus Christ, the King of Israel and of all the nations of redeemed humanity. This perspective maintains the distinctiveness of Israel and the church but stresses continuity (despite differing dispensations) rather than discontinuity.

But: People will point to some text that shows the common link that we are all the people of God and proclaim, “See, we have refuted the basis for dispensationalism!”

Mathison: The promises made to literal, physical Israelites were fulfilled by a literal, physical Israelite, Jesus the Messiah. He is the Seed of Abraham. What dispensationalism fails to grasp is that through union with Christ, all who are His by faith have become members of His body. Therefore, all who are in Him by faith, whether Old Testament believers or New Testament believers, are coheirs of the promises and the covenants. The covenantal promises do not require a future fulfillment by national Israel in order for God’s Word to be true.

Yet in refutation of this, the Bible promises that at some point in the future, at the end of the Tribulation period all of national Israel that is on the earth at that time will turn in repentance and faith and embrace their Messiah. This would have no meaning if the reference was to all of spiritual Israel.

Ezek 37:28 – contrasts the nation of Israel with all of the other nations – cannot be a reference to spiritual Israel

Message of **book of Hosea** – Israel as a nation will be unfaithful, but the Lord will restore her and fulfill all of the unconditional promises of the various covenants

Application: Appreciate the beauty and privilege of **God’s Election**

Rom. 11:5, 17, 25-29

II. NATURE OF THE MILLENNIAL KINGDOM AND THE TIMING FOR THE RETURN OF JESUS CHRIST

- OT promises that the Messiah will reign in peace and righteousness over the entire earth from the throne of David for a period of 1000 years – Is this prophecy to be viewed literally?

- **Rev. 20** – Satan bound for this 1000 year period

- **Is. 11:1-10** description of this reign on the earth

- **Amill** camp says “**No**” – continuous growth of good and evil in the world; the millennium mentioned in Rev 20 describes the present reign of the souls of deceased believers with Christ in heaven or the reign of the church with Christ in this age – so they don’t take a chronological view of the Book of Revelation; don’t see any distinction between the millennial rule of Christ and the eternal state

- **NT frequently interprets the OT prophecies in unexpected ways** – but I think that is due to God revealing and inspiring the authors rather than establishing a pattern for how we are to interpret the OT from the standpoint of illumination ...

- Simple argument:

- Every prophecy not fulfilled at the First Coming, must be fulfilled at the Second

- For every OT prophecy of the First Coming, there are eight for the Second

- Since prophecies related to First Coming were fulfilled literally, we have a right to expect the same for those related to the Second Coming

- **Post mill** camp says “**Sort of**” – the kingdom of God is now being advanced through Christian teaching and preaching and influence; eventually the world will be Christianized and enjoy a

long period of peace and prosperity after which Christ will return for the final judgment and ushering in of the eternal state

- Doesn't meet the smell test – is that really what is happening in the world?
- Simplifies a lot of things – only one return of Christ; only one final judgment ... etc.
- Spiritualizes much of OT prophecy related to the Second Coming
- Refute this by looking at the positive support for the pre-mill position

- **Pre mill** camp – says “**Yes**” – Why??

- more literal hermeneutic in general – God's plan from the beginning has been to establish a kingdom of peace and righteousness on the earth; He has never abandoned this objective
- maintains the distinction between Israel and the church with respect to the OT prophecies
- expectation of Christ and the apostles in the gospels and **Acts 1:6; 3:19-21** (restoration) – just talking about the kingdom being **delayed**; not correcting their expectations about a physical kingdom on earth; still has a focus on the nation of Israel and throne of David; changes nothing about the **nature** of the kingdom they are expecting
- chronological explanation of events in Book of Revelation – **19:11; 20:1**
- distinction from the eternal state – yet OT texts sound like they are talking about the same

But what about the Jewish nature of this kingdom and the rebuilding of the Temple and some form of animal sacrifices reinstated?? Some weirdness

Application: Expectation of a **glorious future** for this earth; a nice approach to a philosophy of history; we are headed somewhere; Christ as King will reign over this earth before He puts down all opposition at the end and ushers in the eternal state

Our home is in heaven – **John 14** – but we will reign on the earth with Christ

2 Tim. 2:12 *If we endure, we will also reign with Him*

III. DISTINCTION BETWEEN RAPTURE AND SECOND COMING (REVELATION) –

arguments mostly against post-trib; left with pre-trib or some form of mid-trib position

Might want to define these positions differently with reference to 70th week of Daniel

- Background: revelation regarding the First and Second Coming of Christ in OT –
 - Viewed as 2 mountaintops without any glimpse of valley between so it looked like one Event

- **Complexity vs Simplicity** – wouldn't it be great if we could just go with simplest interpretation – less resurrections, less trumpet calls, less judgments ...

- certain omissions when these two events discussed

- more importantly, certain areas that cannot be harmonized

- Look at the **chart** from Zondervan: Charts of Biblical Prophecy

- Yet caution: don't try to get too precise with diff Gk words used: Second Coming = general ref

Paraousia – denotes arrival and presence of some ruler at a certain place; being along

Side; Personal and bodily coming of Christ

Apocalypsis – unveiled, revealed

Phaneroo – to make visible what has been not known or seen

Eiphaino – to bring to light; full visibility

- Need **interval of time** for marriage feast of the bride of Christ; for Judgment seat of Christ; for populating the earth with believers who will enter the Millennium and have children who will rebel

But: Matt. 24 passage has a lot of parallels to **1 Thess 4** passage – but some differences as well; introduces much complexity;

Strangeness of Rapture – hard to imagine what will be taking place in the world as all the believers are snatched out; harpooned out; gathered to meet Christ in the air
Left Behind series . . . Tim Lahaye . . .

Application: Privilege of having **mystery truth** unfolded to us – not revealed in OT – but a number of types of Rapture: **Enoch** and **Elijah**; **2 Cor 12:2-4** (rapture of Paul) “*caught up to the third heaven*”

IV. NATURE OF THE DAY OF THE LORD / GREAT TRIBULATION / TIME OF JACOB’S TROUBLE

- Definition of **Day of the Lord** – God’s special intervention into the course of world events to judge His enemies, accomplish His purpose for history, and demonstrate His sovereignty; there have been mini days of the Lord throughout OT history – but only foreshadowings of the coming Day of the Lord . . . right now man has his day; Satan has his day . . . cf. Clint Eastwood: “Make my Day!” Lord will have His day

- importance of **70th week of Daniel** – gap between the 69 weeks and the 70th is where we are living in the church age; 2 events referred to in Dan. 9 that fall into this gap period: **crucifixion** and **destruction of city and temple in Jerusalem** (so it makes sense that entire church age would fall into this gap period)

- Primary application to the **nation of Israel** – abundant details provided in OT

- **two phases/purposes** of the Day of the Lord:

- **judgment** upon unsaved / period of darkness vs
- **deliverance** for believers / period of light, divine rule and blessing

- **Time period**

- definitely **future** – can’t look at some past event like the destruction of the temple in 70 AD and say that it fulfilled all of the cosmic chaos attributed to the Day of the Lord
- **broad sense** – This may surprise you: includes 70th week of Daniel and the Millennial Kingdom; not some limited 24 hour period
- **narrow sense** – one specific day = when Christ returns with His angels to climax the judgment phase

You can see where there might be **confusion** then in some texts with respect to time references = where most of the controversy develops – the mid-point of Daniel’s 70th week with the Antichrist

desecrating the temple – that occurs before the narrow sense of the Day of the Lord ... but in the midst of the broad sense of the Day of the Lord

- view of Book of **Revelation** – some people take a view that these events are largely past and had more to do with the destruction of the temple in 70 AD – only a foreshadowing; many aspects of the prophecy obviously not fulfilled in 70 AD
 - **Preterism** (the Historic View) – the end of the age had to happen in that generation to which Jesus was speaking in **Matt. 24:34**; telescoping view of prophecy is the answer
- Concept of **Birth Pangs** preceding the revelation of Christ and ushering in of new millennial Age; fits well with 7 year period; beginning of birth pangs = 1st 3.5 years; then more severe
- outpouring of **divine wrath** – important concept (see below)
 - how related to Jewish people; when is the nation saved?

But: Are we doing believers a disservice not to prepare them for the suffering and persecution of the coming Day of the Lord?? Certainly there is persecution and suffering throughout the Church Age.

Application: Judgment aspect is not something I would be looking forward to – but rather the blessed hope for us is the **Rapture** – being taken out of the world before this great and terrible day of the Lord

Transition: leads to issues related to the **Timing of the Rapture**

V. ISSUES RELATING TO THE TIMING OF THE RAPTURE

- You cannot just be **pro-trib** – you must make a decision on some passages ... but don't want to make too much out of this issue
- Various Positions:
 - **Partial Rapture** – only “worthy” believers participate in the rapture and escape the tribulation period
 - **Pre-trib** (pre-70th week)
 - **Mid-trib** (mid-70th week) – many variations
 - **Pre-wrath** position – 6th seal judgment begins the outpouring of divine wrath so the church will be raptured some time before that in the second half of the tribulation
 - Overlaps God's program for the nation Israel and for the church
 - **Post-trib** (post 70th week) – or at least at the very end
 - Claims that the early church held this view;
- But: you need some **interval of time** between the Rapture and the beginning of the Millennium to populate the earth with people who will enter the Millennium with unglorified bodies and have children who may end up rebelling
 - What would the purpose be for such a rapture if the church is caught up to meet Christ and then just accompanies him immediately back to earth?

- **Purpose** of Tribulation Period – for Israel rather than the church – gets back to point #1

- **Imminency** is major issue – looking for the **any moment return** of Christ
 - No clearly predicted event must intervene; much more than just possible for that particular generation
 - What about passages that seem to imply **some other event** must first take place??
 - Do we need a temple in Jerusalem??
 - John 21:18-19 old age and death of Peter by crucifixion
 - Acts 23:11 – Paul would have opportunity to revisit Rome
 - Destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70

Renald Showers: The concept of the imminent coming of Christ is a significant inference for the pre-tribulational rapture of the church . . . an imminent event is one that is always hanging overhead, is constantly ready to befall or overtake a person, is always close at hand in the sense that it could happen at any moment. Other things may happen before the imminent event, but nothing else must take place before it happens. If something else must take place before an event can happen, that event is not imminent . . . when an event is truly imminent, we never know exactly when it will happen . . . since we never know exactly when an imminent event will occur, three things are true. First, we cannot count on a certain amount of time transpiring before the imminent event happens . . . second, we cannot legitimately set a date for its happening . . . third, we cannot legitimately say that an imminent event will happen soon. The term “soon” implies that an event must take place within a short time . . . by contrast, an imminent event may take place within a short time, but it does not have to do so in order to be imminent. Thus, “imminent” is not equal to “soon.” This is illustrated by the fact that the next coming of Christ was just as imminent when the New Testament was written as it is today. However, today, some 2000 years later, that coming has not occurred yet. Thus, from today’s historical perspective, it is obvious that although the next coming of Christ was imminent in the New Testament times, it certainly was not soon then. The relationship of “imminent” to “expectant” should be noted. The term “imminent” is an adjective used to describe the nature of the event. It depicts the kind of event that is always hanging overhead and could happen at any moment. By contrast, the term “expectant” is an adjective used to describe people’s attitude toward an event.

- **Historical argument** – pre-trib position not defined until fairly recently in church history . . . but a lot of evidence that people believed in imminent return of Christ – tough to reconcile; Historical pre-mill position = no distinction between Israel and the Church
- **Book of Rev** does not show the church to be on earth during the Day of the Lord
 - 3 divisions – Rev. 1:19 *“the things which you have seen (chap 1), and things which are (chaps 2-3), and things which will take place after these things”* (chaps. 4-22)
- Any **Signs** believers should be looking for to signal the Rapture
 - may have some second degree signs – e.g. when we see signs in the store decorations that Christmas is coming, we know that Thanksgiving is close
- What needs to be present fairly quickly near the beginning of the broad Day of the Lord?
 - God’s regathering of Israel to the homeland
 - A great world leader, the Antichrist

- a new temple in Jerusalem
- a covenant of peace made with Israel by this world leader (Dan. 9:27)
- Rapture does not need to be the **starting point** of the Day of the Lord – may be some intervening time?? Allows for the day of the Lord to be more surprising ...
- How are believers protected from **wrath** ... and the nature of that wrath

Rev 3:10 “I also will keep you from the hour of testing”

(But **John 17:15** – argued by post-trib position)

Keep you from experiencing by taking you out of the world or protecting you from tribulation that is all around you

1 Thess 1:10; 5:9 – seems to be emphasis here on salvation from hell

Bible Knowledge Commentary: The combination of the verb “keep” (*terein*) with the preposition “from” (*ek*) is in sharp contrast to the meaning of keeping the church “through” (*dia*) a preposition which is not used here. The expression “in the hour of trial” (a time) makes it clear that they would be kept out of that period. It is difficult to see how Christ could have made this promise to the local church if it were God’s intention for the entire church to go through the tribulation.

Showers: In what sense will Christ separate church saints from the future wrath? Will it be by removing them from the wrath after they have been in it for a period of time, or will it be by preventing them from ever entering the future wrath? . . . the fact that the church saints’ deliverance or separation from the future wrath is already a present reality before the future wrath begins, and the fact that God’s resurrection of Jesus from the dead guaranteed that the already obtained deliverance will never cease to be a present reality, prompt us to conclude that Christ will separate the Church saints from the future wrath by preventing them from ever entering that wrath.

- Parallels to Jewish wedding customs --

Showers: Parallel to the custom of the Jewish grooms preparing a dwelling place for his bride in his father’s house during a time of separation, Christ has been preparing a dwelling place for the church in his father’s house in heaven during the period of separation . . . In John 14:2, Jesus stated that was why he would ascend to heaven. In the same manner as the Jewish groom came to take his bride to live with him at the end of the period of separation, so Christ will come to take the church to live with him at the end of his present period of separation . . . just as a procession of the groom and male escorts from the groom’s father’s house came to fetch the bride from her home, so a procession of Christ and an angelic escort descending from Christ’s father’s house in heaven will fetch the church from the earth (1 Th. 4:16-17). The Jewish bride did not know the time when the groom would come for her. Likewise, the Church does not know the time when Christ will come for it . . . in the same way that the Jewish groom’s arrival was preceded by a shout, so Christ’s arrival to take the church will be preceded by a shout (1 Th. 4:16). As the Jewish bride returned with the groom to his father’s house after her departure from her home, the church will return with Christ to his father’s house in heaven after it is caught up from the earth to meet him in the air (Jn. 14:2-3; 1 Th. 4:17). In the same manner as the Jewish wedding party found wedding guests assembled in the groom’s father’s house when they arrived, so Christ and the church will find the souls of Old Testament saints (those who were saved in

Old Testament times before the church began and who, therefore, are not part of the Church) assembled in his father's house in heaven when they arrived. These souls will serve as the wedding guests for Christ and the Church. Just as the Jewish bride and groom remain hidden for a period of seven days after they arrived at the groom's father's house, so Christ and the church will remain hidden for a period of seven years after they arrive in heaven. While the seven years of the 70th week of Daniel 9 are taking place on the earth, Christ and the church will be in heaven, totally hidden from the view of those living on the earth. In the same way that the Jewish bride and groom came out of hiding after seven days, now with the bride's veil removed so that all can see who she was, so Christ and the church will come out of hiding from heaven after the seven years of the 70th week, in full view of all who are still alive on the earth, so that everyone can see who the true church is.

Application: 1 Cor 15; John 14; 1 Thess 4 – tremendous comfort derived from these passages; we will not be going through the terrible day of the Lord, experiencing the divine wrath

1 Cor. 15-16 MARANATHA – OUR LORD, COME

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Stedman: Paul calls this "the coming of the Lord." Many people, including certain notable Bible scholars, are confused on this because they tend to regard the coming of the Lord as though it were a single event, an immediate and once-for-all appearing. But if we carefully study the Scriptures (and we will see evidence for this in a moment), the coming of the Lord is a series of events. This series has a dramatic beginning, as Paul describes here, with Jesus appearing to take his living and dead saints to be with him. And it has an even more dramatic ending when, as the Lord himself said, he would manifest himself to the entire world: "They shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of glory with all his heavenly hosts," {cf, Matt 24:30, Mark 13:26, Luke 21:27}. That is a different event from the one here described. You cannot make those fit together. In between them is a period of time during which Jesus is present on the earth though not always visibly so.

That is what Scripture calls the "presence," which is the Greek word *parousia*. That is a better translation of this word "coming." When Scripture talks about the coming of the Lord, it sometimes looks at the beginning of that series, sometimes it looks at the end of it, and sometimes, as in the book of Revelation, it is looking at what is going on between the two ends. We must train ourselves to think in those terms. The *parousia* of Jesus is a series of events.

Keathley: Paul first addresses the issue of those who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, but in doing this, he says "we" and not simply "those." In the Greek text, the "we" is slightly emphatic and seems to be designed to bring out an important point. Clearly, Paul included himself among those who could be alive when the Lord returns. There is a clear implication here. Paul believed the coming of the Lord and the things described here were imminent and could have occurred in his day (cf. John 21:22; 2 Cor. 5:1; Phil. 3:20; Tit. 2:13).

Any other viewpoint fails to give the needed recognition to Paul’s use of the first person pronoun “we” instead of the third person, “those.” . . .

Had this not been the Thessalonians’ outlook, their question regarding the dead in Christ and exclusion from the parousia would have been meaningless. They were thinking in terms of an imminent parousia, expecting to see it before death (Best, p. 183). An intervening period of messianic woes or birth pangs was not their anticipation (Best, p. 184), for such intense persecution would have meant probable martyrdom, and in that case they would have had doubts about their own participation in the parousia. Hence, Paul believed and had taught his converts that the next event on the prophetic calendar for them was their being gathered to Christ. . .

The word imminency refers to an event that is, so to speak, “hanging overhead; it is something that is ready to occur or could occur at any moment.” While other things may happen before the imminent event, nothing else must occur before that event happens. If something else must occur first, then that event is not imminent. Further, no specific amount of time is specified regarding when the event will happen. It may be soon or it may not be. If a certain amount of time were needed before the occurrence of an event, then it would not be imminent. So an imminent event—like the return of Christ for the church—could happen soon. It might not . . . but it could.

Analysis of the different texts mentioning some type of trumpet in connection with end times:

Passage	Trumpeter	Purpose	Result
Matt. 24:31	Angels	Living elect on earth are gathered by Angels	Entrance into the kingdom
1 Cor. 15:52	Not stated	Gather	Resurrection Change
1 Thess. 4:16	God/Christ, it is the trump of God	Gathered in air by Christ Himself, not angels	Resurrection Rapture
Joel 2:1	Humans	Assemble and warn of Danger	War and Invasion
Rev. 8	Angels	Brings on the Tribulation events	Judgments

Texts referring to the various Judgments associated with end times:

Judgments:	The <i>Bema</i>, Judgment Seat of Christ	OT and Tribulation Saints Judged and Rewarded	The Great White Throne Judgment
Participants:	Church Age Believers	OT and Tribulation believers	Unbelievers of all time

Scripture:	1 Cor. 3:12-15; Rom. 14:10-12	Rev. 20:4	Rev. 20:11-15
Time:	After the Rapture	After the Tribulation	After the Millennial reign

Whitcomb: The Rapture of the Church of Jesus Christ from this earth

Introduction: Spiritual cataracts on the eyes of our spiritual understanding; we need clear vision of end time prophecies; need to study the clear revealed Word of God

I. The Promise of the Rapture -- John 14:1-7

Context: 11 frightened disciples; Judas has already departed; upper room setting; the church will be in heaven first before the kingdom comes down to earth and the will of God is performed perfectly on earth as it is in heaven; mansion Christ is preparing for us must be very impressive – He has been working on the project for quite some time; Can't be the Second Coming in Glory – Rev. 19 = all of us clothed in white following Christ as He returns in victory – How do we get up to heaven so that we can return with Him? The Rapture!

Jesus left the details regarding this up to the apostles to explain; intricate details of eschatological events; just hinting at the Rapture here; at this point the disciples did not have much of an understanding of what the church would be – was not formed until Day of Pentecost

What did he not tell them about the rapture here?

- that these people (living believers) would be received without dying
- that all dead believers would be resurrected as well
- only coming part-way to the earth at this time

I have many things to tell you that you cannot bear now; but I will explain later through the NT authors

II. Part 2 -- Additional Details About the Rapture -- 1 Thess 4:13-18

Revealed through Paul

These are precious truths that will encourage us to be faithful in difficult times; written by apostle of Jesus Christ who has mind of Christ and is inspired by Holy Spirit

“*God will bring with Him*” – where are the dead Christians now?? He will bring their soul/spirit of disembodied believers ... but their body is still down here; angels have no body and can minister; we need a body to accomplish anything; [Don't bother praying to Mary to ask her to intercede on your behalf or pray for you]; Dead Christians are in intermediate state – resting in presence of Christ, but incomplete; Jesus is the only glorified human being at this point with a body; all Christians will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air; the physical bodies of the dead will be united to the spirits right before this – they will be glorified first; body will be restored to them – How in the world can that happen?? (1 Cor. 15); God understands our DNA code – completely identifies us with all of our uniqueness; you can clone your whole body from just one small part that contains your DNA; “*caught up*” – unregenerate professors of faith will remain so many churches will continue on without change; Gk word = we get *harp*; when plucked, instrument comes out; harpoon will pluck out sea creatures; we will be *harpooned* out from the ocean of humanity; God never misses;

Illustration: magnet will only grab metal pieces made out of iron (same size, shape, color of bits

of metal out of difficult material) – only those pieces go up; the rest of the pieces just sit there

What type of clouds = not rain clouds, but glory clouds = surround God and his presence; same as at the Ascension; “*so shall we ever be with the Lord*” – just as in John 14 – Christ looking forward to being united with His Bride; What did it take to get Lazarus out of the tomb? Just the shout of Christ “Come forth!” – John 10 – my sheep hear my voice and follow Me (not the voice of a stranger); “All sheep, Come forth!”

Voice of archangel Michael – he has been waiting for this event – Dan. 12:1 – the protector and promoter of Israel; now Israel takes over on the earth to be Christ’s witnesses; Michael has been very frustrated waiting all of this time; Michael started Israel at Mt. Sinai under Moses when God gave the law – Ex. 19:16 – sound of a trumpet that waxed louder and louder; Israel awakes to now perform function of God’s ambassadors on earth; Satan will be extremely unhappy as this happens in the air (his temporary domain)

III. Part 3 of God’s Revelation of the Rapture – 1 Cor.15: 51-58

Mystery = something previously hidden and now revealed;

“*in a moment*” = atom = cannot be divided or split any more; smallest thing in the universe;

[what about sub-atomic particles that we have found ... not in view here ...]

How long does it take for eye to *twinkle*; our age accustomed to evolutionary thinking; takes long period of time to accomplish anything significant; you will not be raptured by chance; will not take any time at all; how long did it take for Jesus to pass from death to resurrected life; no gradual process; same trumpet as 1 Thess 4; we don’t all have to die; but we must all be changed totally, radically, instantly

Feinberg: Let me put the matter in this way. The New Testament commands the believer to look for Christ’s coming. For these many years saints have watched, but He has not returned. Only one generation will look and see Him. Does this call into question the perspicuity of Scripture? I do not think so. The problem arises if we are told to look because **we** will see Him come, and He does not. Neither in the case of the Second Coming nor in the case of the Olivet Discourse do I see a promise that the events spoken of will transpire in the lifetime of the hearers.

