Articles by Thomas Richardson

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The Pathway of Faith (Apr 1962)

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Mr. Thomas Richardson, Grangemouth, Scotland, has prepared this series of articles on the First Epistle to the Thessalonians. We are sure that much benefit will be derived by a careful study of each exposition.

Scripture Readings:

Acts 17:1-9; Thessalonians 1:1-10

A consideration of the experience of this early Christian church reveals the pathway of faith, its beginnings and its character.

Introduction

The Apostle Paul made three great missionary journeys: the first into the Province of Galatia (Acts 13 and 14); the second into Macedonia (Acts 15:36-18:22); and the third into Asia Minor (Acts 18:23-21:17). It was on his second journey that he visited Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, and Corinth.

At Philippi Paul and his companion Silas were shamefully manhandled, scourged, and thrown into prison. On their release from jail they left that city and proceeded to the garrisoned city of Thessalonica. There they soon found lodgings with one called Jason, and apparently, Paul, being a tent-maker, soon found suitable employment. In Thessalonica there was a synagogue of the Jews, “And Paul as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures, opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead.” For

these three weeks, and probably more, they continued preaching the Word with remarkable results for we read, “Some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few.”

The enemy, satanically inspired began to move and the whole city was stirred to an uproar. Finally, the two, Paul and Silas, were expelled and a security bond taken from Jason to see that they did not return. These servants of the Lord travelled on to Berea from which place Paul sent Silas back to Philippi and Timothy back to Thessalonica in order that they see how the young converts were enduring the storm of persecution that had broken upon them. These two workers returned to Paul after he had reached Corinth.

There was much in Timothy’s report about the Thessalonians to make Paul rejoice; notwithstanding, there were some matters which caused him concern. It would seem that the hope that had been so warm and bright in their hearts at the first had become dimmed. It is noticeable in chapter three that in his report Timothy makes no mention of their hope (verse 6). Since Paul’s absence, some of their loved ones had fallen asleep in Jesus and that had caused sorrow and misunderstanding which Paul had to dispel. This he did by explaining more fully matters relative to the second coming of Christ. Consequently, in this Epistle the return of the Lord Jesus has a very prominent place. From the references one concludes that Paul expected that wonderful event even in his own generation.

The doctrine of the second coming of Christ is presented in the Epistle in its relation to salvation (1:10), in

relation to service (2:19), in relation to sanctification (3:13), in relation to sorrow (4:13), and in relation to sleep (5:6).

In this Epistle, the first one the Apostle Paul wrote by inspiration, there is laid out, moreover, certain statements relative to Christian doctrine. Mention is made of the Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (1:1, 1:5-6. 1:10). The great truth of election is likewise mentioned as is the subject of conversion (1:4. 1:7).

The death and resurrection of Christ are referred to (1:10), the judgment seat of Christ (2:19), the Lord's coming for His saints (4:16), the Lord's coming with His saints (5:2), and other similarly important themes.

Exposition

Let us look at the content of the first ten verses. Paul, Silas, and Timothy who were co-workers are now co-writers. Paul was an apostle (Gal. 1:1), Silas a prophet (Acts 15:32), and Timothy a deacon (1 Thess. 3:2). Paul's name in the Greek means little; he was a full-blooded Jew. Silas' name means considerate; he was a Roman. Timothy's name means honoured of God; he was a Greek. The fellowship which these three enjoyed in their service was a proof that all believers are one in Christ. In those early days it was customary to place the names at the beginning of a letter just as it is customary to place them at the close of a letter in our times.

This letter was addressed to a church, a local church composed of men and women. As brethren they were seen in God the Father, hence they had been born again; and in our Lord Jesus Christ, hence they had perfect

security. Thessalonica was the sphere of their living, but being in God the Father was the source of their life.

“Grace to you,” wrote Paul using the Greek salutation, and “peace,” using the Jewish salutation. Grace is the root of peace, and peace is the fruit of grace.

The contents of this chapter may be considered under three subheadings: the prayer of God’s servants, the pleasure they found in the saints, and the pattern this early church presented to all.

THE PRAYER: Paul asserts, “We give thanks,” for praise precedes prayer. Notice the object of their praise, “We give thanks to God;” the scope of their praise, “For you all;” the season of their praise, “Always.” The writers were thankful men; they knew their converts in their new position, with their new possessions in Christ, and their new prospects. They saw, therefore, something in each one that produced praise. At the same time there were other things which led them to mention their names in prayer. Thanksgiving had an important place in the devotions of the Apostle Paul; he speaks of it here, in 2:13, and again in 5:18.

THE PLEASURE: The real cause of thanksgiving was the evidence of Christian graces in the lives of these young converts: their work of faith, their labour of love, and their patience of hope. These are the features of true Christianity. Faith looks backward, love looks upward, and hope looks onward. Faith appropriates Christ, love appreciates Him, and hope anticipates His return. In other words: faith accepts Him, love respects Him, and hope expects Him.

These same Christian graces are referred to again in verses 9 and 10 where it is suggested that through faith

they turned, in love they toiled, and by hope they tarried. They turned from idols to the Living God; from false gods to the True God. They turned from idols, but not to idleness for faith without works is dead.

Near the close of this chapter we have a lovely word picture of the Lord Jesus. Christ's sweetest name, "Jesus." His highest title, "His Son." His greatest act, "raised from among the dead." His present work, "The Deliverer." (See New Translation).

THE PATTERN: "Our Gospel came," says the Apostle, "And ye became." What did they become? They became mimics, models, and messengers.

MIMICS: "Ye became followers," imitators. This word comes from the drama; an actor being one who imitates another. In following these servants of the Lord: Paul, Timothy, and Silas, they were following the Lord Jesus. Paul writes in another of his Epistles, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ."

MODELS: "Ye were ensamples." There is something very passing and temporary about acting in a drama, but the idea of a model suggests something permanent. The sculptor chips away at his model to produce the statue which may stand in the city square for many years to come. This word ensample might also be translated into English by the word type. The printer by means of type produces as many copies as is necessary, for type is permanent. The assembly in Thessalonica had become a permanent model after which other churches might pattern themselves.

MESSENGERS: "From you sounded out the word of the Lord," adds the Apostle. Their testimony had become like the sound of a trumpeter giving forth a clear and

true note. The report of their testimony had gone so far that Paul did not need to speak elsewhere of their faith to Godward; it surely was spread abroad.

May the assemblies of God in these closing days of the Church era follow Thessalonica in this pathway of faith.

Faithful Messengers (May 1962)

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Mr. Thomas Richardson, Grangemouth, Scotland, has prepared this series of articles on the First Epistle to the Thessalonians. We are sure that much benefit will be derived by a careful study of each exposition.

Scripture Reading: 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

In our first article we considered the fruitful message of the Gospel as seen in the first chapter of this interesting Epistle. Let us now consider the faithful messengers who carried that message into Thessalonica.

How long the preachers remained in that city is not definitely known, probably more than the three weeks mentioned in the passage. The effort, even during a limited time, was altogether too successful to please the devil; consequently, he accomplished the expulsion of the servants of the Lord. When their absence was discovered by the populace, certain false reports were circulated. If the evil one cannot stop the preaching, he surely can attack the preachers. These men, the citizens were told, who had suddenly disappeared, were crafty, cowardly, and covetous. Furthermore, they were told, some had been deceived by them and then deserted because “these that had turned the world upside down,” had filled their pockets at the expense of the disillusioned.

This second chapter is actually a statement of self-defence by Paul. It begins, “For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain.” Although Thessalonica was only three days journey from

Philippi, no hand bills were distributed to announce their coming; no church was ready to welcome them.

There are three salient features which characterized their effort in this needy centre: their message, their methods, and their manners.

Their Message

Three times in this short passage we read of their message as being “the Gospel of God” (Vv. 2, 8, 9). The Gospel is good news, not about us, but for us. It is a message that is divine in its origin, definite in its offer, and dynamic in its operation. Those men, the enemy said, “had turned the world upside down;” yet, their only message was the Gospel of God. Surely there must have been a power with those men that is not seen today. Please observe how they preached this wonderful message.

They preached courageously: “We were bold in our God,” said Paul. There was no hesitancy in their manner. There was force in their message for it ruffled the conscience, touched the heart, and subdued the will. The three servants of the Lord who entered Thessalonica did not believe in painless conversions.

They preached it constantly, with much contention. The city was filled with ignorant heathen and fanatical Jews; so through these, every satanic influence was exerted against the Word of God.

In like manner, they preached it freely: “For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail: for labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the Gospel of God.” There was no collection box or bag

passed around the congregation. Wherever possible Paul made himself self-supporting.

Finally, they preached it affectionately: “Ye were dear unto us,” said the Apostle. The Revised Version says, “Very dear unto us.” There was a strong link between the platform and the pew in the meetings at Thessalonica.

These men were not cowards, they risked their lives to carry the Gospel. Their message was not of deceit or uncleanness, nor of guile; it did not lead people astray. Their motives were pure; they did not use a bait. What a message they had! We have the same message today, and when preached in the power of the Spirit of God, it will produce similar results.

Their Methods

It has been said that every preacher has three temptations: first, to please the people; second, to make it pay; third, to increase his reputation. Paul, Timothy, and Silas were all accused of these very things.

In regard to the first charge, that of trying to please the people; the Apostle writes, “For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know.” They made no attempt to tickle the ears of their audiences; they sought, rather, to speak “not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts.” In Galatians 1:10 Paul wrote also, “If I yet please men, I should not be the servant of Christ.”

It may be a temptation to some to make it pay, but this was not a temptation to Paul and his associates. Defensively the Apostle asserts, “Neither at any time used we… a cloke of covetousness; God is witness.” The Pharisees were covetous indeed (Luke 16:14), but Paul

had left all that when he was converted; in fact, he admits that in the Gospel there were occasions when he was hungry, thirsty, naked, and buffeted, and without certain dwelling place" (Cor. 4:11). Thank God, he was also able to write, "I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong? (2 Cor. 12:10).

To the elders of Ephesus, he said, "These hands have ministered to my necessities" (Acts 20:34). As an apostle he could have claimed support (1 Cor. 9:14), but he would not be burdensome to any.

Concerning the temptation to increase one's reputation, Paul refutes this charge against himself and the brethren with him in a very forceful manner, "Nor of men sought glory, neither of you, nor yet of others." What a transformation the grace of God had wrought in this man!

Their Manners

Reviewing his period of ministry with them, Paul said, "We were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children." The Revised Version adds, "Her own children." A nurse does not get, she gives! The servant of the Lord must be gentle (2 Tim. 2:24). The fruit of the Spirit is gentleness (Gal. 5:22). The Revised rendering suggests that the nurse here was also the mother. If she were only the nurse there would be skill without maternal love; if only the mother, love without skill. When the relationship and the training are in the one person things are ideal. The child is the chief concern of such a mother; she anticipates its every need; prepares its food; plans its welfare; hushes its cry, and ministers

to its comfort constantly. Alas, how many spiritual babes have been handicapped like Mephiboseth by poor nursing! (2 Sam. 9:13; 4:4). We need more spiritual nurses among our assemblies today. God have mercy on the many underfed and weak babes in our midst!

Paul was also more to them than a nursing mother; he was a wise father. “Ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children.” He was close to them; gave them help out of his rich experience and encouraged them in order that they walk worthy of God.

Walking in the spiritual life means life, health, growth, and activity. Paul would not carry them; rather, he counselled them to apply their knowledge and to act worthy of the Lord who had called them unto His own kingdom and glory.

The Word of God (June 1962)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 8 No. 6, June 1962.

Scripture Reading 1 Thessalonians 2:13-30

In the first section of this Epistle at which we are looking expositionally, we traced the Pathway of Faith, and in doing so considered the fruitful message of the Gospel. In the second, we followed the activities of the Faithful Messengers who preached that message. The Word of God must now be viewed as it was received or rejected by men.

Its Reception

The writer of this letter and his associates were men who practised what they preached. They exhorted their readers, “In every thing give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” (1 Thess. 5:18). This they could do, for they themselves engaged in thanksgiving, and that, especially because of the Thessalonians: “For this cause we also thank God without ceasing, that, when ye received from us the message, ye accepted it, not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the Word of God” (1 Thess. 2:13 R.V.). There is a constant danger in these days of treating the Word of God as if it were the word of men, and the word of men as if it were the Word of God. Let us always test what is spoken through man by what is written by God. The Word of God is the Book of God, the Bible; it stands supreme over all others because of its beauty, brevity, and blessing.

The Word of God claims to be living and energetic: “The Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword” (Heb. 4:12). It is both life giving and life sustaining. We are told that in apostolic days it greatly increased its influence: “But the Word of God grew and multiplied” (Acts 12:24). This was also true at Ephesus. At Thessalonica Paul says, “The Word of God, … which effectually worketh also in you that believe” (1 Thess. 2:13). Surely these are evidences that it is a living Word.

Their reception of the Word of God was costly to them because it brought them into the line of the enemies’ fire. Persecution against them broke out, “having received the Word in much affliction” (1 Thess. 1:6).

Persecution is often the means that the Lord uses to separate the false from the true, to sift the chaff from the wheat. It tests the reality of faith, the stability of love, and the durability of hope.

The saints at Thessalonica had become imitators (R.V.) of the churches in Judea. (This geographic spot was their temporary location) which are in Christ Jesus (“In Christ” being their permanent location). These earlier churches had suffered much at the hands of the Jews.

Its Rejection

The fellow-countrymen of these new Gentile Christians, urged on by the Jews, had opposed both the messengers and their message. This, of course, added greatly to the guilt of the favoured nation, Israel. In describing this the Apostle enumerates their different actions in this opposition to the work of the Lord. “For ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as

they have of the Jews: Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men: Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway" (1 Thess. 2:14-16).

These opponents not only remained outside the door of salvation themselves, but they sought to hinder any who might wish to enter. Hence the wrath of God is come upon them; they are scattered, and spoiled among the nations.

Paul was a marked man who had hazarded his life for the Gospel, to follow him was, consequently, risky. He writes, "I die daily" (1 Cor. 15:31); the enemy was after his blood. "What persecution I endured!" he exclaimed (2 Tim. 3:11). He was stoned at Lystra, scandalized at Corinth, beaten at Philippi, howled down at Ephesus, chased out at Thessalonica, and beheaded at Rome. Noble Paul! Such was the man who wrote frequently, "Be ye followers of me."

In spite of much disappointment his heart was still with his beloved converts; absent in body but present in heart. His isolation from them was like a bereavement; he fretted about being "so soon taken from you" ("bereaved of you," R.V.). Time and again with great desire, he endeavoured to see their face, but he writes, "Satan hindered us." Satan put a road-block against his return. What a proof of the personality, power, and purpose of Satan! As the devil the work of this evil one is destructive; as Satan his work is obstructive. How he did this we are not told, but this we do know, often he hinders by afflicting the body as the Lord Jesus Himself intimated, "Ought not this woman

being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan bath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond?" (Luke 13:17). At other times he hinders by engrossing us in the things of the world; he shews all the kingdoms of the world within our reach (Luke 4:5). At still other times he hinders through the wrong advice of other believers, as Peter gave to the Lord: "Then Peter took Him, and began to rebuke Him, saying, Be it far from Thee, Lord: this shall not be unto Thee" (Matt. 16:22).

Paul had high hopes of seeing them again, if not down here in the mortal body, certainly, at the Judgment Seat of Christ. While on earth, they were his joy; then they would be his "crown of rejoicing." Yes, he would see them again, and know them, on that longed-for day of resurrection, reunion, rejoicing, and reward.

Four crowns are promised as an incentive to continuance and service for the Lord Jesus. Paul, without doubt, will receive them all: the crown of life for the faithful martyr (Rev. 2:10), the crown of glory for the faithful shepherd (1 Pet. 5:4), the crown of righteousness for the lover of Christ's appearing (2 Tim. 4:8), and the crown of rejoicing for the diligent soul-winner (1 Thess. 2:19).

Let us strive for such honours, for these crowns, that eventually we shall cast at the feet of our glorious Lord. May we not forget that salvation is according to grace; judgment is according to light, and reward is according to work.

Pastoral Care (July 1962)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 8 No. 7, July 1962.

Scripture Reading — 1 Thessalonians 3:1-13

We have learned from chapter two, verse fifteen, that the preachers had been “chased out” (margin) of Thessalonica. It is obvious that if the preachers were absent, the enemies were not.

In this passage now being considered, Paul manifests his interest in his converts in a threefold manner: first, he and Silas sent Timothy back to Thessalonica in order to establish the saints; second, he wrote this Epistle to more fully instruct them; third, he prayed for them. These remind one of the ministry to His Church of the Lord Jesus during the period of His absence from her. He sent to her the Comforter, the Holy Spirit; He gave her the inspired letters of the New Testament; and He continually intercedes for her in Heaven.

The Man Sent

“When we could no longer forbear (hold out), we thought it good to be left at Athens alone; And sent Timothy, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellow labourer in the Gospel of Christ.” Notice Paul’s description of Timothy; he was “our brother,” in his relationship to the saints; and “minister of God (deacon),” in his relationship to the Lord; and “our fellowlabourer,” in his relationship to Paul and Silas.

It is good to be a labourer although it is a hard word; it is better to be a fellowlabourer for that is team-work; it is best to be a fellowlabourer in the Gospel of Christ for

that is doing God's work. This remarkable commendation given by Paul would surely enhance Timothy in the minds of the Thessalonians.

The Purpose Stipulated

Paul asserts that he had sent Timothy "to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith." His purpose was to strengthen them in the present, and to comfort (encourage) them in view of the future, in order that none of them would be moved by the afflictions that had befallen them. The word "moved" means to fawn upon, and embraces also the wagging of the tail of a dog (A good sign when one is approaching a large house with a Gospel tract.), an indication that the dog is inwardly affected. While the Gentiles (the "baser sort," Acts 17:5, A.S.V.) were afflicting them, the Jews were tempting them, enticing them to abandon their new faith, to accept Judaism as a smoother and better path. Behind this movement was the tempter, Satan himself. Temptation is not sin, but the yielding to temptation is sin. Our Saviour was tempted, but He never yielded. Each temptation has two sides, the inside and the outside. The outside is called the bait and the inside, the bite. We should not be guilty of providing the bait, but alas, sometimes we indulge in the bite. The devil is a wily angler, he never casts a bare hook, and unfortunately, we, God's people, frequently, bite the bait.

The Thessalonians were not taken unawares; Paul reminds them of some of his earlier statements, "For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know" (v. 4). He had not hidden from them the cost of discipleship, "That no man should be moved by these

afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto" (v. 3). The word "appointed" has the idea of the posting of a sentry. His duty is to be alert. Paul was deeply concerned about these young converts, and wondered whether or not they would stand the test. He feared lest the tempter had tempted them, and his work, and that of his associates, been in vain (v. 5).

The Report Surveyed

Timothy returned to Paul at Corinth (probably) bringing a report which Paul called "good tidings." He was delighted that they had been sustained by the grace and power of God. This was a great encouragement to him so he added, "For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord" (v. 8).

In his report Timothy commended their faith and love, faith Godward and love manward. They had great affection for the men who had brought to them the Glad Tidings, the Gospel; and they were longing to see Paul and Silas, just as Paul and Silas were to see them.

What a lesson for the preachers of the Gospel! How many promising converts are lost to the assemblies because there is no follow-up ministry. If it is important to preach Christ to sinners, it is equally important to teach new converts (Matt. 28:19-20).

The Prayer Stated

Paul records his prayer that the desire and longing which he expressed (1 Thess. 2:17; 3:16) might be fulfilled. Notice in this connection: when he prayed, "night and day;" how he prayed, exceeding abundantly, struggling for words; and to whom he prayed, "to God Himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ."

In this prayer there is a delicate reference to the Deity of our Lord Jesus hidden in the language. He is addressed in a manner equal to that of God Himself. Only One who is divine could hear and answer the prayers of God's beloved people.

Furthermore, notice for what he prayed: first, for himself; and second, for his converts.

For himself: He requested guidance that the Lord would direct his way back to Thessalonica in order that he might see them again "face to face" (v. 10). We all need guidance in the ways of the Lord. Difficulties had arisen, yet Paul knew the helm of his frail bark to be in divine hands. None have passed over the sea of life before; we are taking our first and final journey through this world. In this journey God guides His own in a threefold manner, by His Word, by His Spirit, and by circumstances. To be sure that God is guiding, all three must agree. The Spirit may guide us contrary to nature, but He never guides us contrary to His Word.

For his converts: "The Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you" (v. 3). The Apostle is able through the grace of God to set himself before them as an example in these very matters.

"To the end He may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming (the presence of, parousia) of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints." Their holiness, like that of Christ when He was here, will be seen in blamelessness in the presence of our holy Lord.

The Model Christian (Aug 1962)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 8 No. 8, Aug 1962.

Scripture Reading: 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

Thessalonica as a sea-port was continually visited by foreigners from various other countries. These were prone to lead the young Christians, so recently brought out of paganism, into all kinds of temptation. The Apostle, therefore, reminded them, “God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness” (v. 7). There were snares set for the feet of these converts; such as impurity, selfishness, restlessnes, and idleness. Into these some had already fallen. Paul, realizing this possibility, besought them to walk so as to please God. The walk of the spiritual life suggests vigour, health, and activity. Over against impurity the Holy Spirit sets a clean walk; over against selfishness, a charitable walk; over against restlessness, a controlled walk; and over against idleness, a consistent walk.

The appeals of Paul in this chapter are actually called commandments by our Lord Jesus (v. 2).

The Clean Walk

“God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.” We are chosen in Christ to be holy (Eph. 1:4). We are commanded to be holy (1 Pet. 1:16), and here we learn that we are called to be holy. A holy life is a life that pleases God. It is recorded of Enoch that he pleased God (Heb. 11:5). His walk with God meant vitality, ability, intimacy, humility, harmony, and victory. In such a

walk we are to continue and abound more and more (v. 1).

The life of the believer expressed in the idea of walking is to be sanctified. ‘This is the will of God, even your sanctification” (v. 3). To sanctify means to set apart from evil for a divine purpose. Sanctification has to do with the person rather than with his sins, as does justification. In Genesis 2:3 God sanctified a day, the seventh, and in such there was no sin. In the New Testament we read, “Say ye of Him (the Lord Jesus), whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest” (John 10:36)? Certainly in Christ there was no sin.

There are three terms of interest used in verses three to eight: the body (v. 4), the brother (v. 6), and the enabler (v. 8).

In regard to the body, we read, “That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour” (v. 4). Here the word vessel may refer either to the person’s own body or his wife, both are called vessels in the Scriptures. When we read, “We have this treasure in earthen vessels,” we are reading of the light of Christ’s glory that has shined into our hearts (2 Cor. 4:7). When we read, “Giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel,” the meaning is obvious (1 Pet. 8:7). Each brother should possess his own vessel in the sense of mastery, sobriety, holding the reins. The body is a good servant but a very terrible master. Paul asserts, “I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection” (1 Cor. 9:27). He meant that he brought it into slavery; he made it his servant. The context here would suggest that each man should have a wife for

himself, and not defraud his brother in this regard for that would be fornication. Surely such sin defiles the body (1 Cor. 6:18) and mars holiness.

It does indeed defraud the other brother (v. 6). A holy life is not only a clean life, but it is a love life. In it there is no envy, jealousy, or covetousness. The Saviour was holy and none of these evil features were found in Him. Unholy living defiles the body, defrauds the brother, and deposes God (v. 8). “God … hath also given unto us His Holy Spirit.” It is His power alone that produces holiness, and imparts the ability to live clean and sanctified lives. The Holy Spirit dwells in the sister as much as in the brother, and where He is resident, He rebukes sin and effects repentance.

The Charitable Walk

“But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another” (v. 9). “Love worketh no ill to his neighbour” (Rom. 13:10). It does not covet another man’s wife or any of his possessions. Love is the queen of all the Christian graces, the fruit of the Spirit, the badge of discipleship, the fulfiller of the law, and the evidence of divine life. How wonderfully the saints at Thessalonica arose to this is seen in the gift they sent by the Apostle to needy saints at Jerusalem. “Their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality” (2 Cor. 8:2). History records that famine and distress were prevalent at that time, and that affliction was a common experience among the saints. Notwithstanding their own trials, their love overflowed toward others. “Ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all

Macedonia" (Vv. 9-10). They had no favourites; their love went out toward "all." "We beseech you," added Paul, "that ye increase more and more." They were not only to keep it up, but they were to allow it to develop to greater proportions.

Two Greek words, both rendered into English by the word love, appear in verse nine. One suggests a fondness through relationship; it is called "brotherly love." The other suggests a strong sacrificial love. Of this we read, "Ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another." This is the word that is used to express divine love as in John 3:16.

The Controlled Walk

The Spirit of God exhorted these believers saying, "That ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business" (v. 11). The Thessalonians had a tendency to be noisy and nosey. They were to strive worthily to be quiet and restful.

Reverence is becoming rare in our assemblies today. The noise of chatter after many a solemn Gospel message has been an aid to the enemy of souls and a great disappointment to the soul winner.

Apparently some of those believers at Thessalonica had retired from business and had established a new line, that of being busybodies, meddling in other folk's affairs ((1 Thess. 3:11). Nosey indeed! The imminent return of the Lord seems to have upset some, and through a misunderstanding they had become idle. It may have been that some of the "honourable women" of whom we read in Acts 17:12 had been too liberal with their money, and some, profiting by their generosity, had ceased to

work. Occasionally, kindness in one will result in ingratitude and laziness in another.

The Consistent Walk

This subsection closes with a command that influences our hands and our feet, our work and our walk: “That ye study to be quiet … and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you; That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing” (Vv. 11-12). Alas! some had given up the good effort of their earlier Christian experience (1 Thess. 1:3), their labour of love. They had become loafers as Dr. Moffatt indicates in his translation of 1 Thessalonians 5:14, “Now we exhort you, brethren, keep a check on loafers.” Paul was a striking example of how a Christian ought to work and walk; it, therefore, grieved him to see that some were “working not at all.” Alas! too many in our assemblies are not pulling their weight of responsibility. Life time is working time. “The night cometh, when no man can work” (John 9:4). We must remember that no work means no reward (1 Cor. 3:14).

It has been said that workless faith is never regarded, and that faithless work is never rewarded.

Perhaps some do not find opportunity for work because others are inclined to do too much. It might be better to say, some have too much to do because others do so little. We are near the end of the day of salvation; the sun is setting; supper time is nearly over. Let us do with our might what our hands find to do. Let our walk be clean, charitable, controlled, and consistent.

* * *

In the assembly, as in business life, very few good ideas will work, unless you do.

The Christian’s Hope (Sept 1962)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 8 No. 9, Sept 1962.

Scripture Reading: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

In an earlier study our attention was directed to the Christian’s walk (Chap. 4:1-12); it is now to be fixed upon the Christian’s hope. Paul in this paragraph departs from the main line of his teaching. The digression embraces the section from chapter four and verse thirteen to chapter five and verse eleven.

When Timothy brought his report to Paul from Thessalonica (Chap. 3:6), he made references to the faith of the saints there, and to their love, but said nothing about their hope. Had the “patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ” alluded to in chapter one been shaken because some fellow believers had died? Apparently, there had arisen a condition in the assembly that required an exposition of the second coming of Christ, His coming for His people (Chap. 4), and His coming with His people (Chap. 5).

The believer’s hope occupies a prominent place in this Epistle; in fact, each chapter closes with an assertion relative to it. From these statements we learn that the second coming of our Lord Jesus is: an inspiring hope for the saved sinner (Chap. 1:10), an encouraging hope for the tried servant (Chap. 2:19), a purifying hope for the tempted saint (Chap. 3:13), a comforting hope for the sorrowing saint (Chap. 4:17), and an arousing hope for the sleeping saint (Chap. 5:6).

During Paul’s absence from them, some believers had died, had fallen asleep in Jesus, and their passing had

caused much sorrow. Those who had lost relatives were stricken with grief because of the mistaken idea that these loved ones would miss the blessing of seeing Christ set up His Kingdom. The truth regarding the establishing of the Kingdom of God on earth had been revealed in both the Old Testament and the first three Gospels. Paul also had made a reference to it earlier in this very Epistle (Chap. 1:11). He now feels impelled to give them fuller instructions, so he writes, “But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep.” The word “asleep” is the one from which we derive our English word cemetery. The word has to do with the body, the death of the body, and in this connection it suggests restfulness, a state in which there is no moral communication with the person, and a state which is temporary.

“That ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.” Certainly, the Christian sorrows; it is difficult to break the ties of nature for such an experience causes sadness. The child of God does not sorrow to the same extent as does the unconverted; their loss is twofold, for not only have they lost a loved one, but they have lost all hope of ever seeing them again. How different for the believer!

“For if (since) we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him.” The “if” of this verse is not an if of doubt but one of argument.

“Jesus died.” Thank God for the use of His human name! He, the sinless Man who lived for a whole generation among sinful men, died; yet, death had no claim upon Him. It was not sleep for Him, but death in all its grim

reality, the fruit of human sin. This should have been the experience of all, but Christ died for all and then arose. His resurrection, therefore, becomes the proof of ours. Because He lives, we shall live also (John 14:19). We shall live together with Him (Chap. 5:10).

What a precious thought is involved in the expression, “Them also which sleep in (by or through) Jesus.” It is He that puts His own to rest. Those sleepers God will bring with Him. Some, no doubt, there may be who will ask, how will this take place?

The Apostle gives instruction both as to the manner and the order in which these things are to be accomplished. “We which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (Vv. 15-17). In this detailed clarification are six precious comforting truths.

A New Revelation: “This we say unto you by the word of the Lord,” or better, This we say in a word by the Lord. This is something entirely new, something not mentioned in the Old Testament or in the first three Gospels. It is revealed in a message from the Lord, His title of absolute authority. Since that is true, we have the most reliable information about our hope. Peter does not speak of the blessed hope of the Church, because it was given to Paul as a special revelation by the exalted Head of the Church.

“The Lord Himself shall descend from Heaven with a shout,” with a voice. with a trump; all of which are for the ear. Now notice what happens:

The Resurrection of the Saints: “The dead in Christ shall rise first” (V. 16).

The Rapture of the Saints: “We shall be caught up.” Paul himself is the example of this, he says, “I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third Heaven” (2 Cor. 12:2).

The Reunion of the Saints: “We shall be caught up together.”

The Residence of the Saints: “So shall we ever be with the Lord.

The Return of the Saints: “Them also that sleep in (through) Jesus will God bring with Him”; that is, at His appearing.

Death is not the Christian’s hope. At death the saints go home one by one; they go to be with Christ, “Absent from the body … present with the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:8). In this passage the Apostle is teaching that Christ is coming for His own, and that all shall be caught up together. No, death is not the hope of the Church.

The coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost was not the realization of the Church’s hope. Pentecost was the commencement of the Church; the return of Christ, in one respect, will be the consummation of the Church.

The Day of the Lord and Christian Duty (Oct 1962)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 8 No. 10, Oct 1962.

Scripture Reading: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

In chapter four the Apostle had spoken about the Lord's coming for His people, and in chapter five he continues with the theme, the second stage of His coming, His coming with His people. This subject is referred to in Colossians 3:4 and in 1 John 3:2, "When He shall be manifested" (R.V.). The Lord's people in Thessalonica knew nothing about the rapture of the Church, it was a new revelation to the Apostle Paul particularly, but of the Day of the Lord they knew a great deal. "Ye have no need that I write unto you," said the Apostle to them.

If the Apostle spent only three weeks in Thessalonica, he must have taught them considerable prophetic truth. "Ye yourselves know perfectly (accurately) that the Day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night" (V. 2).

The Day of the Lord is one of four important days mentioned in the New Testament. In 1 Corinthians 4:3 we read in the margin about Man's Day, the present period of time, and in Philippians 2:16 we read of the Day of Christ, the period between the rapture of the Church and Christ's return with the Church to earth. The Day of the Lord is the ushering in of the Millennial reign of Christ, while the Day of God mentioned in 2 Peter 3:12 is the Eternal State in which righteousness will forever dwell. Righteousness will there dwell rather than reign for there will be no trace of disobedience. God will find His eternal rest in that perfect condition.

It might be profitable, especially for young believers, to distinguish between the rapture of the Church to meet the Lord in the air and His appearing in glory with His Church.

· The rapture will be secret while the appearing will be public, “Every eye shall see Him” (Rev. 1:7).

· The rapture is a new revelation found exclusively in the New Testament while the appearing is the subject of Old Testament prophecy.

· The rapture is related to sounds: voice, shout, trumpet, therefore the ears. The appearing is related to signs, therefore to the eyes.

· In the rapture we see the saints going in to be with the Lord, but in the appearing we see them coming out with Him in glory.

· At the rapture Christ comes alone (1 Thess. 4:16), whereas at the appearing He comes accompanied by the armies of Heaven (Matt. 25:31).

· At the rapture He appears as the Bright and Morning Star; at the appearing as the Sun of Righteousness.

· At the rapture He takes away the sheep and leaves the goats, but in the appearing, conversely, He takes away the goats and leaves the sheep.

· At the rapture He takes away the wheat and leaves the tares, but at the appearing He takes away the tares and leaves the wheat.

· The rapture will be a season of reunion and rejoicing, but the appearing will be a sad time of separation and sorrow.

The Day of the Lord is that dreadful time referred to in such passages as Joel 1:15; 2:1; 2:11; 2:31; 3:14, and many other Old Testament portions. It comes as a thief in the night, that is, unexpected, and the days which precede it are likened to those of Noah and of Lot. Of the people of those former times we read, “They knew not” (Matt. 24:36). A thief comes to take that which does not belong to him so shall it be on that day, “one shall be taken,” taken away in judgment, “and the other left” to enter the millennium. It then shall be as in the time of the flood and the antideluvians were taken away in judgment, but Noah and his family were left. What a day that will be for the ungodly! It will happen with sudden, startling, separating force, even as the shock of a burglary. In a time when “they” not you (a third party) will be saying, “peace and safety” sudden destruction will fall. In some respects this will be like a woman in travail, not unexpected but inevitable, and “they shall not escape.” In the days of Noah none escaped; in the ark there was no condemnation; outside of it, no salvation. See 2 Thessalonians 1:9.

At this point of his letter the Apostle Paul was led by the Holy Spirit to give a description of the moral condition of men and women at the close of this dispensation: darkness, drunkenness, and drowsiness. Darkness, of course, is ignorance; drunkenness, insensibility; and drowsiness, indifference. Such are the characteristics of these godless days. They that are drunken belong to the night, and they that sleep continue in the night.

From these dreadful conditions Paul turns to his converts, and addresses them, saying, “Ye are not in darkness,” you are not ignorant of that day, you know it perfectly, or correctly.

“Ye are all the sons” (not children as in the A.V.). “Sons” (R.V.) suggests more than relationship, it suggests character, as in Matthew 5:45 where we read, “The sons of your father” inferring that there is a family likeness. What a contrast to the ungodly! We are of the day, not of the night; sober, not drunken; watchful, not asleep. People should not sleep in the day, that is the time to work. The Lord Jesus said, “I must work the works of Him that sent Me while it is day” (John 9:4). The day suggests opportunity, hence responsibility.

“Let us not sleep as do the rest” (V. 6). The word for sleep here is different to the word found in chapter 4:14; there it is death, here indifference, sloth.

Paul now changes the metaphor from sons to soldiers (V. 8). Many military metaphors are used by the Apostle in this letter; for example, in chapter 3:3 the word “appointed” means the posting of a sentry; in chapter 4:16 the word for shout is that of a Commander. Some of the Lord’s soldiers are on duty, others asleep, but the shout, the voice, and the trump will bring them all together; quicker than arrows fly, all the saints will be out of sight.

We are still in the enemies’ land, therefore safeguards are necessary: “Let us be sober.” “Let us be putting on” (V. 8). We are to be characterized by brightness, “the sons of light;” alertness, “watch;” sobriety, “be sober.” Avoid all excitement and be on your guard is the force of this admonition. Two vital parts of the person form the target for the enemy, the heart and the head. Let us therefore be putting on the breastplate and the helmet. The breastplate is one of faith and love, faith Godward and love manward. In Paul’s second letter to them, they

were commended for their growing faith and abounding love.

The breastplate and helmet are mentioned in the Epistle to the Ephesians, chapter 6. There is a slight difference between Ephesians and Thessalonians. In the first, salvation is a present experience from the power of Satan; whereas, in Thessalonians salvation is future and is from the presence of sin, “the hope of salvation.” In these days of new and unfounded theories, it is well for us to be guarded in our affections and thoughts.

“For God hath not appointed us (here Paul includes himself) to wrath, but to the obtaining (not attaining) of salvation,” the salvation of the body (1 Thess. 5:9). All this is made possible through our Lord Jesus who died for us. His death has brought us into divine favour and formed the foundation of our hope that whether we are watching or sleeping we should live together with Him (V. 10). In chapter 4:17 association is “with them,” here it is “with Him.” In 1 John 4:9, we live through Him, the past; in 1 Corinthians 5:15, we are to live to Him, the present; here it is future, “to live with Him.” How comforting to those who had lost their loved ones! Until that moment, we are to encourage one another and edify one another. The gifts bestowed by the Risen Lord according to Ephesians 4:12 are for the building up of the Body of Christ. This concept is quite common in the New Testament. It was used by Christ Himself in Matthew 16:18, and again in Acts 9:31 it appears in connection with the welfare of the local churches.

Church Leaders (Nov 1962)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 8 No. 11, Nov 1962.

Scripture Reading: 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28

The subject before us in this section is very important, it is twofold; first, the attitude of the church to its leaders; second, the activities of the leaders in the church. “And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord” (V. 12). In simple language this means, get to know your leaders. In other parts of the New Testament such leaders are called “elders” and “bishops.” Both of these titles refer to the same work and person. The name “elder” is from the Greek word “presbuteros,” and the name “bishop” from another Greek word “episkopos.” These are the words around which two large religious organizations have been built, Presbyterianism and Episcopalianism. The word elder suggests age and experience; whereas, the word bishop indicates the work done by this person, he oversees and inspects as a superintendent. These refer, of course, only to men not to women.

Their Qualifications

Qualifications are required today in any field of importance, and certainly no less in the assembly of God. Elders are to be the husband of only one wife (1 Tim. 3:2). Get to know them, says Paul intimating that they are worth knowing. They engage in three tasks; they work (V. 12), warn (V. 14), and watch (V. 15). Their work is hard and difficult; they “labour.” The word used here is rendered in John 4:6 by the word “wearied,” and suggests a toiling to the point of fatigue. The labour of

love in which church leaders engage often results in late and sleepless nights.

The exhortations of the Word of God are: that we know them (1 Thess. 5:12); that we remember them (Heb. 13:7); that we pray for them in private (Heb. 13:18); and that we salute them in public (Heb. 13:24). They labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; therefore esteem them very highly, and remain in peace among yourselves. This assertion of the Apostle intimates that the holding of God-given leaders in esteem and respect produces peace within the assembly and not conflict. The Christian must ever be prepared to fight the foe, never a fellow-believer much less an elder.

Their Activities

At verse 14 we read Paul's instructions to the leaders in the church of God at Thessalonica. These instructions impose upon elder brethren both a positive and a negative attitude. An understanding of these implications would make all church leaders:

Solicitous: "Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly" (disorderly, R. V.). The word "unruly" implies being out of step. A further reference to these unruly ones is made in 2 Thessalonians 3:11. "We hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies." Dr. Moffat translates verse 14, "Keep a check upon loafers."

"Comfort the feebleminded," exhorts the Apostle. The Revised Version says, "Comfort the fainthearted." The term seems to be a military one indicating those who lag behind in the march. It is necessary to give these a word of encouragement.

“Support the weak.” That is, give strength to those who are ready to drop out. The Apostle could say of his own ministry at Ephesus, “I have showed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak” (Acts 20:35). What a wonderful example he was!

“Be patient (longsuffering) toward all.” Be short tempered, that means, have a controlled temper, like a piece of good steel that keeps its temper and is thereby of greater value.

“See that none render evil for evil unto any man.” Dr. Jowett once stated: “Good returned for good is manlike; good for evil is Godlike; evil for evil is devillike; and evil for good is beastlike.” Elder brethren must learn to overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:21), and keep in mind Paul’s words to the Galatians, “If ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another” (Gal. 5:15).

“Ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men.” Let there be no retaliation. The Christian’s is to be the open hand, not the closed fist.

Spiritual: After these words of positive counsel Paul touches upon the personal lives of the elders, and admonishes them saying: “Rejoice evermore.” They had received the word of the Gospel with joy (1 Thess. 1:6), and he would have that joy increase and be continuous.

“Pray without ceasing.” No one can be a leader among the saints who does not keep in close contact with headquarters. Paul himself was a good example of this; he referred to his night and day praying (1 Thess. 3:10). Prayer makes the will of God clear; the presence of God real, and the work of God easy. Nothing prospers without prayer.

“In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.” In Ephesians 5:20, we read, “Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of the Lord Jesus.”

The Apostle now turns to the negative attitude that the Christian leaders ought to develop. He definitely implies at least three avoidances.

Do not be critical: “Quench not the Spirit.” This, of course, can mean quench not the Spirit in another. A brother or sister may be doing their best to serve and please the Lord, but through unkind criticism a wet blanket may extinguish the fire of zeal, and leave them cold and silent for some time to come.

Do not be callous: “Despise not prophesyings.” There were prophets in the early Church, men who had received a divine revelation; consequently, they were acknowledged teachers. Today, a brother with a message from God’s full revelation, the Holy Scriptures, may be despised probably because he is not a pleasing personality, or a fluent speaker, but the failure to listen to the message may result in disobedience to the will of the Lord.

Do not be credulous: “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.” No matter how popular a preacher may be, one must learn to test what is spoken by what is written, not what is written by what is spoken.

The remainder of the chapter is completed with a prayer by the Apostle for his beloved children in the faith, the Thessalonians. He prays for their sanctification and for their preservation, and as he does so, he expresses four very fine thoughts involving a person, a petition, a prospect, and a promise.

The Person: “The very God of Peace.” The Revised Version renders this title thus, “The God of Peace Himself.” How grand to know in this world of turmoil the God of Peace Himself!

The petition: “The very God of Peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit, soul and body be preserved blameless.” Sanctification and preservation suggest that the Christian should be set apart and kept apart.

The prospect: “Unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” He that hath this hope set on Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure (1 John 3:3).

The promise: “Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it.” God’s power and faithfulness will accomplish that which to us may seem impossible.

In closing, the Apostle asks that inasmuch as he has prayed for them, they pray for him. He sends warm greetings to all, and then commands that the Epistle be read to all the holy brethren, all in Christ.

Paul had instructed them that the Lord Jesus would return personally for them, but in the meantime he was anxious that they enjoy much of the Lord’s presence with them. He closes the Epistle with the benediction, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.”