

Studies in 1 Thessalonians

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Introduction to 1 Thessalonians

Introduction

It was during Paul's missionary journey (second) that the light of the gospel first broke into the darkness of Thessalonica. See Acts 17:1-10.

The assembly that was left behind in the city was instructed in many of the great doctrines of the faith.

Their ardent and vigorous faith in Christ brought upon them severe persecution.

When Paul arrived in Athens (Acts 17:15) he learned of this.

Consequently he tried to visit them, but Satan hindered. 1 Thess. 2:17-18.

So he sent Timothy to them. Ch. 3:1-2.

Timothy ultimately brought back a good report to Paul (Ch. 3:6-8). This prompted Paul to write this letter.

Paul's stay in the city was brief.

Acts 17 says it lasted three successive Sabbath days, just under a month.

Despite the brevity of his visit, he discussed with these new believers many of the great Christian doctrines such as:

1. The Trinity 1:1, 5-6.
2. The Holy Spirit 1:5-6, 4:8, 5:19.
3. The Lord's second advent 1:10, 2:19; 3:13, 4:14-17, 5:23.

4. The Day of the Lord 5:1-3.

5. Assurance 1:5.

6. Conversion 1:9.

7. Election 1:4.

8. Resurrection 4:14-18.

9. Sanctification 4:3, 5:23.

10. Christian behavior 2:12, 4:1.

One of the most important themes of the epistle is the return of the Lord Jesus. It is mentioned at least once in each chapter.

A believer who is expecting the return of the Lord momentarily has no room for:

1. Idols in his heart 1:9-10

2. Slackness in his service 2:9, 19

3. Divisions in his fellowship 3:12-13

4. Depression in his mind 4:13-18

5. Sin in his life 5:23 v. 1-The men mentioned here had been accused of turning the world upside down.

This was unsolicited tribute to the power of the gospel delivered through dedicated men.

The letter was written to the church "in Thessalonica," in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The word church was used at this time to describe any kind of assembly.

Paul wants to make it clear that this is not a heathen assembly, but one that is related to God as Father and Jesus Christ as Lord, double security.

v. 2-3 Paul gave thanks to God for them “all” and remembers them without ceasing in his prayers. It would appear that he mentioned each one by name.

The Thessalonians displayed three outstanding spiritual virtues.

1. The work of faith. This would primarily refer to their conversion to God. Their faith was not of the empty, theoretical kind. It was a living, vibrant, energetic faith that demonstrated itself in power and intensity in the face of adverse conditions. This faith in God was the driving force that energized them in their work for God. This was the same faith that the heroes of Hebrews 11 displayed as they worked and died in their service for God.

2. The labor of love. The next virtue that Paul calls to mind is their labor of love. This speaks of their service for God motivated by their love for the Lord Jesus. Theirs was a determined, self-sacrificing love. Their love for Christ inspired them to labor and toil to the point of weariness and fatigue. Their love never wavered despite the cost.

3. The patience or endurance of hope. The third virtue was their patience of hope, steadfastness. This hope is given by the indwelling Holy Spirit. This hope is that steadfast waiting for the return of the Lord Jesus. They had been undergoing tremendous persecution because of their faith and love for Christ. Despite this, they never wavered. Their hope in the coming of the Lord and in all the other promises of God in Christ was unshaken. They believed God. Such hope produces unshakable patience and steadfast endurance.

v. 4 “Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.”

“Brothers, whom God loves, we know that he has chosen you.” T.C.N.T.

Paul was certain that God had chosen these saints before the foundation of the world.

The elect are chose by God in a past eternity.

By Spirit-given insight Paul recognized, in view of the spiritual characteristics of verse 3, that the Thessalonians were among the elect.

Many people, when viewing the Biblical truth of “election”, picture God as a tyrant, damning or saving men at will.

The Scripture rather gives the impression that election proceeds from God’s love.

It is not a device for sentencing men to eternal torment, but rather for rescuing them from it.

Election protects us from thinking of salvation as dependant on human whims, and roots it squarely in the will of God.

Our being saved is only because God, by His Spirit, convicted us and then saved us by His grace.

Our election was no afterthought with God.

Ephesians 1:4 “Chosen in Him before the foundation of the world.”

Paul thanks God for His choice of the Thessalonians.

v. 5 “For our gospel came not unto you in word only.”
Etc.

This verse describes the manner in which the gospel came to Thessalonica.

Paul had had the experience of being forbidden by the Spirit to preach. Acts 16:6

Sometimes he had spoken fearfully and haltingly. 1 Corinthians 2:3.

In his frequent discussions with the Jews he no doubt felt it was hopeless.

In Thessalonica his experience was different; he felt the power of God.

The gospel did not come to them in carefully arranged rhetoric, i.e. in word only.

1. It came with power. The dynamic of the gospel worked in their lives with spiritual energy, producing conviction of sin, repentance and conversion.

2. It also came in the Holy Spirit. Then as now there are many kinds of power in the professing church. The kind of power that was seen in Thessalonica was the Holy Spirit's power which breaks men and women and leads them to Christ for salvation.

3. The gospel also came in much assurance.

Their full assurance of faith was the result of the Holy Spirit's work in their lives.

They knew Whom they had believed.

They were saved and they knew it.

Verses 4 and 5 show how the gospel was presented to the Thessalonians.

Verse 6 shows how they responded to it.

They received the gospel in much affliction and joy of the Holy Spirit.

Those who received Christ were persecuted and suffered dreadfully.

Through it all, they experienced joy and serenity as the Holy Spirit strengthened them and ministered to them.

Paul and Silas knew something of this joy and serenity.
Acts 16:25

The early saints were beaten for their faith in Christ, but left the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer for His name. Acts 5:40-41.

This joy in affliction comes only from the Holy Spirit, who is our Comforter.

They also became imitators of the apostles and followers of the Lord.

Dramatic changes had taken place in the lives of these new converts.

From being idol-worshippers, worldly and grossly immoral, they now followed the Lord.

The model church as an example to us today.

v. 7 The Thessalonians became reproducing Christians.

Their joy, despite severe persecution, was an example to believers in Macedonia and Achaia.

This would encompass all the Christians in Greece.

No other local church was ever singled out by Paul and set forth as an example by which other churches should measure themselves.

v. 8 "For from you has sounded forth the Word of the Lord."

This is an example of what a New Testament church should be like.

The word of the Lord, which would in essence be the Gospel, sounded forth from them like the clean piercing blast of the trumpet or a roll of thunder echoing and re-echoing, and was heard in distant places.

Thessalonica, being a great seaport, news of their transformed lives and faith was carried throughout the Roman Empire.

So extensively had the report of their faith traveled, that it was not necessary for Paul to report on their spiritual state.

Believers are not intended to be terminals of their blessings, but channels through which they can flow to others.

Rivers of water should flow from every believer to those around. John 7:37-38.

v. 9 It was common knowledge that when Paul went to Thessalonica, a startling transformation took place in the lives of many people.

1. They had turned to God from their pagan idols. When one becomes a child of God, there must be a break with worldly habits. We must leave our idols behind. There must be a change of direction. The whole life of the believer must be reoriented.

2. To serve the living and true God. They had yielded their lives to God. Romans 12:1-2. This God whom they were serving was the living and true God, in contrast to the false and lifeless idols they once worshipped.

Paul's "entrance" into the city was a Spirit-empowered entrance.

His preaching of the gospel was no mediocre, mechanical presentation.

It was delivered with such burning zeal and faith, that the Thessalonians in turn caught the fire and the flames of their joy, love, and faith spread to others in distant places.

Note the wonderful sequence of events.

Two men go into this heathen city and preach the gospel.

They preach in the power of the Spirit.

Unregenerate men and women are regenerated.

These become so enraptured with Christ that they leave their idols.

Next a local church is formed.

They serve and praise God, live lives of holiness, bravely endure persecution, witness and win others to Christ.

May we never lose sight of the scriptural approach to evangelism.

v. 10 These new converts were also waiting for the Lord's return.

The context would support that they expected Him momentarily.

One can imagine the anticipation of these new believers as the beauty of the Lord unfolded to them.

1. The Person – God's Son, possessing absolute deity.
2. The Place – from Heaven His dwelling place.

3. The Pledge – Whom God raised from the dead.

4. The Precious Name – Jesus, matchless name.

5. The Prospect – Who delivers us from the wrath to come.

They turned to God – this would equate with their “work of faith” v. 3. They were looking to God.

They now served the living and true God – their labor of love. They were “looking on the fields.”

They were waiting for the return of God’s Son – steadfastness of hope. They were looking for Jesus.

Are we waiting for God’s Son from heaven?

Are we waiting for the redemption of the body? Romans 8:23

Are we really waiting and looking for the Savior, the Lord Jesus? Phil. 3:20

Do we really have the hope of the Rapture? 1 John 3:3

The One we look for is Jesus, Who will deliver us from the wrath to come.

This may be understood in two ways.

1. He delivers us from the eternal punishment of our sin. On the Cross He endured the wrath of God against our sin. Through faith in Him, God reckons our debt paid. There is therefore no judgment for us because we are in Christ Jesus. Romans 8:1

2. The second aspect is that the Lord will deliver us from the coming period when the wrath of God will be poured out on a world who rejected His Son. This period is known as the Tribulation and the Great Tribulation.

1 Thessalonians 1

See Acts 17:1-10.

It was during Paul's first missionary journey that the light of the Gospel first broke into the darkness of pagan Thessalonica.

The apostles were beaten and jailed in Philippi. They also were forced to flee Berea. Paul's stay in the city was brief due to the violent persecution.

Acts 17 says it lasted through three successive Sabbath days, almost a month.

Despite the brevity of his visit, he instructed these new believers in many of the great doctrines of the faith.

The Trinity—v. 1 and 5-6

The Holy Spirit—1:5-6, 4:8, 5:19

The Lord's Second Advent—1:10, 2:19, 3:13, 4:14-17, 5:23

1. Assurance—1:5

2. Conversion—1:9

3. Election—1:4

4. Resurrection—4:14-18

5. Sanctification—4:3, 5:23

6. Christian Behavior—2:12, 4:1

One of the most important themes of the Epistle is the return of the Lord. It is mentioned at least once in each chapter. Also mentioned in each Chapter is the second epistle.

The teaching of the Epistle would indicate that a believer who is expecting the return of the Lord momentarily has no room for:

1. Idols in his heart—1:9-10
2. Slackness in his service—2:9-19
3. Divisions in his fellowship—3:12-13
4. Depression in his mind—4:13-18
5. Sin in his life—5:23

The Thessalonians displayed three outstanding spiritual virtues, which gave Paul reason for constant thanksgiving.

1. Their work of faith - The working of your faith

This would primarily refer to their conversion to God.

Then it would also include their life of faith following conversion.

Their faith was not of the empty theoretical kind.

It was a living, vibrant, energetic faith that manifested itself in power and intensity, in the face of adverse conditions.

It was the driving force that energized them in their work for God.

This was the same kind of faith that urged the heroes of Heb 11 to toil and die in their service for God. See Heb 11:33.

Their faith gave substance to the unseen things of which the Scriptures speak.

2. Their labor of love

1. Self-denying labors of love to each other.
2. This speaks of their service for God motivated by their love for Jesus Christ.

Theirs was a determined, self-sacrificing love. This love drove them to labor and toil to the point of weariness and fatigue. Their love for Christ never wavered despite the tremendous cost. First love.

- 3) Their patience of hope – endurance of hope – Persevering endurance.

This hope is given by the indwelling Spirit.

This hope is their steadfast waiting for the return of the Lord.

These new believers were enduring tremendous persecution because of their faithfulness and love for Christ.

Despite the pressures, they were unmoved from their hope of the Lord's return. Even though the evidences of their arduous circumstances were contradictory to their hope of the return of the Lord, they remained unshaken.

They believed God. Such hope produces unshakable steadfastness. See I Corinth 15-58.

V. 4—"Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God." See 2 Thess 2:13.

"Brothers, whom God loves, we know that He has chosen you."

Paul knew that they were among the elect by the way they received the gospel, and by the spiritual characteristics they displayed in their life.

Many people when viewing the Biblical truth of Election, picture God as a tyrant, damning or saving men at will.

The teaching of scripture rather gives the impression that election proceeds from God's love.

It is not a device for sentencing men to eternal torment, but rather for rescuing them from it.

Election prevents us from thinking of salvation as dependent on human effort, and roots it squarely in the grace and will of God.

Our being saved is only because God by His Spirit convicted us and then saved us by His grace.

Our election took place before the foundation of the world. Eph 1-4.

V. 5—Notice how the gospel came to the Thessalonians.

It came with power—it came in the Holy Spirit—it came with assurance.

1. Paul's presentation of Christ in the Gospel was not merely carefully arranged rhetoric, i.e. in word only.

As he preached, God's power swept through the company. We need this power today.

The dynamic of the Gospel worked in their lives with spiritual energy, producing conviction of sin, repentance and conversion.

2. The Gospel

Also came to them in the Holy Spirit.

There are many kinds of power in the professing church (organization, publicity, oratory, wealth, music, talents of all descriptions).

But the kind of power that was seen in Thessalonica was the Holy Spirit's power, which breaks the stony hearts of unbelief and leads men and women to Christ for salvation. Grips the mind, disturbs the conscience, makes drunken men sober, crooked men straight, warms the heart, saves the soul, and sanctifies the life.

3. The Gospel of Christ also came in much assurance.

The full assurance of their faith in Christ was the result of the Holy Spirit's work in their lives.

They knew whom they had believed, etc. I Tim 1:15.

They were saved and they knew it and were fully assured that all the promises of God would be fulfilled, especially with regard to the Lord's coming.

The Model Church

V. 7 The Thessalonians became reproducing Christians.

The spirit-filled church reproduces, it is indigenous, recreative, procreative, and generative. Their example under adverse conditions was an inspiration to the believers throughout Greece.

No other church was singled out by Paul and set forth as an example by which other churches should measure themselves.

The church at Thessalonica was an "evangelical church."

V. 8 From you sounded forth the Word of God.

Not only was this young church an "evangelical church" - it was also a missionary church.

The Gospel sounded forth from them like the clear piercing blast of a trumpet, and like a roll of thunder

echoing throughout Greece and re-echoing in distant places.

Rivers of life-giving water should flow from every assembly to those around, and then on into the regions beyond.

Another example of an evangelical and missionary church is the young church at Antioch.

There were five characteristics seen in their activities.

1. They preached the Lord Jesus.
2. The hand of the Lord was with them.
3. Great numbers believed.
4. They were a giving church
5. They were a missionary church.

V. 9 They turned to God from idols.

“The dearest idol I have known

Whate’er that idol be

Help me to tear it from thy throne,

And worship only Thee.”

To serve the living and true God—they were the living slaves of Christ Rom 12:1, 2. Present your body. Living and true God in contrast to the dead and false idols.

Rom 6:19. As you presented your members as slaves to lawlessness, now present them as slaves to righteousness. Missionary.

The truth of sanctification. See Ch 4:3 – Ch 5:23. This is a setting aside of the total man for God. This entails being broken, God can only use broken believers. The

power of sin must be broken – We must be totally at the Lord's disposal.

V. 10 Wait for God's Son from heaven.

God's people should be waiting for the coming of the Lord momentarily. We should be watching as well as waiting.

The one we look for is God's Son, Jesus, who will deliver us from the wrath to come.

This may be understood in two ways

1. The Lord delivered us from the eternal punishment of our sins.

On the cross He endured the wrath of God against our sin.

Through faith in Him, God reckoned our debt paid.

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. Rom 8:1.

2. The second aspect is that the Lord will deliver us from the coming period when the wrath of God will be poured out on a world which rejected His Son.

This period is known as the Tribulation and the Great Tribulation.

1 Thessalonians 2 & 3

1 Thessalonians 2

The purity of Paul's conduct among the Thessalonians
Verses 1-12

In these first 12 verses lies the secret of Paul's success as a servant of Christ.

Paul evidently was pursued relentlessly by his enemies everywhere he went. Thessalonica was no exception.

His enemies spread slanderous rumors about Paul's personal life.

His motives were forever being questioned.

His methods were always suspect to his religious foes.

This would account for Paul devoting so much space in this short epistle to defend his ministry.

v. 1 Paul first of all reminds them that his stay with them was "not in vain." It was not empty, nor void of power. There were those who were saying that the message he preached was worthless and irrelevant. Paul replies, "You yourselves know that our message was not empty nor void of power." On the contrary it met your need and proved to be powerful.

v. 2 In this verse Paul exhibits his unselfish love for them and his unquenchable zeal for the gospel. He had just come from Philippi where he had been subjected to physical abuse and grievous insult. Acts 16. Despite this maltreatment in Philippi, he loved the people of Thessalonica so much that he came "boldly", that is with a supernatural courage and preached the gospel "with

much contention.” In his preaching Paul met stiff opposition. The battle for Thessalonica was very real and in the fighting for the gospel he endured “agony”, contention.

v. 3 Other false teachers were guilty of deceiving, living morally impure lives, and employing cunning to ensnare the unwary. Paul says that his message, the gospel of God, was devoid of all intrigue.

v. 4 The word “allowed” means “approved.” In effect, Paul is saying that he has been approved by God to preach the gospel. His proving would include his three years in Arabia; Gal 1:17. His eight years in Tarsus; Acts 9:30, 11:25. God proved him again on his first missionary journey. Because of his approval by God, he preached for God, disregarding the opinions of men.

v. 5-6 In his preaching Paul never used flattering words. Neither did he seek from his converts money nor prestige. (Uncompromising) Neither did he exalt himself, nor show off. (He was God’s man, humble.) Neither was he a burden to them; they were self-supporting, even though as an apostle he could have expected VIP treatment. (Unpretentious)

v. 7 Labor with gentleness. Rather than trying to make gain out of the Thessalonians, Paul and his companions were gentle among them. They treated the people with tenderness, without a trace of superiority. Just as a nursing mother would love her child.

v. 8-9 It is evident that Paul loved the believers at Thessalonica. He was “affectionately desirous” of them, that is, he yearned over them as a mother yearned over her child. It was this unreserved abandonment that was the secret of Paul’s effectiveness. (see Romans 9:3) No

holding back of the fullness of the gospel. No holding back of himself. He gave himself unreservedly in labor that was saturated with difficulties. He worked with his hands night and day to support himself so that he would not be a burden to them.

v. 10-12 Note the excellency of Paul's life. His conduct among them was impeccable. Contrast the false teachers. Paul's conscience must have been clear as he made the claim that he lived holy, justly, and unblameably among them. He made the claim before them and before God.

v. 11 Because Paul's life was exemplary he had the authority to exhort, encourage, and to charge. He did this in the same way as a father teaches his children. There was firmness, no compromise, but there was a tender definiteness in all his dealings with them.

v. 12 The purpose of this unblameable life and godly counsel was that they should walk worthy of God. (walk worthy of our vocation, walk circumspectly) This is God's standard for believers in every age.

v. 13 In this section, which really extends into Ch 3:13, we can see the heart of the shepherd and the care of the father. He does two very definite things on behalf of the church.

1. He sends Timothy to minister to them in his place.
2. He intercedes for them night and day before the throne of God.

Paul was concerned for the young church. He had been forced to leave them before it was firmly established. From Athens he had sent Timothy to ascertain their spiritual state. When Timothy returned with a good

report, he was greatly encouraged. He wrote, "I thank God without ceasing." The subject of his thanksgiving is that they received the Word as from God. It had brought them eternal life at conversion. "Born of incorruptible seed." 1 Peter 1:23. It had worked effectively in their lives, in that they had turned to God from idols. The Word was a dynamic force in their lives. And although persecuted for their faith in Christ, they were so fortified by the Word that they withstood every effort of their enemies to turn them from the faith. They were steadfast, unmovable, etc. 1 Corinthians 15:58.

Verses 14-20 give us the cause of their suffering. This young church was being persecuted relentlessly by their own countrymen. The Jews in the city stirred up the Gentiles to persecute their fellow Gentiles for their faith in Christ. This was exactly what had happened to the churches in Judea.

v. 15 The Jews there had been so vindictive that they had killed the Lord. In their determination to stamp out the name of Christ, they had killed the prophets. Stephen and James. Paul himself had experienced more than his share of suffering. The Jews had tried to stop him from preaching. At Antioch, Acts 13:45-50, Iconium, Acts 14:1-5, Lystra, Acts 14:19, Berea, Acts 17:13, Corinth, Acts 18:12, then at Thessalonica. Men of this sort do not please God. They are against both God and man.

v.16 Paul's indignation mounts as he thinks of those men trying to prevent the gospel being preached to the Gentiles. (Acts 13:46 "Lo we turn to the Gentiles." The Macedonian call.) Such preaching was to bring the Gentiles to Christ for salvation. They vehemently protested and violently opposed all efforts to bring the

Gentiles into a right relationship with God and on equal level with themselves. The trouble was not caused solely by man. God too had purpose in “To fill up their sins away.” To the brim. Paul is saying here that God, sometimes, in order to prove the evil nature of man, allows his people to be persecuted. This allows Him to show the righteous character of His judgment as it falls upon them to the uttermost.

v. 17 Perhaps one of the accusations leveled at Paul was that he never intended to revisit Thessalonica. Paul addresses them as brethren. Then he goes on to express his sense of loss at their absence from him and his absence from them. The words “taken from you” really means being bereaved, orphaned. Paul grieved because of their separation. It had only been for a short season. He assures them that the separation was only physical. They were still joined in heart. Then he assures them that he would love to see them.

v. 18 Whatever had kept Paul away from them, it had not been his personal desires. He had made several attempts to reach them, but had been hindered by Satan. Satan can hinder the Lord’s servants as they seek to do the Lord’s work.

v. 19-20 Paul’s enemies had repeatedly accused him of intentionally absenting himself from the new believers. The expressions of esteem in verse 19 give the lie to his enemies who were saying that he had lost interest in his converts. Those spiritual children were his hope, his joy, his crown of rejoicing. Paul’s exultation in the Thessalonians is so intense that his heart overflows, his cup is running over. No doubt the dynamic church was his hope, joy, crown at the time of writing. John wrote “I

have no greater JOY than to hear that my children walk in truth.” But Paul is looking on into the future. Thinking of the coming of the Lord, the “presence”= parousia, and no doubt thinking of the judgment seat of Christ. He rejoices that he will be able to rejoice before the Lord on that great occasion.

v. 20 “Ye are our glory and joy.” The Judgment Seat of Christ. We all will give an account of our stewardship to the Lord. For we must all appear before the Lord. Stand before the Judgment Seat to give account of ourselves. Those who stand there will receive according to what they have done in the body, whether it be good or bad. See 1 Corinthians 3. The believer’s works being tested by fire. If any man’s works stand the test, he shall receive a reward. Those whose works, when tested, go up in flames, he shall suffer loss. Describe this. Must I go and empty-handed? Must I meet my Savior so? Not one soul with which to greet Him. Must I empty handed go? (“Must I Go and Empty-Handed” by Charles Carroll Luther)

v. 18 Satanic opposition. Satan hindereth us. The first five verses of this chapter graphically portray for us the picture of what every Christian can expect in this life. Then verse 18 introduces the fact that the moment a person becomes a believer, Satan begins to confront him. Some believers never experience Satanic opposition. That must be because they are walking in the same direction. Satan dogs the footsteps of an active believer, he opposes him and does all in his power to destroy him. Satan attacks the believer in his most vulnerable spot. Even mature believers can succumb to the attacks of the devil. Peter’s denial is an example of this. Matthew 26. Acts 5 Satan has filled your heart to

lie to the Holy Spirit. 2 Corinthians 12:7 “There was given unto me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me.” Roaring lion, angel of light.

1 Thessalonians 3

The word wherefore would link this chapter with the previous one.

v. 1 The separation of which Paul has been speaking of became unendurable, so he took action and sent Timothy to them. This action, as the language reveals, was a tremendous sacrifice on Paul’s part. As much as he loved the Thessalonians, he hated to see Timothy leave him. “He was left behind at Athens alone.” “Demas hath forsaken me. But the Lord stood by me.” This phrase in the original means that he felt abandoned. This gives us some idea of the depths of the apostle’s feeling as he was left alone in Athens to face the philosophers. Even the servants of God become depressed and feel alone at times.

v. 2 In this verse Paul reveals Timothy’s spiritual character. He is called a brother. A minister or a servant of God. This is the word deacon. A fellow-worker in the gospel of Christ. Timothy’s mission to the church was two-fold.

1. He was to establish them. There were many facets of the truth that had not been explained to this young church. Many questions had arisen. Timothy’s job was to reveal truth, explain the problems, and answer questions. 2 Timothy 4:2

2. He also was to inspire them in their trials and encourage them in the battle that lay ahead. 2 Corinthians 1 “The God of all comfort.”

v. 3-4 The Thessalonians were not supermen. Because of their afflictions some may have been tempted to give up. It was Timothy's privilege to support and encourage such. Paul says that they were appointed to such things. Suffering by divine appointment. See Acts 9:16, Job v. 5 Here we have an illustration of the phrase that wherever there is a work of God, there is a counter-work of Satan. He is concerned that Satan having tempted them, they would succumb and go back into the world.

v. 6 When Timothy returned to Paul, he brought with him a good report and good news. The good news being that their faith toward God was steadfast. Their love toward their fellow man was undiminished. Their love for Paul, even in his absence, had not waned. Paul specially appreciated the latter and mentioned that the feeling was reciprocal.

v. 7-8 Paul was comforted and encouraged by their victorious attitude. Especially so as he himself was being crushed by mighty foes. Since setting foot in Europe, he had suffered four successive experiences of apparent defeat. At Philippi he had been in jail and asked to leave the city. At Thessalonica he had been forced to leave the city and there was no guarantee that he would return. At Berea he was pursued by the Jews and compelled to move on. Now in Athens he had little success with the philosophers. He was in affliction and distressed. This report of Timothy regarding their steadfastness in the faith brought him a surge of energy; it was a source of inspiration.

v. 9 Because of this good report, Paul offers his sincere thanks to God. "It is a good thing to give thanks unto the

Lord.” “Oh give thanks unto the Lord, for His mercy endureth forever.”

v. 10 Paul at prayer. Note the intensity of his prayers, “night and day” Paul prayed without ceasing. Night and day “exceedingly”—this is a very strong word. He prayed that he might see their love. This prayer was not answered until some years later. Acts 20:1-2 He also longed to “perfect that which was lacking in their faith.” This means to render complete, as one may repair a fishing net. This would include the restoration of fallen saints. It would mean a restatement of vital doctrine. It would involve teaching them more perfectly the way of the Lord. Paul did not consider that the great commission was fulfilled when people were saved. The great pastor’s heart shows itself in this verse.

v. 11 After praying that they may be complete in their faith, he continues to pray that he might be brought to them. He invokes the help and in his earnestness, pleads the name of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. The word “direct” means to “make straight.” Paul is pleading the names of God and the Lord Jesus Christ to have the obstacles removed which Satan had put in his way.

v. 12 Paul continues to pray: That the Thessalonians might abound in love toward one another and all men. The purpose of this request is stated in this verse. That God would establish them in holiness. It was Paul’s desire that these young believers should be set apart for God and learn the truth of personal sanctification. Very often when the coming of the Lord is mentioned, it is with the intent of driving us to a life of holiness. In this section Paul has expressed certain concerns for this young church. He also has given some suggestions of

how to strengthen the church so that sufferings, Satan, or short-comings will not hinder its work and development.

1. The work of the servants of Christ among them is an important factor. This is seen in the ministries of Paul and Timothy. Ch 2:17-20, 3:2

2. We see the importance of prayer in the life and growth of the church. Ch 3:11-13

3. We see the need for the knowledge of God in order to appraise correctly the events of life. This is exemplified by realizing that suffering is the appointed lot of the believer. Ch 3:3-4.

1 Thessalonians 4 & 5

1 Thessalonians 4

v. 1-12 The life that pleases God.

We now pass from the personal and historical section of the epistle to the practical part. This follows the normal pattern of Paul's epistles, doctrine, then duty, precept, then practice.

v. 1-2 Before dealing with specific things in which the believer needed help, Paul opens this section with a word of general exhortation. He exhorts and beseeches them as brethren by the Lord Jesus. These are strong and endearing terms. Paul had taught them how they should walk before men as a believer. He also instructed them how they could walk before God to please Him. The believer's life is never static. There is a growing and abiding day by day.

v. 2 When Paul was present with them he had also given some "commands" about practical Christian living. This is a strong word—it is used by the military. Paul disclaimed personal responsibility for the strong language he used; he spoke on the authority of the Lord Jesus.

v. 3-8 After this word of introduction, Paul deals with the first specific lack in the lives of the Thessalonians. Describe the loose morals and sexual laxity of society. Paul begins his discussion in this delicate area by putting it on the highest possible plane. "This is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication." This introduces us to the neglected but important subject of sanctification. Paul's strong

influence here is that sanctification includes holiness of body, as well as spirit. Ch 5:23. To sanctify means to set apart for God. Our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. In this context Paul says that the believers must abstain from fornication. This means that believers must not have extra marital relations after marriage, and certainly none before marriage.

v. 4 There are two views as to the meaning of the word “vessel”. Some think that it means “body”, and Paul is saying that the believer is to gain mastery over his body in order to keep himself pure in matters of sex. See 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. Others think the word “vessel” means wife. The word “possess” indicates courtship and contracting of marriage. They see verse 4 as the honorable entrance into marriage. Verse 5 as the proper maintenance of that estate.

v. 6 It is a grievous, horrendous, horrible, heinous sin for anyone saved or unsaved to take another man’s wife for the purpose of having sexual relations. Such a sin will not go unpunished. “The Lord is the avenger of all such.”

v. 7 This verse firstly reminds the believer that he has not been called to unclean living. He has been called to holiness (Ephesians 1:4). Absolute unity, purity.

v. 8 To despise this truth is to despise God. To treat lightly the commands of the apostle with regard to sexual purity is to treat the God of heaven lightly, by rejecting His commandments. God has made victory possible for the believer by giving the Holy Spirit.

v. 9-10 The two things that should characterize vibrant Christianity are mentioned here, purity and love. Brotherly love: This is the unique love that binds

believers together. This love seeks the highest good for his brother. They had been taught of God to love one another in this fashion. This kind of love should extend to all brethren. It did so in their case. Thessalonica being the commercial center of Macedonia, the believers had ample opportunity to show their love to believers from other places. Increase more and more.

v. 11 Study or “be ambitious” to be quiet. Some of the believers were living a rather hectic life. Paul urges them to calm down and allow Christ to control their life. They are also exhorted to “attend to their own business, to work with their own hands.” Some of them believed that because the Lord was coming soon, there was no need to work. Therefore they were depending on others to keep them.

v. 12 The injunctions of verse 11 must be carried out, that they might walk becomingly before the world. The final exhortation here is that if they work and are gainfully employed their needs would be met. The revelation of the rapture of the Church Problems associated with the Parousia. Ch 4:13 - 5:11. The first problem was concerning those who had fallen asleep. While among them Paul’s teaching had primarily been focused on the return of Christ. Time did not permit a full explanation of the doctrine of the resurrection of believers. In their waiting for the coming of the Lord, some of their loved ones died. The question then arose in their mind. Had their premature deaths caused them to lose all hope of sharing in the glorious reign of Christ. Paul’s answer to this problem is a reassuring affirmation that the dead will be raised when the Lord returns.

v. 13 The statement “I would not have you be ignorant” is used in Paul’s writings when he wishes to explain some new point. The subject is “those who are asleep.” The object of the metaphor is to suggest that the sleeper does not cease to exist while his body sleeps. Sleep is temporary; sleep has a waking—death will have its resurrection. In the light of this fact, any sorrow that a believer has over the loss of a loved one is unlike the hopeless despair which the heathen have.

v. 14 This hope, this confidence, this certainty is ours through the resurrection of Christ, because He has been resurrected and is coming again to rapture the church. God will bring with Him all those who sleep in Jesus.

v. 15 The following verses are the subject of a new revelation that was given to Paul by the Lord Himself. Those who are alive when the Lord comes will not have preference nor precedence over those who have fallen asleep.

v. 16 From this verse onward, Paul now begins to fill in the details of what will happen when the Lord comes. “The Lord ‘Himself’ shall descend from heaven.” There will be a shout. It is a word of command. It has the ring of authority and a note of urgency. This shout of the Lord will resound throughout the whole earth. Those who are asleep in Jesus will hear it and awake. The voice of the archangel—loud, commanding. The commands given by his voice may gather the raised ones in readiness to hear. The trump of God—the final blast on the silver trumpets of heaven. Keeping it in the military context, the signal to march or in this instance to depart the scene.

v. 17 The next step in the proceedings is that after the dead in Christ are raised, the living are changed and together we are “caught up” in clouds. We shall be reunited with our loved ones. Then we shall see the Lord and we shall be with Him forever.

v. 18 “Wherefore comfort one another with these words.” Notice that the word comfort, literally means “exhort.” “He that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself even as He is pure.”

1 Thessalonians Chapter 5

The day of the Lord was the subject of much Old Testament revelation. Many passages speak of it in various detail. Isaiah 2:12, 13:9-11; Joel 1:15; Amos 5:18; Zephaniah 1:14-16, 3:14. There are many others.

A study of the various scriptures shows that the Day of the Lord is both a time of judgment and blessing. At this time God deals with the world in judgment for its sin. It is the period of the great tribulation. It also extends into the time of blessing when the earth shall enjoy the personal reign of Christ during the Millennium. To put in succession the details of this Day, we learn that it extends from 2 Peter 3:10-13 and Revelation 4-21.

The period of the great tribulation

The second coming of Christ

The battle of Armageddon

The judgment of the nations

The judgment of God upon Israel

The millennial reign of the Savior

The final defeat of Satan

The second resurrection

The judgment of the great white throne

The destruction of the present heavens and earth

The establishing of the new heaven and earth

In verse 2 Paul is only discussing the coming of the Day of the Lord.

The word “but” in verse 1 indicates a contrast. The preceding subject was the rapture which involves the resurrection of the dead in Christ, the changing of the living in Christ, then the translation to glory. This was not the subject of O.T. revelation, it was a mystery. 1 Corinthians 15:51. They knew of the Day of the Lord. They knew of the times, i.e. the durations, and the seasons, i.e. the characteristics, of the Day of the Lord. They also knew that it would come as a thief in the night. The essential elements in this figure are the unexpectedness of the coming of the thief and the unpreparedness of those to whom he comes.

v. 3 The Day of the Lord will delude men. They will be saying, “Peace and safety,” when the Day overtakes them. At the very time when the world seems secure, sudden destruction comes upon them. Destruction is not annihilation, but utter hopeless ruin. Please note the phrase, “they shall not escape.” Another version puts it, “There will be no place to hide.” Revelation 6:15-17

The Message of the Day of the Lord

v. 4-5 The coming of the Day of the Lord is the great divider between the children of light and the children of darkness. In these verses, Paul expresses his confidence that the Thessalonians were children of the Light. It

behooves each of us to examine ourselves and be sure to which group he belongs. At this point notice the “them” and “they” in verses 3 and 7. And the “ye”, “we”, “us”, in verses 5, 6, 8, 9, and 10.

v. 6 In this verse there are two injunctions. Watch and be sober. It is the opposite of indifference which is the idea behind the word sleep. This is the characteristic of those who are morally of the night. Paul is urging them and us to be alert and steadfast at all times in view of the Lord’s return.

v. 7 This verse reminds us that those who are of the night do the opposite. They sleep and are drunk. Unredeemed man is completely indifferent to God.

v. 8 The believer being steadfast and on the alert brings to Paul’s mind the picture of a soldier on duty. So he mentions the Christian’s armor. Romans 13:2; Ephesians 6:11-17. The idea here is for the believers to “put on the armor and leave it on.” It is a once-for-all step. The breast plate consists of “faith and love.” The helmet is the “hope of salvation.” Once again we see the triad of Christian growth, faith, hope, and love.

v. 9 The helmet of salvation in the previous verse is the hope of the full realization of our salvation in the future. The assurance of this hope as expressed in this verse is that God has not appointed us to wrath, but to salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ. The wrath in question here is the wrath and anguish and tribulation associated with the Day of the Lord. The believer has been delivered from this.

v. 10-11 Our deliverance is based on the death of the Lord Jesus. The glorious fact is that whether we are awake (alive on earth) or asleep (dead as far as the body

is concerned) we are still with Him. In the light of these things we should be joyful, comforted, and we should strengthen each other in our faith.

v. 12-13 This practical section of the epistle now draws to a close with some miscellaneous instructions to the church. Those in fellowship are exhorted to know them who labored among them, and were over them in the Lord, and who had admonished them. This is an exhortation needed among us today. Paul said to the Thessalonians, know your leaders, esteem them, and be of peace. Paul also mentions the duties of the leaders. They labor, they preside, they admonish. Peace, harmony, and unity are important to the church's well-being.

v. 14 This verse may have a wider application than just to the elders. It could apply to the entire congregation. However, because of the context, they have a special reference to the elders. There are four things they have to do.

1. Warn the unruly. This may have a direct bearing on those who had given up their employment. Warn the idle. The warning was to get back into step, or into rank.

2. Comfort the feeble-minded. This should read "faint-hearted". Those who were discouraged because their loved ones had died before the Lord returned needed comfort and encouragement.

3. They were to support the weak. That is the weak spiritually. Some symptoms of spiritual weakness: Instability, Inability to face persecution, Yielding to the attacks of Satan. All of these elements were present in Thessalonica.

4. Be patient to all men. This literally means to be long-tempered, the opposite of short-tempered. Those in authority must be long-suffering.

v. 15 The injunctions here are general. Do not render evil for evil to any man. This attitude extends to the unsaved. Follow that which is good. This is to be our attitude among ourselves and spill over to the unbelievers. Even in the face of hostility, cruelty, hatred, they and we, must not retaliate vindictively.

v. 16 Rejoice evermore. This is a startling admonition when viewed in the light of their suffering. This brings us to realize that true joy does not depend on circumstances. The ground for lasting joy is found in eternal things. In the Lord, Phil. 3:1; In the gospel, Acts 13:48, John 4:36; In seeing fellow believers grow in the truth, 3 John 4.

v. 17 Pray without ceasing. Paul has used this phrase “without ceasing” twice of his own remembrance of the Thessalonians. Ch 1:3, 2:13. Now he urges this condition on the believers. Where we may not always be praying audibly, the believer who is praying without ceasing is always in the attitude of prayer.

v. 18 In everything give thanks, etc. This trilogy of admonitions concludes with the exhortation to be thankful in every circumstance. Ephesians 5:20; Philippians 4:6; Galatians 3:17 v. 19 Quench not the Spirit. The word quench is the word used for putting out a fire. The tense is present and since this is a command, it means stop quenching the Spirit. We must stop immediately what we are doing that quenches the Spirit. Wherever the gifts of the Spirit are being manifested, they must not be stifled.

v. 20 Despise not prophesying. There are two aspects of prophesying.

1. Forth telling. At Thessalonica this may have included admonitions to the believers because of their idleness. In their immaturity they needed to be corrected.

2. Foretelling. This no doubt involved messages concerning the second coming of Christ. Whatever the thrust of the aspect of their messages, they were not to be despised; they were to be heeded.

v. 21 Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Paul does not advocate an uncritical acceptance of everything that claims to be of the Spirit. He advocates the proving or testing of all ministry. The word “good” means genuine. In all ministry, the chaff must be sifted from the wheat.

v. 22 Abstain from all appearance of evil. This would cover every sphere of our life, spiritual and natural. Every appearance or visible form of evil is to be avoided by the Christian.

v. 23-24 In this verse Paul exhorts his readers to complete holiness on the basis of assured help from God. The word wholly is only found here in the New Testament. It is made up of two words, “complete”, and “end”. This gives us the idea of wholeness and completion. This is entire sanctification and it is the work of God. Paul prays in the latter part of the verse, that your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul here is praying that his readers will be sanctified now and will remain so until the coming of the Lord.

v. 25-26

1. Paul makes request for prayer for himself.
2. He sent his greetings in the familiar form of the holy kiss.
3. The epistle was to be read to all the holy brethren. The word charge really means “to bind with an oath.” He wanted to make certain that everyone knew what he had written.
4. Finally, Paul concludes the letter with a prayer for the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ to be with them.

The Church

On the day of Pentecost, the Church received power to evangelize the world.

It was given the dynamic power of the Holy Spirit.

In those days, when the gospel was preached, miracle-working power issued forth, resulting in conviction of sin, repentance toward God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

At this time some were empowered for special service.

All believers received power to witness.

The real power of the local church is not found in:

1. Modern buildings or unique methods of presenting the message.
2. Nor does this power come from the wealth of the congregation.
3. Nor does this power come from prominence or popularity.

The Laodicean church was the first bragging congregation.

They said: We are rich. God said: You are poor.

We are wealthy. You are wretched.

We do not need anything. You need everything.

We are busy in the church. You are miserable.

We have a vision. You are blind.

We are clothed in fine garments. You are naked.

We are satisfied. You make me sick.

You can always recognize a Holy Spirit empowered church. They have the power to evangelize. The members of the group share their faith with the lost and they are saved. When a church is not involved in winning souls, it grieves the Holy Spirit and is void of power. The Holy Spirit empowered church reproduces; it is indigenous, re-creative, procreative, and generative. Souls are born into the family of God through the imperishable seed of the Word of God. The Spirit-filled believer sows the seed. The Holy Spirit hovers over the seed, convicting and leading the lost to repentance.