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LESSON #1 - THE BIRTH OF A CHURCH

Acts 17:1-15

LESSON AIM

To acquaint the students with Paul's establishment of the church at Thessalonica and to encourage them to witness to others even when their efforts are resisted.

INTRODUCTION

Paul's second missionary journey brought him and Silas north of Antioch into Europe. They were accompanied by Luke and Timothy, the latter joining with them at Lystra (Acts 16:1). After the events at Philippi, they traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia until they came to Thessalonica, which was located about 100 miles from Philippi.

Originally called "Therma" because of the hot springs in the area, the city was renamed in 315 B.C. by Cassander after his wife. Thessalonica was one of the most important cities of its day. Being located on a major highway that tied the east and west together it was an ideal place to establish a church and spread the gospel.

I. PAUL'S PAST EXPERIENCE IN THESSALONICA (Acts 17:1-15)

A. His Arrival (Acts 17:1)

After leaving Philippi, Paul and his group passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia until they came to Thessalonica. These places surely needed the gospel also, but there is no mention of it being preached there. This shows that while the gospel is to be preached in the entire world (Acts 1:8), God has a specific place for each of His servants. It isn't enough to simply preach the gospel; we must serve in the place God has appointed for us (Acts 16:6-12).

Thessalonica was on a major highway and accessible by both land and sea. It was an ideal place for a church to be located.

B. His Approach (Acts 17:2-3)

1. It was customary.

Vs. 2 "as his manner was"

2. It was calculated.

Vs. 2 "Reasoned with them out of the scriptures"

The word "reasoned" indicates that he engaged in a debate, a formal argument. He evidently put forth certain propositions and refuted their rebuttals using the Old Testament as his text book.

3. It was Christ-centered – vs. 3

Using the Old Testament as his source, Paul taught them about Christ: His suffering, death and resurrection. The word “opening” means “explaining.” The word “alleging” means “to lay beside.” As he reasoned with them he laid out the scriptures in an orderly form showing them how they harmonized with one another and explained to them the true meaning.

C. His Audience (Acts 17:4)

Paul’s audience consisted of both Jews and Greeks. Some of the Jews believed, a great multitude of the Greeks believed, and more than a few of the chief women believed. By any standard, Paul’s efforts were a success. However, many were still not convinced of his message. This serves to remind us that, at best, we will only be partially successful in our efforts to reach others.

D. His Adversaries (Acts 17:5-13)

1. They were unbelievers
Vs. 5 “the Jews which believed not”
2. They were motivated by envy
Vs. 5 “moved with envy”
3. They were of the “baser sort” (vs. 5)
These are what some would call “the low-lives.”
4. They created an uproar, abused God’s people, and took a man by the name of Jason into custody (vs. 6-9).
5. They continued to harass the missionaries even after they moved to Berea (vs. 13). God’s servants have always had to face the forces of heathenism. Just as Paul faced opposition where ever he went, we can expect much of the same today.

II. PAUL’S PURPOSE FOR WRITING TO THE THESSALONIANS

After the unbelieving Jews stirred up trouble in Thessalonica and Berea, Paul journeyed on to Athens. While there he sent word for Timothy and Silas to rejoin him (Acts 17:15). They caught up with Paul at Corinth (Acts 18:1) and gave him a report of what was happening at the church in Thessalonica.

Paul wrote his first letter to this church about A.D. 50 or 51. Concerning the purpose of his writing, John L. Benson offered the following reasons:

1. “To commend the Thessalonians for their behavior in persecution --
2. -- to comfort them in suffering --
3. -- to confirm his own conduct and motives --

4. -- to correct erroneous doctrine --
5. -- to challenge them to chastity, industry and duty --
6. -- to caution them against social cliques --
7. -- to cement the bond of personal affection between them and him."

LESSON #2 - A MODEL CHURCH

I Thessalonians 1:1-10

LESSON AIM

To show how salvation manifests itself in a person's character.

INTRODUCTION

How would you define the ideal church? Paul gives us the answer to that question in these verses. Here we see him commending the church at Thessalonica for its faithfulness and progress. Paul believed that it was proper to give "a pat on the back" when it was deserved. We ought to do the same. Amid all the complaining in our world today, it is refreshing to be around people who have the attitude Paul had.

I. THE GREETINGS FROM PAUL (I Thessalonians 1:1)

A. From Paul, Silvanus, and Timotheus

While Paul wrote the letter, he included the names of Silas and Timothy who had also ministered among the Thessalonians. This was an act of courtesy on Paul's part, but it was prompted by the Holy Spirit who directed Paul to write the letter. To be sure, the Holy Spirit would never lead us to be unthoughtful and rude.

B. To the church of the Thessalonians

The Greek word translated "church" is "ekklesia" which means "a called-out assembly." Paul was writing to a local, visible assembly of born-again, baptized believers who had been organized for the purpose of carrying out the Great Commission.

C. With a prayer for grace and peace

By "grace" he means more than the initial act of God that brought them salvation. It is a request that they continue to receive the gifts of God's blessings.

The word "peace" describes Paul's desire that, amid harassment and persecution, they find rest and tranquility. Salvation put them at peace with God (Romans 5:1) but as Christians they needed the "peace of God" to cope with the ever increasing problems they faced (Philippians 4:17). Again he reminds them of "God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ." This not only describes the place of their position, it also describes the source of their provisions.

"The title that Paul gives to Jesus is breathtaking. He is Lord, Jesus and Christ. 'Lord' is the Greek equivalent of the Old Testament when Paul, who was a Jew of the Jews, called Jesus 'Lord' he was ascribing to him all of the characteristics of God. Jesus is God. Everything that God is, Jesus is.

Then he is called 'Jesus,' his human name, meaning 'Savior.' He is called 'Jesus' because he will save his people from their sins (Matthew 1:21).

The name 'Christ' is the Greek word for Messiah. He is given this official title as the One who is the mediator between God and men. He is the One that God promised would come." (James T. Draper, Jr.)

II. THE GRATITUDE OF PAUL (I Thessalonians 1:2-4)

A. He Praised them (1:2).

Vs. 2 "We give thanks to God always for you all --."

This expression of gratitude was a means of praising them. That, no doubt, was a great encouragement to them.

B. He Prayed for them (1:2).

Vs. 2 "... making mention of you in our prayers."

The importance of a church's ministry should cause us to pray. No church can prosper or survive very long without prayer.

C. He pointed out their good qualities (1:3).

1. "work of faith"

Faith without works is dead (James 2:17-18). True faith is active. Works prove that faith is real. These folks had placed their confidence in God and were convinced that He would bless their efforts.

2. "labour of love"

While the word "work" simply speaks of the expenditure of energy, the word "labour" is much stronger. It speaks of strenuous toil, even to the point of exhaustion. They did this because they were motivated by love. The Greek word translated "love" is "agape." It is the same word that is used in John 3:16 which speaks of God's love which prompted Him to give His Son for our sins. Real love causes a person to sacrifice to meet the needs of others.

3. "patience of hope"

This is more than a morbid, passive endurance of a situation. It is a patience of hope which means that they remained steadfast with an energetic spirit of expectance.

NOTE: This seems to be the standard by which Paul measured a church (see Colossians 1:4-5). These same three things are mentioned in I Corinthians 13 where they are identified as the best gifts. Without faith, hope, and love a church is nothing more than a glorified social club and its message is as sounding brass and a tinkling symbol.

D. He Proclaimed his confidence in them (1:4).

Here Paul expresses his belief that they were truly saved. Their conduct convinced him that they were the elect of God and consequently his beloved brethren. He uses the word "brethren" or "brother" 19 times in this letter. He does so to indicate that they were all part of the same spiritual family.

III. THE GUIDANCE OF PAUL (I Thessalonians 1:5-6)

A. He Guided them unto Salvation (1:5).

Whatever else we preach it is all in vain unless the gospel be proclaimed and believed. The preaching of the cross should be central to all we do.

In this verse Paul tells them that the gospel had been demonstrated as well as declared. The evidence of God's power in the life of His messengers made the truth of the gospel believable. That's still true today.

B. He Guided them unto Service (1:6).

The word "followers" indicated that they imitated the example of Paul and his co-workers. Notice the order – Paul says, "Ye became followers of us," then he adds "and of the Lord." This reminds us that people don't see God first. They first see the person who brings them the gospel.

Next Paul says that they "received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost." One writer said, "This is a beautiful picture of receiving something with delight, latching on to it hungrily and happily. They received the word 'in spite of trials and sorrow.' These new converts had to break away from pagan religions. Some of them had to leave the Jewish synagogue. They received a great deal of condemnation – It wasn't just mild opposition they faced, but tremendous strain." (James T. Draper)

This serves to remind us that regardless of the problems we face, the Holy Spirit produces joy in the heart of those who are surrendered to God (Galatians 5:22).

IV. THE GREATNESS OF THE CHURCH (I Thessalonians 1:7-10)

While this church wasn't perfect, it was an example for others. It could be called a model church. Let's notice what made it so outstanding.

A. They Reflected Christian Virtues (1:7).

This church was so impressive that Paul says "ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia." Wouldn't it be wonderful if that could be said about every church?

B. They Realized Their Responsibility to Evangelize (1:8).

The phrase "sounded out" means to reverberate or thunder forth. Paul didn't need to tell anyone about the progress of the work there. They were well known for their evangelistic efforts. What better reputation could a church have?

C. They Resolved to Serve God (1:9).

The fact that they "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God" was evidence

that they had truly been saved. These people were doers of the Word and not hearers only. That's the way it should be.

D. They Regarded the Coming of Christ as a Reality (1:10).

This is important for any church. The church that doesn't live in the expectance of the Lord's return will grow slothful, selfish, and stubborn.

LESSON #3 - BUILDING BELIEVERS

I Thessalonians 2:1-12

LESSON AIM

To show the importance of helping new believers in their spiritual development.

INTRODUCTION

In these verses Paul speaks of his conduct while among them. Evidently certain men had attacked his character and the motive of his ministry. Fearing that this propaganda, along with the persecution, might discourage them, he reminded them of his life.

It is important that we confirm our love for others, especially when it is suspect, and that's what Paul does here. In speaking of his manner and service among them, he uses three examples: a steward, a nurse, and a father.

I. A DEDICATED STEWARD (I Thessalonians 2:1-6)

A. His Trials (2:1-2)

It's never easy being a servant, especially when our service is of a spiritual nature. We must expect trials and be willing to "endure hardness" (2 Timothy 2:3).

In these verses Paul refutes the charges against him by appealing to their experience with him. He had been willing to undergo all sorts of hardships to bring them the gospel. He would not have done that had he been self-seeking.

Paul reminds them that his labor had not been "in vain." Both his faithfulness and his fruitfulness served as a testimony that he was a man who could be trusted.

B. His Trust (2:3-4)

The ministry was not something that Paul had assumed, but a work that he had received from the Lord. As a good steward it was his job to properly manage the affairs of his Master. Paul pictured the gospel as a treasure that he had been entrusted with. And, as a faithful servant, Paul assures them that he had not used "deceit," "uncleanness" (moral impurity), or "guile" (trickery). He served only to please God "which trieth our hearts." Paul knew that he would be accountable to his master for the way he served (see Luke 16:1-2) and that thought prompted him to be true and faithful.

C. His Truthfulness (2:5-6)

1. His Methods (2:5)

Paul assures them that he did not use “flattering words” to entice them, nor a “cloak of covetousness.” Contrary to those who use the ministry to meet their own desires, and resort to almost any means to get what they want, Paul was honest and willing to do without to meet the needs of others.

2. His Motive (2:6)

Paul wasn't in the ministry for gold or glory, fortune or fame. His only desire was to glorify God. He proved this by the fact that he made no appeal for funds. He was interested in them, not their money.

II. A DEPENDABLE NURSE (2:7-9)

This is a precious picture. Here Paul likens his relationship with the Thessalonians to that of a nurse with her child. Notice that the children are called “her children.” A nurse who cares for other children would be kind and careful out of a sense of duty, as a servant. But think about how much more she would do with her own children. Paul wanted them to see that his service to them was more than a compulsion of duty; it was an expression of his love.

A nursing mother has a tremendous responsibility. The life of her children is in her hands. That's the way Paul felt toward his converts. The word “cherish” means “to warm.” It is used to describe the manner in which a bird covers her young (see Deuteronomy 22:6). Because the Thessalonians were “dear” unto Paul he treated them with gentleness and, just as the mother gives of herself to meet the needs of her child, he “imparted” unto them his very self.

III. A DEVOTED FATHER (I Thessalonians 2:10-12)

When you think of a steward you think of faithfulness. When you think of motherhood you think of gentleness. But when we think of a father, we think of labor and leadership. As with the Corinthians (I Corinthians 4:15) Paul felt as a spiritual father to the saints in Thessalonica. They had been “born-again” under his ministry and he felt responsible to care for their needs.

A. His Concern (2:9)

Just as the father labors to meet the needs of his children, Paul was willing to “labour and travail – night and day” – for their sakes. He did this as a tent-maker. Rather than ask new converts for financial aid, Paul worked as much as was necessary to support himself.

Every church has a responsibility to support those who minister the gospel, but no minister has the right to insist on payment before he will preach. Like a father (2 Corinthians 12:14), Paul's main concern was for their needs, not his own.

B. His Conduct (2:10)

Here Paul uses three words to describe his conduct:

1. “holily”

As a servant separated unto the service of God, Paul was holy, patterning his moral behavior after the One he served.

2. “justly”

This word indicates that his conduct was in conformity to God’s perfect standard.

3. “unblameably”

This indicates that others were not able to honestly find fault with him. In other words, they couldn’t bring any indictable charges against him. That should be true of all Christians.

C. His Charge (2:11-12)

Paul says he “charges” them “as a father doth his children.” The word “charges” means “testified.” As any good parent would know, Paul knew how important it was to instruct “his children.” From his own knowledge and experiences he shared with them important information that was beneficial to their welfare.

The word “exhorted” comes from the root word used to describe the Holy Spirit. It means “to call one alongside, to share, console, or lift up.” Then Paul uses another word that is translated “comforted” which basically means the same thing. He seems to be saying “we came to comfort you and did.”

The reason for this was that they would “walk worthy of God.” This is the thing that delights the heart of a loving father or a faithful pastor (2 John 4). Just as a little child must learn to walk, babes in Christ must be taught and encouraged to live a holy life (see Ephesians 4:1; Colossians 1:10, Philippians 1:27).

LESSON #4 - STRUGGLING SAINTS

I Thessalonians 2:13-20

LESSON AIM

To show that spiritual progress must be made in the face of opposition and to encourage students to remain faithful unto the end.

INTRODUCTION

In our last lesson Paul spoke about his concern for the Thessalonians. Now he speaks about their difficulties and his desire to be with them.

I. THE RECEPTION OF THE WORD (I Thessalonians 2:13-14a)

Paul's heart was overwhelmed with thankfulness because they had received his message as the word of God. In vs. 13 we find the word "receive" twice, but in the Greek they are two different words. The first means "to hear" and refers to an objective receiving of information. The second means "to welcome," to receive with delight and joy. One writer explained it like this: "They heard it with their ears and responded with their hearts." That's good! That's the way the gospel must be received. It first comes to us objectively, as an objective revelation about Christ. But the word of God doesn't change our lives until it becomes subjective, until it becomes personal to us and we receive it with all of our heart.

This is crucial. Spiritual conversion is not mere mental assent to the correctness of God's Word. It is the consent to the rule of Christ in our hearts.

After expressing his gratitude that they had received the Word of God, Paul makes mention of the effect. He says, "For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God." Their conduct manifested the fact that they had truly received the Word. This is just the opposite of those mentioned in Titus 1:16. (See James 2:14-26)

II. THE RESISTANCE OF THE WAY (I Thessalonians 2:14b-18)

In Acts 9:2 Christianity is described "this way." In Acts 18:24-26 we're told that Aquila and Priscilla instructed Apollos in "the way of God." In Acts 19:9 we read that certain unbelievers "were hardened, and believed not, but spoke evil of the way." Then in Acts 24:14 Paul points out "the way" was called heresy by the Jews. Now in our text we see that the way of God provoked the wrath of believers.

A. The Thessalonians were persecuted (2:14b)

In vs. 6 of this chapter one Paul said that they “received the word in much affliction.” Now he speaks of their suffering. Just as the churches in Judaea had been persecuted so were the Thessalonians. The good news is that the word had not been stopped. In spite of the fierce opposition they remained steadfast in their service to God.

A person’s attitude toward persecution reveals a great deal about his sincerity. In His parable of the sower Jesus spoke about the seed that is sown on stony ground. Jesus said, “And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness; And have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word’s sake, immediately they are offended” (Mark 4:16-17).

The fact that the Thessalonians had remained steadfast was a testimony as to the reality of their faith in God. They refused to quit when the going got tough.

B. Christ was crucified (2:15).

In his book “The Prospect of Glory,” John L. Benson writes: “For its severity, Paul’s scathing indictment against the Jews (vs. 14-16) is second only to the denunciations of Christ. The Roman Catholic Church, in 1969, exonerated the Jews from murdering Christ, but Paul emphatically charged them with that terrible deed (vs. 16). This is neither racism nor anti-Semitism; it is the cold, hard fact of history. They killed the Lord Jesus, slaughtered their own prophets, and endeavored to destroy whoever trusted Jesus as their Lord and Messiah.”

The persecution of the saints in Thessalonica was a fulfillment of our Lord’s warning recorded in John 15:18-25. Jesus wanted us to know that we can expect persecution. Paul spoke from experience when he said to Timothy, “yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12).

C. Paul was hindered (2:16-18).

It was the desire of Paul’s heart to return to Thessalonica, but he was “hindered” by Satan. The word translated “hindered” means “to cut up.” It was used in reference to the cutting up of a highway so as to put obstacles and a road block in a person’s way to keep him from reaching his destination. That’s what Satan does in a spiritual sense.

Paul realized that “there are many adversaries” (Acts 16:9) seeking to hinder our spiritual progress. Every step we take as servants of God will be against the forces of opposition.

III. THE REWARD OF THE WORK (I Thessalonians 2:19-20)

Paul wanted to see these faithful converts again but his efforts had been thwarted. However, he reminds them that the coming of Christ will bring about a glorious reunion and that would be reward enough for him. He tells them that they were his hope and crown of rejoicing. We need to think about this in the context of our own lives. Those we have led to the Lord will be a source of external rejoicing for us. That’s quite a reward!

There's another great lesson here for us. Instead of allowing his disappointments to discourage him, Paul took heart in the fact that the coming of Christ will make all things right for His servants. We need to remember that! It always helps to look at life from the perspective of eternity. Only by doing that can we see things as they really are and defeat the disappointments that would otherwise destroy us.

LESSON #5 - STABILIZING THE SAINTS

I Thessalonians 3:1-13

LESSON AIM

To help our students lead a steadfast life of separation and service. That's simple to say and hard to do.

INTRODUCTION

Anyone who has been saved very long has noticed that, for whatever reason, many professing Christians don't continue on in the faith. The dropout rate is alarming! We ought to be concerned about it.

In this chapter Paul shows his concern for the converts in Thessalonica. His desire is for them to be established so as to continue standing fast in the Lord.

I. PAUL'S PLAN (I Thessalonians 3:1-5)

The opening word "Wherefore" turns our attention back to Paul's remarks in chapter two. There we learned that Paul's friends in Thessalonica were in trouble and he had a burning desire to be with them. The suspense of not knowing about their welfare was almost more than he could bear. He had planned for a return visit but had been hindered by Satan from making the trip. Paul, therefore, devised a plan whereby Timothy was sent to them in his stead.

This meant that Paul would be left alone at Athens. It's obvious that Paul wasn't trying to make things easier for himself, as we sometimes do. To lose the companionship of such a capable associate was no small matter. Yet Paul was willing to make the sacrifice for the sake of his friends.

Timothy's mission was "to establish, and to comfort" (vs. 2) the Thessalonians. Paul had warned them concerning afflictions that were sure to come (vs. 4), but he knew that alone wouldn't lessen the pain. They needed someone to assist them. They were young converts who needed to be encouraged. For that job Paul turned to Timothy because he was confident that he would get the job done.

II. PAUL'S PRAISE (I Thessalonians 3:6-10)

When Timothy returned to Paul his report became the springboard for Paul's letter. Timothy brought "good tidings" of their "faith and charity" (vs. 6). This comforted Paul's heart (vs. 7, 9). To see these young converts living victorious amid persecution greatly encouraged the rugged warrior Paul who had been through so many battles himself.

Their steadfastness was a fulfillment of life for Paul. He said, “For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord” (vs. 8). It seems that his anxiety for them had been sort of a living death, draining him of energy. Timothy’s good report was like an infusion of life. This caused the tenderhearted apostle to burst forth in praise, yet he knew not how to put his feelings into words (vs. 9). Then he assures them of his prayers that God would complete His work in them (vs. 10).

You can’t read Paul’s writings without being impressed with his zeal and compassion. He was excited about serving God and he was concerned about the welfare of the Lord’s church. That explains his great success. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if we all had that same attitude?

III. PAUL’S PRAYER (I Thessalonians 3:11-13)

Now Paul’s promise gives way to performance. He said he would pray for them and he does. Here he allows them to listen as he prays. It’s nice when someone insures you of their prayers, but it is even more wonderful when you hear them actually praying for you.

A. He Prays for Reunion (8:11)

This no doubt, was very meaningful to the saints at Thessalonica. People everywhere want to feel wanted. When you love someone their presence is precious. Paul’s desire was to be with these people and he let them know how he felt.

B. He Prays for Renewal (3:12-13)

1. That their love would increase (3:12)

This is interesting. He had already commended them for their love and faith (vs. 6), but he realized that they were yet imperfect and he prays that they might continue to develop. We too need to realize that as long as we are in these earthly bodies there is room for growth to love, faith, etc.

2. That they would be established in holiness (3:13).

As faithful as they were they needed to understand that sanctification is a continuous process, completed only when we received our glorified bodies. Only as we are progressing spiritually can we be unblameable. In this life there is no place for us to rest on our laurels. We are to go “from glory to glory” (2 Corinthians 3:10). A smug spirit of complacency has destroyed the usefulness of multitudes. Paul didn’t want that to happen to them.

J.C. Ryle wrote: *“Another mark of ‘growth in grace’ is increased holiness of life and conversation. The man whose soul is ‘growing’ gets more dominion over sin, the world, and the devil every year. He becomes more careful about his temper, his words, and his actions. He is more watchful over his conduct in every relation of life. He strives more to be conformed to the image of Christ in all things, and to follow Him as his example as well as to trust in Him as Savior. He is not content with old attainments and former grace.”*

That's what Paul wanted for his friends in Thessalonica. He knew that there were greater heights to climb, more battles to win, more work to do, and more blessings to claim. For this he was willing to pray "Night and day" (vs. 10) for them.

LESSON #6 - CHRISTIAN CONDUCT

I Thessalonians 4:1-12

LESSON AIM

To show what God expects from a Christian, that we should be controlled to love rather than lust.

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever heard someone say, “But times have changed?” Of course, we all have. And it’s true. Times have changed Man’s ideas and opinions are much different than our forefathers’. Young people today are taught situation ethics by those who believe that moral standards are relative and that there is no such thing as absolute truth.

But God’s Word never changes! That’s what we need to remember. His standards are ever the same. In every age the heathen have indulged themselves in lewd living. This immorality was common in Paul’s day and he makes it clear in these verses that believers are forbidden to participate in sin.

I. THE CONTROL OF LUST (I Thessalonians 4:1-8)

The opening words, “Furthermore then,” introduce a new section of the letter. In the last verse of chapter three he spoke about God’s eternal purpose to establish the saints “unblameable in holiness.” Now he shows how our lives should be conforming to that divine ideal.

What Paul says is more than a request. There are commands from God. They also come in the form of a plea from Paul who speaks to them as a dear friend. The words “beseech” and “exhort” implies that Paul was literally begging them to obey God.

A. His Call (4:1-2)

Here he reminds them of his exhortation and example. They were to walk after the example they had received from Paul and his co-workers, so as “to please God.” This would cause them to “abound more and more.” These “commandments” (vs. 2) were imperatives handed down by God Himself. They were moral principles that “ought” (vs. 1) to be kept.

B. His Counsel (4:3-8)

1. Abstain from fornication (4:3)

The Greek word translated “fornication” is “porneia,” from which we get the word “pornography.” It refers to sexual impurity of any kind (pre-marital, extra-marital, or homosexuality). Regardless of what modern man says, “this is the will of God,” and His will should be the determining factor in every decision we make. If we disregard God’s will it leaves us without any sure standard of right and wrong. That’s where our society is today.

2. Exercise self-control (4:4-5)

The word “concupiscence” (vs. 5) means “a longing (especially for what is forbidden), desire, lust.” Traditionally this had been the practice of “the Gentiles which know not God.” Their philosophy is, “If it feels good, do it.” That should never be the case with Christians.

When a person has been saved his body belongs to God. It becomes a vessel to be set-apart (sanctified) wholly for the Master’s use (see I Corinthians 6:19-20; 2 Timothy 2:20-21; Romans 12:1-2). What we need to realize is that the only way to “self-control” is to give God control. Galatians 5:16-25 describes what happens when we do so.

3. Consider the effects of your actions (4:6-8).

Having instructed them as to their responsibilities he now sets forth his reasons for the restriction.

First, he tells us it is an injustice to others; he defrauds his fellow man (vs. 5-6). If we had no other reason to follow the standards set forth in the Bible this should be reason enough. God’s will is not only right, it is best. If we hope to have social order and happiness we must return to the God-given principles of right and wrong.

Secondly, Paul tells us that sin is an offense to God who “is the avenger of all such” (vs. 6). Hebrews 13:4 says, “Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.” Some people evidently don’t believe this, but it is true nonetheless.

In the next two verses Paul proceeds to show us the seriousness of this matter. This is a message we need to get. In vs. 7 he tells us, as believers, we are “called --- unto holiness.” Then he tells us in vs. 8 that the person who violates these commandments despises God. In other words, your actions are a reflection of your attitude toward God. Those who disobey God despise God. Those who love God obey Him (John 14:21, 23). For them, His commandments “are not grievous” (I John 5:3).

II. THE CONDUCT OF LOVE (I Thessalonians 4:9-12)

A. Love Should Be Abounding (4:9-10)

Paul had commended them for their love toward one another (1:3, 3:16), but he continues to urge them on that their love might “increase more and more.” Although they had been a model for other churches, Paul realized the danger of their love becoming stagnated. That would be disastrous!

Love is the chief characteristic of a Christian (John 13:34-35; I John 3:14; 4:7-8). Without love we are “as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal” (I Corinthians 13:1). When a person is saved he receives the capacity to love, but it must be cultivated if it is to grow.

B. Love Should Be Ambitious (4:11-12)

The word “study” (vs.11) means “endeavor, labor, be diligent.” Paul is saying that they should strive to do the following:

1. “to be quiet” (4:11)

This speaks of living in tranquility. He wanted them to have a calm and quiet temper, to be peaceable rather than contentious.

2. “to do your own business” (4:11)

Do your own job. Don’t meddle in the affairs of others!

3. “to work with your own hands (4:11)

We are not excused from duty just because we are a child of God. We are to be diligent in our work, whatever it is.

4. “walk honestly toward them that are without” (4:12)

If we are going to win others to Christ this is crucial! John L Benson wrote these insightful words:

“The kind of love which Paul mentioned shows no interest in calling attention to self. It has no desire for emulation or personal distinctions. Rather, it strenuously seeks to work unnoticed (vs. 11). It is ambitious to be unambitious. Besides that, Christian love will safeguard us from becoming meddlesome. It books no interference in the neighbors’ affairs. Love for our fellow Christian cuts down undue curiosity over his business. In addition, love solves the problem of laziness and inconsideration. Christians who love their neighbors do not impose upon them. When the Lord comes, the best thing Christians can be doing is to be occupied in the daily round of work, providing the necessities of life for their families and themselves.”

LESSON #7 - THE RAPTURE

I Thessalonians 4:13-18

LESSON AIM

To show the glorious hope that we have as believers in Christ.

INTRODUCTION

“During Paul’s visit to Thessalonica he had instructed the believers there in the truth of the Lord’s imminent return and the ensuing millennial reign. The townspeople in general misunderstood Paul’s doctrine of the kingdom and charged him with allegiance to King Jesus rather than to Caesar. The Christians were also deficient in their understanding of kingdom truth. They daily anticipated the arrival of Christ and the subsequent inauguration of the promised kingdom. Meanwhile, some of their number had died, and the survivors were distraught that their departed loved ones had missed the event of the Lord’s return and its aftermath. They feared that the deceased would have to forfeit participation in the kingdom reign.

This confusion on the part of the Thessalonians prompted Paul to discuss the subject of the Lord’s return in greater detail than he had done previously.” (John L. Benson)

I. THE PROMISE OF THE RAPTURE

A. Paul Declares his Concern (4:13a)

The phrase “I would not have you to be ignorant” is used frequently by Paul (see Romans 1:13; 11:25; I Corinthians 10:1, 12:1, 2 Corinthians 1:8). Unlike the religious hucksters today, Paul had a genuine concern for people. He didn’t want them to be in the dark about spiritual truth. He wanted them to be well-informed.

He speaks here “concerning them which are asleep” and they knew exactly what he meant. The word “sleep” is used in the Bible to refer to the death of believers (John 11:11-13; I Corinthians 7:39; 2 Peter 3:4). It is a metaphor used to show that the deceased do not cease to exist. This has no reference to what some call “soul sleep.” The soul doesn’t sleep. The Bible defines physical death as the body being “without the spirit” (James 2:26). When the soul of the believer leaves the body it goes to be “with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8). In vs. 14 Paul says, “them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him.” He couldn’t bring them with Him unless they are with Him. Every Christian who has ever died is now with the Lord and they shall accompany Christ when He returns.

B. Paul Draws a Contrast (4:13b)

He says, “---sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.” What a horrible thought – “no hope!” No wonder they sorrow. In Ephesians 2:12 Paul says of unbelievers that they “were without Christ, being aliens from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.” That is a terrible condition to be in. Death dashes into pieces the vain hopes and

dreams of those who know not Christ as their Lord and Savior. They have no hope of ever being reunited with their loved ones.

C. Paul Describes the Condition (4:14)

Here we see the grounds of our hope – “For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again.” Notice, he says nothing about baptism, church membership or good works. It is simply through believing the gospel that we become partakers of what God offers. Those believers who have died will come with Jesus when He returns to receive His people.

D. Paul Discusses his Confidence (4:15)

Paul’s information wasn’t based on his personal views or the teaching of others, but on “the word of the Lord.” The promise of God’s Word is that “we (believers) which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent (precede) them which are asleep (dead).” According to this, those who are alive when Christ comes will not have any advantage over those who have already died. Those who have died will rise first which shows that they will not miss out on the glory of His coming.

Warren Wiersbe wrote:

“How can mortal man penetrate beyond the grave and find assurance and peace for his own heart? From Old Testament days till the present, mankind has tried to solve the riddle of death and the afterlife. Spiritists have tried to communicate with those who have gone beyond.

In our modern world, scientists have investigated the experiences of people who claimed to have died and returned to life again. They have also studied occult phenomena, hoping to find a clue to the mystery of life after death.

Paul solved the problem when he wrote, ‘For this we say unto you by the Word of the Lord’ (vs. 4:15). We Christians need not wonder about death and life after death, for we have a revelation from God in the Word.”

II. THE PICTURE OF THE RAPTURE (I Thessalonians 4:16-17)

A. The Savior shall Descend (4:16a)

Paul says, “For the Lord himself shall descent from heaven.” This is exactly what He promised in John 14:1-3 and what the heavenly messengers predicted in Acts 1:9-11. His return is the believer’s blessed hope (Titus 2:13).

1. “with a shout”

The same One who “cried with a loud voice, Lazarus come forth” (John 11:43) shall one day give the command and “all that are in the graves shall hear his voice” (John 5:28).

2. “with the voice of the archangel.”

Since Michael is the only archangel called by name in the Bible, although there seems to be others (Daniel 10:13), we presume that it is he who is mentioned here.

3. “with the trump of God” (see I Corinthians 15:51-52)

The Jews used trumpets to call people to war, to worship, and to gather for a journey. It was an instrument used for making announcements. Someday it will announce that glorious event that God’s people have been waiting for throughout the centuries, the return of Jesus Christ and our gathering together unto Him.

B. The Saints shall Ascend (4:16b-17)

Notice carefully each phrase:

1. “the dead in Christ shall rise first” (vs. 16)

This resurrection doesn’t involve everyone. Only those who are “in Christ” will be resurrected at this time. It is a resurrection of the redeemed.

2. “Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up...” (vs. 17).

This speaks of Christians who are living when Christ returns. While the word “rapture” isn’t used in the Bible, its meaning is clearly conveyed in the phrase “caught up,” meaning “to snatch suddenly, to seize, or claim.”

3. “together with them in the clouds” (vs. 17)

The word “them” refers to the “dead in Christ” who shall rise first. At that time we who are saved will be reunited with our saved loved ones who have died. Remember – God’s people never meet for the last time!

4. “to meet the Lord in the air”

In reference to this event there is no mention of Christ coming to earth, so as to touch it. His return to the earth occurs at the end of the tribulation, seven years later, when He comes with His saints to establish His kingdom on earth. At the rapture He comes in the clouds and we are caught up to meet Him “in the air.”

5. “and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (vs. 17)

In John 14:1-3 Jesus said he was going to the “Father’s house” to prepare a place for us and that He would come again to “receive” us, that where He is (in the Father’s house) there we would be also. What a day that will be!

III. THE PRODUCT OF THE RAPTURE (I Thessalonians 4:18)

While the thought of our Lord’s coming causes some to quake with fear, it should be of great consolation to those who are saved. We have no reason to fear.

The fact that Paul says they should be comforted by these words is evidence that believers will not go through the tribulation period. If that were the case there would be no comfort in the thought of being alive when Christ comes. It would be better to die than to endure the awful horrors of the tribulation.

LESSON #8 - THE DAY OF THE LORD

I Thessalonians 5:1-11

LESSON AIM

To show that the coming day of the Lord is certain and will be sudden. Also to show what affect this event should have on us.

INTRODUCTION

The end of chapter four and the beginning of chapter five are closely related. Chapter four closed with Paul speaking about the rapture. Chapter five speaks of the destruction that follows. The same event that brings deliverance for the believer brings devastation to the unbelievers.

I. A PICTURE OF DESTRUCTION (I Thessalonians 5:1-3)

This section deals with the event called “the day of the Lord.” While the word day generally refers to a 24 hour period it is also used in reference to events of greater duration. An example of this is found in Genesis 2:4 where the entire creation week is called a day.

The day of the Lord is mentioned several times in the Old Testament (see Isaiah 2:12; 13:9-11; Joel 1:5; Amos 5:18; Zephaniah 1:14-16; 3:14). It speaks of the tribulation period during which time God will pour out His wrath upon the nations. This day begins after the rapture of the saints.

Our text tells us three things about this event:

A. It was previously announced (5:1-2)

In addition to the Old Testament prophecies, when asked about the coming kingdom Jesus said, “It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power” (Acts 1:7). He is simply telling them that they had already received all the information they needed concerning His return. They knew that He would come “as a thief in the night” and they were to daily anticipate the possibility of His coming at any time. This information was common knowledge among the disciples, so much so that Paul could say – “ye have no need that I write unto you” (vs. 1). “For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night” (vs. 2).

We too are without excuse. The Bible gives us an abundance of information.

B. It will come while people are deceived (5:3).

Here Paul tells us destruction will come when “they shall say, Peace and safety.” The word “they,” in contrast to the world “you,” refers to unbelievers. Disregarding the many warnings of the Bible that judgment is approaching, they will be expressing their belief that they are living in a time of “Peace and safety.” The Anti-Christ will make great promises and lull people

into a false sense of security. Not foreseeing the danger people will keep doing business as usual. It will be the same as it was during the days of Noah and Lot (see Matthew 24:37-39; Luke 17:26-30).

C. It will be a time of destruction (5:3).

In their state of deception they will suddenly be overtaken by anguish (travail) and none shall escape. How bad will it be? Jesus said, "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no nor ever shall be" (Matthew 24:31). In other words, it will be as bad as it gets, worse than anything ever seen.

II. A PROMISE OF DELIVERANCE (I Thessalonians 5:4-11)

Here we see a series of contrasts between "ye" and "they," "us" and "them," light and darkness, sleep and wakefulness, drunkenness and sobriety, destruction and salvation. It is apparent that it isn't God's plan for believers to be left to go through the tribulation. Just as Enoch was taken out before the flood, believers will be raptured before the tribulation – "for God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ" (vs. 9).

Now let's consider how the reality of this event should affect us. It should cause us:

A. To Live Expectantly (5:4-6)

Unlike those who live in darkness we are "children of the day" and should be prepared for the coming of Christ. We have the light of Scriptures to illuminate our mind. There is no reason for us to be deceived. We are told clearly that Jesus could come at any time. We aren't looking for signs. We're looking for the Savior! (see Matthew 24:42-44)

B. To be sober minded (5:6b-8).

While others sleep and are drunken we are called to be sober. The word translated "sober" implies that our life is under control, sane, or alert (see I Timothy 3:2, 11; Titus 1:8; 2:2; I Peter 1:13; 4:7). Sadly this is not what we see today. Most people live as though Christ will never come and as if they will never have to give an account of themselves to God. They are wrong on both counts. Christ will come, perhaps at any moment, and every person must stand before Christ to be judged.

C. To put on our spiritual armor (5:8).

Although the list here isn't as extensive as the one given in Ephesians 6:10-18 there is enough to remind us that we can't face the difficulties of life in our strength. We need the armor of God if we are to succeed. Notice what is mentioned in our text.

1. Breastplate of faith and love.

This speaks of protection for the heart which is vital to a life well lived (see Proverbs 4:23). In ancient times people associated the various organs of the body with a person's

innermost feelings or emotions. That's why the Bible speaks so often of the heart, the bowels and the reins (kidneys). These are associated with our emotions, affections, desires, etc. Faith and love protects us from being led astray by our feelings and desires.

2. Helmet – hope of salvation.

The helmet protects the head where we think. This doesn't mean that we merely hope we are saved in the sense of wishing. Believers are confident that God has saved them. This phrase speaks of the hope that salvation brings. This gives us peace of mind during troublesome times and we need that.

We are in a spiritual warfare and if anything requires clear thinking it's warfare. Satan tries to deceive, distract, discourage and destroy us. We often face hardships that stretch us to our limit. The hope of salvation helps us put everything in its proper perspective.

It gives us assurance that –

- Our labor is not in vain.
- Our trials have meaning and purpose.
- Our troubles will come to an end.
- Good will triumph over evil.
- The devil will finally and forever be defeated.
- King Jesus will rule and reign.

D. To minister to others (5:11)

It is a sad fact that many people seemingly do not realize their purpose for assembling together. Far too many people attend church thinking only in terms of what they can get, rather than what they should give.

Our text tells us that we are to encourage (“comfort”) and build up (“edify”) one another. Hebrews 10:24 says, “And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works.” Do that and you will “get more out of church” than you ever imagined.

LESSON #9 - DUTIES FOR DISCIPLES

I Thessalonians 5:12-28

LESSON AIM

To show what things are necessary for a church to function properly and to encourage class members to do their part.

INTRODUCTION

Paul is writing to this church for the purpose of aiding them in their spiritual development. In these verses he shows us what it takes for a church to be healthy and happy.

I. PAUL'S COUNSEL CONCERNING RESPECT FOR LEADERSHIP

(I Thess.5:12-13)

No organization can operate properly without order, and order is impossible without leadership. From the beginning God established orders of authority: parents over children, husbands over wives, government over citizens. This is also true concerning spiritual matters. Hebrews 13:7 says, "Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God; whose faith follow ---." Hebrews 13:17 continues the thought with these words: "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief; for that is unprofitable for you."

A. Their Responsibilities (5:12)

1. "labour"

This word speaks of work which tends to weariness. It implies that much effort is put into the work, even to the point of exhaustion.

2. "rule"

This word means to "preside." Regardless of what a group of people are doing, someone needs to be in charge. When it comes to the church, that responsibility belongs to the pastor.

3. "admonish"

This word is translated "warn" in vs. 14. It means "to put in mind" that which is right and proper.

B. Their Respect (5:12b-13)

1. "know them (5:12)

The Greek word "know" ("eido") means "be aware, consider, understand." This implies more than simply knowing about them. Church members are to consider their leaders and

to understand their situation. They are called into a ministry they did not seek, to do a job that they can't do in their own strength. They have given themselves to the task of watching "for your souls" (Hebrews 13:17). They must be willing to live where ever they are sent and to do what they do without consideration for financial remuneration. Their duties are many, their hours are long, their temptations are great, and the pressure is awesome. Their service should be appreciated.

2. "esteem them very highly" (5:13)

Because of their position and for the "work's sake" they should be honored, held in high respect. That doesn't mean that they are smarter, better, or more deserving. It is because they have been divinely appointed. It's a matter of position, not personality. When there is disharmony between the pastor and the people there will be a disruption of peace.

II. PAUL'S CALL CONCERNING INTER-CHURCH RELATIONSHIPS

Commenting on these verses one writer said, "It is not enough for us to think rightly about the leadership of the church. It is not enough for us to give them honor and respect. We must share the ministry with them. The responsibility for the fellowship of the church is just as surely yours as it is the pastor's. We all have a responsibility to minister." (James T. Draper, Jr.).

Well known author Warren Wiersbe wrote, *"According to Ephesians 4:12, the spiritual leaders in the church are supposed to equip the members to do the work of the ministry. In most churches the members pay the leaders to do the work of the ministry; and the leaders cannot do it all. Consequently, the work begins to weaken and die, and everybody blames the preacher."*

This is the problem that Paul deals with in our text. After pointing out the importance of having the right attitude toward leadership he speaks of the need for the members to minister to one another. Notice what he tells them to do:

A. "Warn them that are unruly" (5:14)

These are those who refuse to be ruled. The word "unruly" describes a soldier who refused to keep rank. It is a military term that came to mean that something is out of order. In this case, it refers to those who are rebellious toward authority and neglectful of their duties.

B. "Comfort the feebleminded" (5:14)

This doesn't have anything to do with a low I.Q. It speaks of those who are fainthearted and easily discouraged. What might not trouble you may be devastating to some who are weaker. It's your duty to comfort them, rather than criticize them.

C. "Support the weak" (5:14)

In Romans 14:1 Paul said, "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye." Every church is made up of strong and weak members. Paul defined our duty in Romans 15:1: "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves."

D. "Be patient toward all men" (5:14)

If we are going to succeed at the things just mentioned we must "be patient toward all men" and refuse to retaliate when we feel mistreated, as the next verse tells us.

E. "---ever follow that which is good ---"(5:15)

Everything else said in this verse and the preceding verses revolves around this. We are to do good to all people at all times. That would prevent and solve a lot of problems.

III. PAUL'S COMMENTS CONCERNING PERSONAL DUTIES (5:16-22)

In these verses it could be said that Paul gives us seven steps for success:

A. "Rejoice evermore" (5:16)

A healthy church is a happy church. Joy is one of the nine graces that makes up the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). It is a divine imperative that we live joyfully. Anything less is sin.

B. "Pray without ceasing (5:17)

We cannot over-emphasize the importance of prayer. The early church was borne along upon the wings of prayer. While we can't be on our knees every moment we can maintain an attitude of prayer and make it a regular part of our daily life. No church can be what it ought to be without praying members.

C. "In everything give thanks" (5:18)

Why? Because "this is the will of God." Prayer and thanksgiving go hand in hand (Philippians 4:6). It is an evidence that we are "filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18-20).

D. "Quench not the Spirit" (5:19)

The word "quench" is used to describe the putting out of a fire. In this case it speaks of stifling the Holy Spirit.

E. "Despise not prophesyings" (5:20)

Before the completion of the Bible, God spoke through prophets. Although we do not have prophets today the point is still valid. We are to receive God's Word, rather than despise it (consider it as nothing).

F. "Prove all things" (5:21)

We are not to believe everything we hear. We are to test everything and “hold fast that which is good.”

G. “Abstain from all appearance of evil” (5:22)

This should answer the question concerning questionable things. We are to avoid anything that smacks of evil.

IV. PAUL’S CONCLUDING REMARKS (I Thessalonians 5:23-28)

A. His Prayer (5:23)

He prayed that their entire being (spirit, soul, and body) might be sanctified (set apart), reserved exclusively for God (I Corinthians 6:19-20).

B. His Encouragement (5:24)

He reminds them of God’s faithfulness. We all need to be reminded that God alone can enable us (Philippians 1:6; 2:13).

C. His Request (5:25)

Paul wasn’t too proud to ask others to pray for him.

D. His Advice (5:26)

In those days it was common to greet friends with a kiss on the cheek. The men kissed the men and the women kissed the women. Our custom today is to shake hands. The point is that we should “Greet all the brethren.” Everyone should feel welcome.

E. His Charge (5:27)

“Charge” speaks of a command. He impresses upon them the importance of not neglecting the Word of God.

F. His Desire (5:28)

Since everything depends upon God’s grace that is what he desired for them.

LESSON #10 - PAY DAY SOME DAY

II Thessalonians 1:1-12

LESSON AIM

To show that it is possible and profitable to continue serving God during difficult times, even when we are suffering persecution.

INTRODUCTION

Evidently only a short period passed between Paul's first and second letter to the Thessalonians. Timothy and Silas were still with Paul.

He had written concerning the coming of the Lord in his first letter but now further instructions were needed. Persecution had increased and deceptive teachers had convinced some that they were living during the tribulation.

I. PAUL'S PRAISE (2 Thessalonians 1:1-5)

After a brief salutation Paul began to deal with the problems which prompted his writing. His first words come in the form of praise. That's something we ought to keep in mind in these negative times. In vs. 3-4 Paul mentions three things that were praise worthy.

A. Their Faith was Growing (1:3a)

He says, "your faith growth exceedingly." That's the way it should be. The problem is that many times our growth is stunted and the measure of our faith is small. In I Thessalonians 3:10 we learned that Paul had prayed that their faith would be perfected. Now we see that his prayer had been answered.

There are two important factors in the development of our faith. First, the Word of God (Romans 10:17). Second, the exercising of what faith we have. Instead of destroying their confidence, persecution had tested their faith and proved that it should be trusted.

B. Their Love was Abounding (1:3b)

This is marvelous. Paul says, "the charity of everyone of you all toward each other aboundeth." Again, this is exactly what Paul had prayed for (I Thessalonians 3:12). This is truly amazing when you consider that this was true of all the members.

C. Their Patience was Continuing (1:4)

"The word patient does not suggest a passive resignation to fate. Rather, it indicates that these believers forcefully stood their ground and manfully bore their troubles. They manifested a super-natural fortitude which the Holy Spirit imparted to them for the purpose of keeping

them faithful to God despite their afflictions. Such endurance sprang from their faith in the Lord Jesus.” (John L. Benson)

This perseverance had been produced, at least in part, by their persecution. Our trials work for our good if we accept them with the right attitude. (Romans 5:3; 2 Corinthians 4:15-18; James 1:1-5)

Their steadfastness caused Paul to glory in their behalf in the churches he visited. When Christians demonstrate the power of faith by going through great difficulties it encourages other Christians. Someone is always watching to see how we react to our problems. Our troubles give us an opportunity to show others what God can do.

In vs. 5 Paul points out God’s purpose in allowing them to suffer persecution. He says “---that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God.” That doesn’t mean that they earned the right to enter God’s kingdom. He doesn’t say they are made worthy, but that they are “counted,” declared, worthy. In other words, their perseverance was to be viewed as proof that God was working in them and he guarantees that He would keep His promises related to their future place in His kingdom.

II. PAUL’S PROPHECY (II Thessalonians 1:6-10)

In these verses Paul assures them that God will eventually make all the wrongs right. Knowing this gave them reason to “rest” (vs. 7), or relax. The word translated “rest” means “relief from tension,” as taking the pressure off by unstringing a taut bow. Paul could not promise them exemption from trials, but he does assure them that they could find relief in the midst of their troubles. In vs. 6 Paul asserts that God will “recompense” (repay) those who troubled them. In vs. 9 he tells us that they shall be “punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord.”

Many things in life seem unfair, but the righteous judgment of God will make everything right. We need not fret over our mistreatment, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord” (Romans 13:19).

However, even the punishment of our persecutors doesn’t seem worth the price we have to pay. So then what is it that makes suffering worthwhile? I believe vs. 10 gives us the answer. In addition to the punishment of the wicked, the coming of Christ will also be a time of glorification. Christ will be “glorified in his saints.” Notice, he did not say “by” his saints, but “in” his saints. The time is coming when the saints shall reflect or manifest the glory of God which will cause Christ “to be admired in all them that believe.” That makes all our suffering worthwhile!

III. PAUL’S PRAYER (II Thessalonians 1:11-12)

The aim of Paul's prayer is that they would be counted worthy of their calling which could only be done by them walking according to God's will, thereby causing Christ to be glorified. Notice what he prays for:

A. Their Walk with Christ (1:11)

This involves two things:

1. "fulfill all the good pleasure of his goodness"

2. "and the work of faith with power"

Only by the supernatural strength of God could they do this. They must not only resolve to do His good pleasure, they must also depend upon His mighty power (see Philippians 2:13).

B. Their Witness for Christ (1:12)

John Benson wrote: "When faith flourishes, love abounds, steadfastness endures, and faith works, the name of our Lord Jesus Christ is glorified in us (vs. 12). We become a bright and shining testimony to who He is and what His grace has done. God works Christian virtues in us in order that Christ might be magnified. Glory will accrue to His name for what He has produced in us."

LESSON #11 - A DREADFUL DAY

II Thessalonians 2:1-12

LESSON AIM

To show the danger of being deceived concerning our Lord's coming and to encourage believers to reach others while they have the opportunity.

INTRODUCTION

Paul had already taught them much about prophecy. However, due to false teachers some of the members were confused. They had evidently come to believe that they were living in the tribulation period. In this chapter Paul sets the record straight, assuring them that "that day" had not yet come.

I. THE RAPTURE (II Thessalonians 2:1)

This verse introduces the subject matter of this section – "The coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" and "our gathering together unto him." Paul had already spoken about our being gathered together with Christ in his first letter (I Thessalonians 4:13-18). This truth wasn't new to them but they were confused about the order of events.

II. THE RUMOR (II Thessalonians 2:2)

Here Paul is simply telling them that they had no reason to worry, for when Christ comes we shall be gathered together to meet Him. Evidently, some had said, and someone had written what was supposed to be a letter by Paul, that "the day of Christ is at hand." Of course if this was true they had missed the rapture and were living in the tribulation period, which without a doubt would have resulted in a troubled state of mind. Paul, however, reassures them that, regardless of what they had heard, "that day" had not yet come and that they should not be "shaken in mind," or be troubled.

Rumors are never a dependable source of information. With all the false rumors flying around we will always be upset if we take them seriously. I've known people who had been troubled for years because of something someone had told them that was untrue. We best find out the facts.

III. THE REMINDER (II Thessalonians 2:3-5)

When Paul was with them he told them the very same thing as what he tells them now (vs. 5). The problem is that they had allowed the rumors to confuse them. Now they needed to be reminded of what Paul said earlier. To clarify the matter Paul mentions two things that will come before the fury of the tribulation comes:

A. Apostasy (2:3)

He says, "...for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first." Some claim that this refers to the removal of the saints before the tribulation, but that doesn't seem to be what Paul intended. It's true that the saints will be raptured before that dreadful day, but it seems more likely that Paul is speaking here about a falling away from the truth. The phrase "falling away" comes from the Greek word "apostasia" from which we get our English word "apostasy". It implies a falling away or turning away from the truth they once professed to believe.

This evidently doesn't speak of apostasy in general, because we've always had that. It evidently speaks of a "wholesale" or universal departure from the truth. Charles Ryrie wrote, *"It is as though the infidelity of those who profess to be religious will prepare the way and perhaps even furnish the occasion for the final display of revolting against God in the person of the 'Man of sin.' Of course we are seeing this very act of aggression against the truth taking place today."* For those of us living in America this should be easy for us to see. We are rapidly departing from the very truths we once embraced.

B. Antichrist (2:3)

Next Paul says, "...and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition." This is the second thing that must happen before God's wrath is unleashed during the tribulation. The "man of sin" (this speaks of his character) called "the son of perdition" (this speaks of his destiny) will be revealed. This is the Antichrist who shall come (I John 2:18), the "little horn" of which is mentioned in Daniel 7:8.

The prefix "anti" has two meanings: "against or opposed to" and "instead of." The Antichrist not only sets himself against Christ and His people ("opposeth"), he also seeks to take the place of Christ, he "exalteth himself---showing himself that he is God."

IV. THE RESTRAINER (II Thessalonians 2:6-7)

Her Paul speaks of a principle, "what," and a person, "he." While Paul says they knew of what and of whom he spoke he does not tell us. If we cast aside all the foolish notions of man, there can be only one sensible answer, God! Only the Lord Himself has the power to control Satan.

At this present hour only the ministry of the Holy Spirit restrains Satan. But, He will eventually be "taken out of the way." That doesn't mean God will cease to be omnipresent. Were that the case no one could be saved during the tribulation. It does, however, imply that the Holy Spirit will, for a time, cease to block the efforts of the Antichrist. But the story doesn't end there.

V. THE REVEALING OF THE ANTICHRIST (II Thessalonians 2:8-12)

A. He Shall be Revealed (2:8)

“And then shall that wicked be revealed...” This doesn’t mean that the world will recognize him for what he is. It simply implies that he shall step on the scene of world events.

B. He Shall be Destroyed (2:8b)

This occurs at the end of the tribulation when Christ comes with His saints (Revelation 19:11-21) to set up His kingdom on earth. Paul knew it would help them to remember that the reign of the wicked is short.

C. He Will be Energized by Satan (2:9)

Just as Jesus was empowered by the Holy Spirit, the Antichrist will be empowered by Satan. Just as Christ worked miracles to authenticate His claims, the Antichrist will perform miracles to deceive others.

D. He Shall Deceive Many (2:10-12)

These verses have confused some folks, but there is no need for confusion. Paul says, “Because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved (vs. 10)God shall send them delusion, that they should believe a lie” (vs. 11). The idea here is the same as that found in God hardening Pharaoh’s heart because he hardened his heart against God. When a person refuses to accept the truth and refuses to change his mind, God gives them over to a “reprobate mind” (Romans 1:28). In other words, if a person chooses to live apart from God, God grants them their desire.

LESSON #12 - PRAYER AND PRAISE

II Thessalonians 2:13-3:5

LESSON AIM

To encourage Christians to be more thankful and to pray.

INTRODUCTION

Having stated his case concerning the order of events pertaining to our Lord's coming, Paul begins to conclude his thoughts. In these verses he makes several statements that would hopefully aid them in their spiritual development.

I. PAUL'S REFLECTIONS (II Thessalonians 2:13-15)

As Paul thought about his friends in Thessalonica, it caused his heart to respond with thanksgiving. He was thrilled because God had called them to salvation through his ministry (vs. 14).

The last half of vs. 13 has troubled many folks. It is used by some to prove their claim that God elects certain people to be saved while excluding others. However, it is important to note that they were not simply chosen to be saved while others were ordained to be lost. The choice has to do with the means of salvation. They were "chosen to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." This shows both God's part and man's part in salvation. It is our part only to believe. It is the Spirit's work to set us apart unto eternal life.

Then, in vs. 15, Paul reminds them that because they are saved they should "stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle." Tradition isn't always bad. It simply means that which is handed down from one person to another. In this case it refers to God's Word.

II. PAUL'S REGARDS (II Thessalonians 2:16-17)

Here he expresses his well-wishes for them. Throughout both letters Paul made it clear that he respected them and was genuinely concerned about their welfare. After mentioning the work of God in bringing them to salvation (vs. 16) he states his desire that God would do two things:

A. "comfort your hearts" (2:17)

Because of their difficulties Paul prayed that God would provide comfort to sustain them. This should serve to remind us that people need more than doctrinal instructions. They need to be encouraged and we ought to do what we can to provide it. We especially need to pray that God will do what we can't.

B. “stablish you in every good word and work” (2:17)

This tells us that Paul was concerned about their talk (“word”) and their walk (“work”). What we say and what we do are both important. The believer’s message must be demonstrated as well as declared. Paul knew that if they succeeded in these areas it would only be because of God working in them.

III. PAUL’S REQUEST (II Thessalonians 3:1-2)

Paul didn’t have the attitude that he had something to offer them, but that they had nothing he needed. He let them know that they were mutually dependent upon one another. Paul wasn’t afraid to ask people to pray for him. He realized that his ministry depended greatly upon the prayers of God’s people. Here he makes a two-fold request:

A. “that the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified...” (3:1)

The phrase “free course” means “run.” Paul is asking them to pray that the Word of God will be spread rapidly, quickly accepted and appreciated by those who hear it. Many people don’t seem to realize how important prayer is when it comes to the preaching of God’s Word. Far too many people act as though everything depends upon the preacher’s ability, rather than the prayers of God’s people. When there is no response to his message they tend to blame the preacher instead of confessing that they had not prayed.

B. “and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men” (3:2)

If anyone had met their share of such men it was Paul. This might have been a direct reference to his troubles in Corinth (see Acts 18:1-18) from where this letter was written.

Since “all men have not faith” we can expect them to be “unreasonable and wicked.” We must not imagine that we can work without opposition. However, through the prayers of God’s people, we can expect to be delivered from their snares. I can’t help but wonder how many times we’ve been guilty of criticizing some fallen Christian for whom we’ve never prayed. If we haven’t opened our mouth in prayer we certainly shouldn’t open it in condemnation. We have a responsibility to pray for one another.

IV. PAUL’S REASSURANCE (II Thessalonians 3:3-5)

A. He Expressed his Confidence in God (3:3)

This was a common practice of Paul (see Philippians 1:6; 2:13; I Thessalonians 5:24; II Timothy 2:13). This shows great wisdom. The faithfulness of God is one fact that we must always keep before us if we are to succeed. He alone is able to strengthen us and keep us from evil.

B. He Exhibited his Confidence in Them (3:4)

This would have surely encouraged them. To think that so great a man as Paul was confident that they would do the right thing must have encouraged them to do just that. It seldom helps to express our doubts about others, but it often does a great deal of good to express our confidence in them. When we let others know that we believe in them it helps them to have a more positive attitude.

Keep this in mind also. Paul wasn't being dishonest. They had proven themselves and were worthy of his confidence. And Paul was thoughtful enough to give "honor unto whom honor is due."

C. He Explained His Desire for Them (3:5)

Here Paul seems to be saying the same thing as Jude who said, "Keep yourselves in the love of God" (Jude 21). They were to keep themselves under the canopy of God's love, trusting in what it affords, while they patiently waited for Christ. Only if we commit ourselves unto the care of God's love, know that He knows best, can we persevere under the pressures of life.

LESSON #13 - MAINTAINING ORDER

II Thessalonians 3:6-18

LESSON AIM

To show the importance of maintaining order within the church and to show how to deal with problem members.

INTRODUCTION

I remember my mother reminding me (it seems like it was everyday) repeatedly to take care of myself, lest my neglect create a more serious problem. She repeatedly pressed home her point by reminding me of a neighbor who stepped on a tack and eventually lost his leg. Because the wound didn't seem serious he ignored it. Later it became infected and the doctor had to amputate his leg to save his life. Church problems can be much the same. They can be like a concern that must be cut out lest the whole body be destroyed. In these verses Paul teaches them how to deal with such problems. His advice was extremely important to the future welfare of the church.

I. THE EXCLUSION OF DISORDERLY MEMBERS (II Thessalonians 3:6)

It's obvious, by the amount of space given to it, that church discipline is an important matter. Paul realized that internal problems can be just as serious as external problems, often more so. What Paul says is a command, an obligation, not an option.

He tells them to withdraw "from every brother that walketh disorderly." The word "disorderly" is explained by the last part of the verse. He says they walk "not after the tradition" which they had received from Paul and his co-workers. The word "disorderly" is a military word that means "out of rank."

Those to be excluded are called brothers, which indicate that even that precious relationship didn't give them the right to ignore the problem. The sin of any one member affects the entire body. That's why church discipline is necessary (see I Corinthians 5:7-13).

II. THE EXAMPLE OF PAUL (II Thessalonians 3:7-9)

From this we see that Paul taught by example as well as by exhortation. Both are necessary. Unless we practice what we preach we will have little success. Paul had been willing to work with his hands, earning his own way, when necessary, for the sake of preaching the gospel. He asked for nothing by way of special favors and was content with what he had.

III. THE EXHORTATION (II Thessalonians 3:10-12)

Now we get a greater insight into the problem that visited there. Some were refusing to work and became "busybodies." Paul has already told them that if any would not work "neither should

he eat.” Some have suggested that since they were anticipating the return of Christ they quit work. That may or may not have been the case. For whatever reason, the principal was, no work, no eat. They had no right to live off the charitable contributions of others when they were perfectly capable of providing for themselves.

Compounding the problem is the fact that they became “busybodies.” Their idleness led to mischief. They were busy about business that was not their own. Paul commands them that “with quietness – work, and eat their own bread.”

Ernest Pickering wrote: “God did not make man to be idle, but to engage in productive labor. When man seeks to circumvent their plan of God, shrinking his work hours and enlarging his leisure hours, he creates trouble for himself. Sinful men with too much leisure time will only find more ways in which to grieve God. Christians, more affluent than ever before, have purchased lake cottages, camper trailers and a variety of other instruments of leisure; and in many cases they have suffered spiritually, become church ‘drifters’ and – especially in the summer time – have become unfaithful toward the ministry of their own local church.”

IV. THE EXPLANATION CONCERNING DISOBEDIENT MEMBERS (II Thessalonians 3:13-15)

After encouraging them to “be not weary in well doing,” Paul explains how they were to deal with members who refused to obey his admonition. They were to “note” (mark) the erring brother “and have no company with him.” That would hopefully make him “ashamed” and cause him to come to his senses.

This doesn’t mean that we are to be harsh or unkind. Church discipline isn’t an act of revenge. It is an act of love which hopefully leads to the person’s restoration (compare I Corinthians 5:1-5 with II Corinthians 2:1-9).

V. THE END OF PAUL’S MESSAGE (II Thessalonians 3:16-18)

A. His Prayer (3:16)

Notice that he prayed for “all” of them, even the disorderly busybodies. He didn’t allow his disappointment with them to make him bitter.

B. His Salutation (3:17)

It was Paul’s custom to dictate his letters to a secretary and then to take pen in hand and write a few of the words at the close of the letter in his own handwriting.

C. His Benediction (3:18)

If we could remind people of just one thing we could not do better than to remind them of “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.” That’s exactly what Paul does. He knew that God’s grace was sufficient to meet every need (see II Corinthians 12:9). Thank God it still is today!