

## 1 Thessalonians Commentary

### CHAPTER 1

Let's take a trip to a church plant done by the Apostle Paul in the middle of the first century. We must make our way across the Atlantic, travel through the Straits of Gibraltar into the Mediterranean Sea, sail north in the Aegean Sea and up to the port city of Thessalonica. The town was founded by Cassander, King of Macedon, who named it after his wife (the half-sister of Alexander the Great). Over 300 years later Paul came to town with the light of the gospel. You can read about his work there in Acts 17:1-13. His was a relatively brief stay, but quite productive. 3 Sabbath days' ministry translates to somewhere between 15 and 27 days there, yet a church was planted to whom Paul wrote this, perhaps his first letter. He did not leave town in comfort, but in flight from jealous religious Jews who stirred up the people and the local authorities against the Missionary Troupe. Each chapter of this book makes reference to the return of Christ. It is a practical epistle, giving much life guidance for the Christian believers in Thessalonica. Now, let's see some of the characteristics of this Biblically-based first century church - we should be more like them today.

- 1) When Paul responded to some concerns in the Thessalonian church by writing this letter, he was in the company of Silas and Timothy. He writes to a group of believers he calls the "church," meaning they have been "called out" from the world. These folks by faith have found a home "in God" and "in Christ." This new position results in lives being filled with **grace**, the fountain of all good things, and **peace**, the crown of all blessings.
- 2) In what we call his 2nd missionary journey, Paul planted a church in the Greek city of Thessalonica. He was only there about three weeks, but God prospered his ministry, and souls came to know Christ. Being a good spiritual "father," Paul was faithful to agonize in prayer, praying for and thanking God for these believers.
- 3) The 3 great Christian virtues are found here - faith, hope, and love. Their faith produced work that required them to expend energy; it was not an idle, passive, speculative faith. Their love prompted them to a labor that made them perspire - it was body-wearying toil. Their hope in Christ enabled them to endure, to "abide under" the load placed upon them. These fruit-bearing virtues caused Paul to thank God often for them.
- 4), 5) I like to look at this passage as "evidences of election." Let's use the term election as a synonym for salvation. The Bible teaches a choosing by God that results in salvation, as well as a responsibility for man to respond to the gospel invitation if he would be saved. These two friends, divine sovereignty and human responsibility, do not need to be reconciled, but neither can they be fully understood by finite minds, since they are infinite truths. When the Thessalonians observed the conduct and heard the message of the Apostle, the Holy Spirit worked in such a way that people were saved. Though the gospel **is** conveyed through words, it was not **just** a word, but a word **with power!** Their conviction led them to trust Christ for their souls' salvation. Paul could speak with confidence ("we know") as he called them his brothers, ones who were "born of the same womb."
- 6) Here is something contrary to nature, human nature, that is. A people are faced with two examples, their spiritual parents, whom they had seen suffer greatly, and Christ, whose sufferings were also well known. Paul had been run out of town, & Jesus had been nailed to a cross. In spite of the fact of their example of suffering, the Thessalonians gladly received the message that would call on them to suffer, as well. They experienced a joy in the midst of this suffering that can only be explained in terms of the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives.
- 7) When people imitate Paul and Jesus, they earn the right to be imitated by other believers. Such was the case with the Thessalonian Christians. They left their mark, their stamp on others throughout Macedonia in the north and Achaia in the south. They became a paradigm for others to follow in their witness. It is amazing in that day of slow and difficult travel and communication for their testimony to spread so far. Paul would later (2 Corinthians 8:1-8) point to them as a fine example of sacrificial giving to provoke that same grace in others.
- 8), 9), 10) The missionary's job then and now is to lead men to Christ who will lead others of their own countrymen to Christ. The Thessalonian believers were a great product of this ministry; they heard the word & believed; then they trumpeted the word abroad so that others might believe also. Paul hardly needed to preach in areas where their testimony reached, they had done such a good job! The converts resulting from this church's ministry gave good testimony of what they saw in the lives of the

Thessalonians. 1<sup>st</sup> was the surety of their conversions - they turned to God! And when they did so, they naturally turned away from their old idols. Next, they replaced their old attachment to dead idols with a self-imposed servitude of the true & living God! What a change! Last, they testified that the Thessalonians were waiting in patience, trust, & confident hope for Jesus. Paul characterized Jesus as 1) God's Son, 2) risen from the dead, 3) coming back from heaven, & 4) the One Who will rescue us from the coming wrath. This could mean either tribulation or hell.

## **CHAPTER 2**

- 1) This passage looks back to 1:9, relating to the entrance of Paul and his troupe into Thessalonica (Acts 17). How did they come in? Well, the Thessalonians knew; they knew that it was successful, not "in vain," or empty. Paul's group came with the gospel in hand, and left less than 30 days later with a new church having been formed. I'd call that success.
- 2) Endurance, perseverance under difficulty, was a mark of Paul's ministry. His experience in Philippi had included shame, pain, and loss of freedom. He was asked to leave town. That treatment did not deter the heavenly postman from making his appointed rounds. The Gospel (good news) of God was needed in Thessalonica, and he would unashamedly take it there, openly proclaiming it with great effort (ajgw'ni - "agony"), in spite of opposition.
- 3) Paul refutes 3 possible allegations here: 1. That his message was untrue - it did **not** have its source in error, but in eternal truth. 2. That it was unclean, like those of so many (i.e. temple prostitution, sex cults), the gospel of Christ calls men to cleanness of life. 3. That he used trickery to entice them; he was, to the contrary, straightforward in his presentation. There was no "bait-catching" done by the Apostle. He even told people that the Gospel would call for suffering.
- 4) Paul was wounded and offended that his motives for ministry would be called suspect. He answers: "our preaching to you was done as by men whom God chose, called, and approved after testing to do the job." Paul did not seek this work, he was sought by God for it. And the desire of this missionary team was to please God, not men; else they would not have encountered so much opposition and spent so much time being persecuted by men. And we are stewards, too.
- 5) As to his actions and his motives, Paul here invokes the Highest Witness, God Himself! Never once did the Apostle or his companions employ the use of flattery, attempting to get people to like him and follow them. Nor did they ever wear a false face when it came to money - there was no greed in the Missionary effort. There was no flattery to swell you, and no greed to fleece you. Receiving praise and gaining possessions were not motivations in this work, nor ours...
- 6) The custom of the day was for traveling philosophers to speak so as to get a following and to obtain some fortune. If Paul were accused of this, he answered well. While reason and Scripture would vouch for his being supported by those to whom he ministered, he never required it, but he worked or received from other churches the aid he needed.
- 7), 8) Paul had a great love for those to whom he ministered. That affection and desire to bless formed his manner of service as he moved among people. Not as a lord over servants, or as a master over slaves, but as a nurse among infant children, Paul was tender as he shared Christ. O, he was able to stand against false teaching and false accusations, but in giving out the gospel, he was gentle to the lambs he fed. In getting to people in travel and in ministering to them in trouble, Paul often put his life on the line. As Jesus had sacrificed His life to make the gospel a reality, so His messenger was willing to give his life to get the Word out to those in need of Christ. So selfless and giving ought the children of God to be; yet we may this morning struggle just to decide on going out to worship the Lord! Shame on us! How can we twenty-first century Christians quibble over small things when Jesus gave His all for us?
- 9) He now calls them to witness by their memories of his labors among them. While he had the freedom to require wages of them for his maintenance, he denied himself that comfort. "Burning the candle at both ends," he often earned his own way while he spent himself in the proclamation of the gospel. What an industrious, selfless example!
- 10) The trial concerning his motives and actions winds down. The two witnesses - themselves and God - are called one last time in defense of the accused Apostle. *"When we came to Thessalonica, we behaved ourselves in a pious, Godly manner. We were just in our actions toward all men, and we lived in such a*

*way as to give no cause for anyone who is reasonable to bring accusation against the Lord or His message.”* What more could the Thessalonians ask?!

- 11), 12) Again Paul calls on the Thessalonian believers to search their memories and come to his defense. He did this six times in our text (vss 1,2,5,9,10,11). Though his ministry there was not long (3 Sabbath days), it was open and memorable. As the nurse was gentle (vs 7), so the father in him wanted the children to be able to stand on their own one day. And so he challenged them and testified faithfully to them of things that would confirm them in their faith and walk with Christ. Believers are called by God to His kingdom and its glory. To live a low, earthy, shameful life here is inconsistent with a heavenly calling and citizenship. So the Apostle charges them to live up to the glorious name they bear. There should be no breach between what we believe and how we live. Faith must affect behavior if it is living faith. Without confirming works, James told us, faith is dead. How alive is your faith today? Does it show?
- 13) Paul returns here to a pivotal issue: "What is the source of the Bible?" Is it the Word of God, or is it the words of men?" He found great joy in the fact that these Thessalonian believers eagerly received it as the Word of God! They did not reluctantly let it fall into their hands; they reached out and snatched it! *"You recognized its divine origin, and it worked in your lives the proof of that for all the world to see."* May we experience God's work in us as well!
- 14) Paul commends the Thessalonian Christians ("Brothers," he calls them) for following the example of churches in Judea. The Greek word behind "Imitators" gives us our English word "mimic." It is good to find quality examples and follow their lead. It's interesting that it is here where that we discover that the Jerusalem church (the original assembly born on the Day of Pentecost) has "sister-churches" in the surrounding area by now. The non-believers in Thessalonica foisted the same type of suffering on the Christians there as was experienced by those Judean believers at the hands of unsaved Jews. A mark of the early church was the suffering of persecution.
- 15), 16) The long history of persecution, even to the point of killing people for their faith, had been perpetrated on the prophets. It continued and reached its apex in the crucifixion of Jesus, the highest crime ever committed by men. Men of the same ilk pursued Paul and his teams, and the Apostle here characterizes all that as "displeasing God." Those who would hinder the gospel's progress are opposing all mankind, who can never be saved from hell without trusting Jesus! The end of verse 16 reminds us of the Hebrew Scripture image (Gen 15:16) of sins filling a cup until they spill over and judgment comes. Be assured of this, God will not let sin go unpunished; He will judge and balance the books.
- 17), 18) Acts 17:1-10 details what Paul writes here; unbelieving Jews made an uproar over the inroads of the gospel in Thessalonica to the point that the new Christians there secreted Paul and Silas out of town and on to Berea for their safety. After less than a month in Thessalonica, the missions team was "torn away" from them. Paul makes it clear that while he bodily left there, his heart remained with them even until the time of this writing. Though Paul was an itinerant minister, he possessed a pastor's heart! Paul and Silas wanted again and again to get back there to be with the saints, but Satan hindered them each time! (See Rom 15:22 for a similar struggle).
- 19), 20) When Jesus comes, or when life is over, what matters most? When movies, parties, and sporting events have ended, what is important? The same thing is a believer's answer to both questions - souls that will escape hell and live in heaven for eternity. Lives that have been changed by grace matter most. For what do we hope? That people are redeemed. What brings the most joy in life? Seeing people we care about meet Jesus. What crowns will there be in heaven for serving the Lord Jesus? Souls that are forgiven the sin that would otherwise have taken them to hell. The Thessalonian believers were a testament to Paul's faithful proclamation of the gospel. They were the evidence of the success of his ministry. In them he would glory and rejoice.

### **CHAPTER 3**

- 1), 2), 3) Later in his ministry, when Paul was incarcerated in Rome, he would suffer the loss of assistance of a young believer named Onesimus by sending him back to Colosse. He did this because Onesimus was a runaway slave, and as a new believer, he was responsible to obey the (Roman) law of the land and return to his owner, Philemon. Here he suffers the loss of Timothy's help in ministry to send him to Thessalonica. His reason this time was different from the other - it was not compliance with Rome's

law, but concern for the Thessalonian Christians in their struggles as young believers and a fledgling church. Acts 17 relates how Paul moved from Thessalonica to Berea to Athens. While the Apostle was over 250 miles away, he was near in heart to his friends in Christ. Timothy was a “brother” (one born of the same womb) and a “co-worker” for Paul; yet he sent Timothy to strengthen and encourage the Thessalonians, hoping to keep them from being carried away by their circumstances of suffering. They were gaining knowledge of trials by experience; Paul said they should know intuitively that trials are part of the Christian life. Paul’s example of self-sacrifice here should challenge us today to set our own agendas and desires to the side for the benefit of others, especially others who are in the faith.

- 4) Here Paul expands on the last phrase of verse 3. Not only should the Thessalonians intuitively know that persecution was a part of the Christian experience, but he had told them as much when he was with them. They had also observed it as Paul was forced to leave their city! We should not complain about any difficulty that may come to us because of our faith. We should take pride in being named with others who have borne so much more.
- 5) He further expands verses 1 & 2, again describing his inability to stand it any longer - that is to wonder how they were doing in their faith and walk. Paul knew and feared Satan’s power, and we should not take it lightly. This foe would do anything to ruin our joy, weaken our faith, destroy our testimony, and in any and every other way keep us from being of use to God. We are in no game in this Christian life, but rather in a battlefield, an invisible war!
- 6) Even as the letter was in writing, Timothy returns from his mission to bring news from these saints to Paul. O! How good that news sounded in the ears of the apostle! He spoke of their faith toward God & their love for men. He told how they remembered the apostle fondly & hoped to see him again. There it is again - faith, hope, love.
- 7) How often Paul wished to encourage the churches - it was part of his intended mission. Yet here the father was to be encouraged by the children; the patient ministered health to the doctor. Even young believers have ministry opportunities, and they should seize them. Word of their faith was a balm to the wounds of Paul’s persecution.
- 8) John said to us that he had no greater joy than to hear that his children were walking in the truth. As a minister of several decades, I can attest to the invigoration that comes to see converts of yesteryear still walking with the Lord. It distresses a person to see someone they thought was a believer living a life apart from God. Equally, it pumps new life & strength into one who sees steadfastness in their spiritual offspring. So it was with Paul.
- 9) Thanksgiving and joy are handmaidens; when we have something to thank God for, we also have reason for joy. Paul experiences & expresses **both** regarding his readers. They were a cause of much joy for him in the way they endured their afflictions. For this great benefit, Paul could not gather up words enough to thank God.
- 10) Persecution had aborted Paul’s stay in Thessalonica. There was more he wanted to share with them, growth he desired to see them experience. It was in his heart to visit there again, hoping to then fill in some of the gaps. We are complete, i.e., we have all the parts, but we are all children hoping to grow into Christian adults.
- 11) Paul links himself positionally with the Thessalonians when he says, “our.” He calls upon God & Christ to link them in personal presence, and he links the Father with the Son in the prayer request. Bible versions translate the prayer “direct our way to you” (KJV, NASB) or “clear the way for us to come to you” (NIV). The idea is a desire that God would “make the path straight.” When we’re away from those we love, we like straight ways to them.
- 12) Paul prays about a favorite theme of his - love. And this is not “brotherly love,” as you might expect; it is the highest word - agape. He piles up terms: “increase **and** overflow,” “for each other **and** for everyone else,” your love for them, **and** our love for you. This kind of love does not come naturally; it takes a supernatural work of God in the hearts of men for them to love like that. And it is for this work of God in the Thessalonians that he prays.
- 13) 1<sup>st</sup>, there is the **prayer** - for the strengthening of their hearts (we get our word “steroid” here). 2<sup>nd</sup> there is **purpose** - that they would be blameless (unchargeable) and holy (separated unto God). 3<sup>rd</sup>, there is **presence** - our presence before Him, and His presence as He returns to gather us home. While it

matters (for their sake & our testimony) what men think of us, it matters most what God the Judge (in Christ) thinks of us in the end.

#### **CHAPTER 4**

- 1) This pleading is for believers to strive to please God more & more. "*Doing*," the practical aspect of Christianity, is as important as "*knowing*." At Thessalonica, Paul had taught that the highest goal in life is to please God. This they were doing, but they should not become complacent in it. They must strive for excellence in the matter of pleasing God. And you, dear friend, whom are **you** seeking to please with **your** life? Your spouse, your children, your churchmates, your pastor, your **self** (God forbid!), or do you wish to please God Himself?
- 2) The believers at Thessalonica could not plead ignorance concerning Paul's earlier instruction - no, they "knew" his teaching about living for God. The authority was not Paul's but his instruction was "in the Lord Jesus" (vs 1). As Commander-in-chief of the army of Christian soldiers, Jesus must be obeyed! This is no less true today.
- 3) For the many who ask the question, "What is God's will for me?" here is a partial answer - God desires that His people be sanctified, that is, holy, set apart **from** sin and **unto** Him. While this may not guide you in choices like education, marriage, and career, it will guide you in the many events of life that require choices on a daily basis. The area of sanctification dealt with here is that of sexual morality. Any form of sexual immorality is forbidden to the believer. The single word rendered "sexual immorality" gives us our word "pornography."
- 4) Today's emphasis on the display of the body is falsely called "honoring the body." Honor & holiness are inseparably linked by the Scripture. Our bodies, when it comes to sex and display, are set aside (holy) for our marriage partner only. The writer to the Hebrews reminded us that "marriage is honorable, and the marriage bed is to be kept pure. To be unholy is to be dishonorable. Let's not be taken in by the sins of our sex-crazed culture.
- 5) Giving in to the expressions of passion and lust outside the marriage relationship is described as characteristic of the nations who do not personally (and savingly) know God. A relationship with God through Jesus Christ changes our attitudes about sex, and gives to us a new power to have the self-control prescribed by God's Word. While lust can be a "strong burning desire," the Holy Spirit in us can bring that desire under His control.
- 6) How a believer lives his or her life in regard to sexual activity is not just about offending God. Sexual immorality is a sin that offends and harms more than just the "consenting adults." Each person has (or likely one day will have) a partner whom they defraud in such acts, not to mention the body of Christ being hurt by the impurity of one of its members. Judgment from God will follow such sin - Paul had given them this warning in person.
- 7) Vs six forbade immorality because of the **penalty** that would come; here it is prohibited because of the **purpose** for which we were called - Holiness. In writing to the "**church**" at Thessalonica, Paul uses the verb form of the word for "**church**" when he says God "**called**" us. Literally, He "called us out." So we are to be different from this vile world **out of which** He has called us - we are to be holy, set apart from the world & its ways, to God and His ways for us. So when someone asks you, "What is God's will?" Tell them to live a pure & chaste life.
- 8) A lady said to me one day, "**I don't like Paul; I like Jesus.**" I suppose that was because Paul got down to specifics (which Jesus promised would follow), where Jesus often painted with a broader stroke. The words Paul wrote under inspiration are as truly God's Word as those which some Bible editions have printed in red because Jesus spoke them. To reject Paul's words is not just to reject Paul, it is rejecting God! It is He Who gave us believers the Holy Spirit. Can we then live in unholiness when Holiness lives in us? The answer is clearly **no**.
- 9), 10) In vs 1 Paul spoke of pleasing God as something believers should strive to do **more & more**. In vss 9 & 10 he mentions a second outgrowth of being a Christian that should be pursued **more & more**. It is the practice of brotherly love - φιλαδελφία (*Philadelphia*). While **Bible doctrine** is usually learned through the mediation of a human teacher, "**brother-love**" is a "God-taught" fact of the Christian experience. The Thess Christians had the reputation of loving near and far, but, as Matthew Henry wrote, "*There are none on this side heaven who love in perfection.*" So the Apostle challenges and encourages them to pursue greater depths of love for the brethren. Love in the family of God transcends cultural, racial,

economic, educational, & other normal divides between people. Let us so love, because the effectiveness of our Christian witness is strengthened by loving.

- 11), 12) In these closing sentences, Paul issues 3 instructions for action that will produce 2 results in a believer's life. In the word translated "ambition" is the idea of "honorable pursuit." The first is an attitude of quietness. Too much talk and frantic activity take away from personal reflection and peace (a life of peace helps beget peace). Second is to "mind our own business," something Solomon recognized as helpful in neighbor relations a thousand years earlier, *"Let your foot rarely be in your neighbor's house, Lest he become weary of you and hate you"* (Prov 25:17). Finally, Paul exhorts to industry of life, adding further dignity to the matter of work. As to the two results, these things will produce for us a good reputation, and they will also make us self-sufficient as far as providing the things needed for this life. What practical advice! How blessed are those who follow it!
- 13) It is clear that Paul had word of the death of some Thessalonian believers, and of the resultant concern among the others as to their disposition should Jesus come - a hope they no doubt held to. He writes to inform them, in order that their grief should be tempered and not be like the grief of those who are hopeless without Christ.
- 14) Paul included his readers in his editorial "we." They had all received the gospel with faith; they did indeed believe that Jesus died and was raised from the dead. A natural consequence of that was to also believe that when He returned, He would bring with Him the ones who sleep in Jesus - here sleep is a euphemism for death.
- 15) We don't know when or how Jesus revealed this to Paul, only that He did. Believers yet alive when Jesus comes will not precede those who have died. It appears here that Paul felt he would be alive when Jesus returned.
- 16) The order of those future events is revealed here. First, Jesus will come down from heaven - an event which will be accompanied by three audible signs (a loudly shouted command, Michael, the archangel's voice, and a trumpet call from God). Second, the souls of dead believers will re-enter their bodies, and they shall rise!
- 17) Again the evidence that Paul still thought he would be alive when Jesus came - "We." Next is a catching away by Christ of all church age believers - the living (now glorified according to 1 Cor. 15:51,52) & the dead, having been raised into glorified bodies also. These clouds of believers will never again be separated from Christ.
- 18) No one but God knows how many believers have found comfort for their aching hearts from these words when a loved one in Christ has passed away. I know that I have been so comforted here more than a few times. To know that such a death is a temporary parting and not a final good-bye, is a blessing beyond price or words.

## **CHAPTER 5**

Whenever we read Paul cautioning a people about certain behavior, we can guess that either they were already involved in it or certainly in danger of such involvement. While some may have gotten so wrapped up in thinking of the return of Jesus that they quit their jobs to "wait for His return," it seems others were living reckless, out of control lifestyles marked by drunkenness and night-time reveling. Paul addresses both of these extreme behaviors.

- 1), 2) That Paul is writing to believers and not the lost is evidenced by his use of the word "brothers." He chooses not to address God's "schedule of end time events" with them. They already knew all anybody would ever know about it when he told them that Christ's return would be sudden & unexpected, like a "thief in the night." Far too much time & effort has been wasted in vain attempts to discover the undiscoverable about God's timing. The expression, "day of the Lord," speaks of actions by God that bring judgement on unbelievers & blessing on the saints. In this mention, it speaks of the end-time events that will do both of these things. The rapture, the tribulation, and the earthly kingdom of Christ, followed by the great white throne judgement are the major events yet to come. Each of these can be seen as blessing for believers and judgement on unbelievers.
- 3) I remember a night a few years ago when my mother phoned to request prayer for my niece, who had begun labor pains. They had come suddenly and unexpectedly. So will God's judgements suddenly overtake those who ignore His commands and warnings. They will feel they are at peace and in safety, but how they will be surprised! We all should be working and watching and waiting until Jesus comes or

calls us to come home.

- 4) While the unprepared will be caught unawares, believers in Christ who are students of God's Word have all the data we need to be prepared for Christ's coming, which will initiate the "day of the Lord." We should not be surprised if the Lord came back today. Our walk with Him should have us prepared to leave with no regrets.
- 5) Often in Scripture darkness and night are associated with sin and rebellion. "Men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." "This is your hour, the power of darkness." But not so with God's children! He has brought us out of the darkness, into the light! "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, a light unto my path." He even called us the "light of the world." So we walk in the light and we share the light in a world of darkness.
- 6), 7) It is always true that our **position** should be matched by our **practice**. We should **behave** in keeping with what we **believe**. Our **creed** should be clearly reflected in our **conduct**. Alright then, we are children of the day & of the light; we are to be manifestly different from those who belong to the night and the darkness. People should look at us and see the difference! We are supposed to be a peculiar people, a people who evidently belong to God! He speaks specifically here of believers being alert & self-controlled. Worldlings are seen as drunk in the night. They have no idea what is about to happen, and they are under the dominion of Satan.
- 8) Clouded by darkness, the lost are drunken. Living in the day, let us be sober. He now uses a favorite metaphor of the Christian life - that of being a soldier. Here the soldier finds protection in the three great Christian virtues. **Faith & love** make up the breastplate, protecting the heart; salvation's **hope** is our helmet, keeping the head.
- 9) We are standing on the threshold of an event (the rapture) that will mean sudden **translation** for some & sudden **terror** for others. The coming tribulation is described in Revelation as the "wrath of God." Paul makes it clear here that we are not destined by God to be participants in that, but to obtain deliverance through Christ. We may take this text to plainly declare a removal of believers before the tribulation begins (a "pre-trib rapture").
- 10) Again arises the subject of believers awake & asleep, living and having died. "It makes no difference," says Paul, "In either case we are going to live with him." His death conquered death for us. It is no longer an enemy, but now is a friend to usher us into the presence of Christ. Now, I am **with Him**; then, I am **with Him even more!**
- 11) So, having all this wonderful information has some practical application. Paul gives a pair of commands: "Keep encouraging each other & building each other up." Encouraging the disheartened & edifying believers young & old is part of the church's ministry to itself. Let's use these great truths to do that, even today!
- 12), 13) On a few occasions I have heard pastors use this text (and Heb 13:17) to taut "pastoral authority." When a man has to tell people they are supposed to be under his authority, it is usually because he cannot "command" (earn it by good leadership) their respect and has to therefore "demand" ("order" them to do it on some supposed Scriptural basis) it. The word translated "respect" (ESV), "appreciate" (NASB), is I think better rendered "know" (KJV), or "acknowledge" (NIV). A God-called, Spirit-led, hard working pastor will have no issue here. He will labor hard behind the scenes, and he will "stand before" (a better rendering that "are over") the congregation with their highest respect. Their love for him who so ministers will produce the greatest possible esteem from them for him. The end of verse 13 is the first of a series of 15 imperatives (commands) to the believers at Thessalonica. Paul first commands them to have harmonized relationships with one another ("to be at peace"). What a blessing such a group of believers is to each other, their pastor, and the Lord!
- 14) "Urge" is "we call you alongside us." Labor with us and as we do in these following things. Sadly, then a now, there were "idle" (inactive through laziness) people in the church. They are to be stirred up to action, warned against idleness. Secondly, some saints were "small-souled," needing to grow. We are compelled to come alongside them and speak to them. Such speech must needs be gentle for their weakness. Next, those who are weak and learning slowly to lean on the Lord may need to lean on us in the meantime. Thus we are of help to them. The idle, fainthearted, and weak will frustrate some who are moving ahead with fervor and speed of growth. Rather than cast them aside or wave them off, we should patiently deal with them to bring them along. That is part of our sacred ministry.

- 15) Commands 5 and 6 here in verse 15 are related. The 1<sup>st</sup> is a prohibition, the 2<sup>nd</sup> is a substitute admonition. It is natural to wish to “give as good (or as bad!) as we get” - to repay people “eye for eye.” That is forbidden here, and the additional order is to do good instead! Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures and the teachings of Jesus, we learn not to seek vengeance, but to repay evil with good.
- 16) While “Jesus wept” (John 11:35) is the shortest verse in the English Bible, this one is shorter in the Greek New Testament. However brief it may be in verbiage, it is long on instructive command! Philippians 4:4 comes to mind here as unending rejoicing is commanded. Joy and happiness must be differentiated. Happiness depends on our circumstances, and it rises and falls. Joy is a deep, settled gladness that God is good to us - it never has to diminish or cease. We may be perpetually joyful, for God is perpetually good!
- 17) What could Paul mean by telling us to pray unceasingly!? Let’s try to answer that. There are several words for prayer in the Greek New Testament. This particular word is more about devotional prayer - not so much an “asking” as a “being with” and “clinging to” God. It is the soul’s communion with heaven. It can be called an attitude more than an action. While we are busy in our activities of life, there can be a nearly unbroken fellowship with God in prayer. May we be blessed to attempt to obey this command. It will certainly open heaven’s windows for God’s poured out blessings on us!
- 18) While it is fair to say that we don’t necessarily thank God “for” everything, it is certain that we can express our gratitude to Him “in” every circumstance of life. There is so much to be thankful for that we could be verbalizing appreciation to God almost without interruption. Over 100 times in Scripture we find some form of the word “thank.” God is so very good to us, even in the most difficult of times, that praise and thanks might be like an ever-flowing stream from our hearts and through our lips. God’s will for us, then, includes joy, prayer, and thanksgiving. What a life-changing trio of things they can be!
- 19), 20) These two commands are constructed in such a way in grammar as to suggest that activities now occurring should be stopped. Apparently some were opposing certain works of the Holy Spirit, either in their personal lives or in the life of the church. It is more likely the latter, for the second command for cessation is to stop underrating prophecies. Giving of prophecies (done while the Bible was still being written) was a work of the spirit. For us today this would be a devaluing of the Word of God, the Scriptures. Sadly, there are some who would emphasize experience and discount doctrine. It is what we believe that determines how we behave. Our creed dictates our conduct.
- 21), 22) Our last three imperatives form an interconnected group. “Test” is to prove authenticity or find out what is false. We are to “keep on putting to the test” things that are taught, behaviors that are set forth as God’s will, and such. 1 John 4:1 should be looked at here. Not all that glitters is spiritual gold. We should tenaciously cling to things that measure up as good. Those things that don’t stand up to the light of Scripture should be cast aside. The Word of God and the leading of the Spirit never disagree. If we think we are being led by the Spirit in something that conflicts with Scripture, we are hearing from a false spirit, and we should run the other way!
- 23) The assembly at Thessalonica seemed anything but peaceful, and so Paul appeals to the God of peace. He asks God to set them apart **from sin** and **unto Him** in sanctification. He asks for this to be thorough, taking in each individual’s entire person - spirit, soul, and body. This sets forth that man is tripartate - 3 parts. Paul desires that they be “blameless,” without reproach, beyond fair accusation, until Jesus comes again. This man cannot do for himself, but with the help of God, this prayer can be answered even in our lives today!
- 24) The God Who by His grace calls us unto Himself, saves us by the blood of His Son, Jesus, and predestines us to look like the Son, is a faithful God, and He is able to perform that which He requires. Let Him do it in you!
- 25) Paul speaks to those who have the same spiritual birth as he, “Brothers.” He commands them to mention him and his missionary troupe before the throne of God’s grace. And the tense of the imperative verb includes that they “keep on praying” for them. Ministry’s forward motion is on the wings of prayer, and we should often pray for those who serve our Lord.
- 26) In the ancient (and present) East, men would greet men with a kiss, and women would greet other women in the same fashion. The kiss was a salutation, and expression of open fellowship. In our culture we are more likely to shake hands, hug, or pat one another on the back. All of these physical greeting methods must be done cautiously and without any thought of romantic love.

- 27) The Word of God is for all His people, not just the “clergy,” or some other “enlightened” few. The Holy Spirit is our Teacher, and the Bible is our Textbook. Every saint should be a student, a fervent student of Scripture. How can anyone expect to “do the will of God” if they do not “know the will of God?” And where do we get this knowledge? From Holy Writ, Scripture, the Bible!
- 28) Grace is the fountain of all good things. It comes to us through Jesus, Whom Paul calls here “our” Lord Jesus Christ. As the Bible is for the masses, so Jesus belongs to us all! I love that here Paul used the full name of the Savior - Lord Jesus Christ. Each word is filled with meaning and will reward richly thorough study. May His grace flood our lives always!