

1 & 2 THESSALONIANS

A COURSE FOR AFRICANS TEACHING AFRICANS STUDENTS

1 Thessalonians 2:3-4 “ For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts.



Africans Teaching Africans Bible Training Program

www.africansteachingafricans.coM

Abraham Kogo

Email: abrahamkogo@yahoo.com

Cell: +254723148876

CONTENTS

1 THESSALONIANS

1. Lesson One: Introduction, Greetings and Church's Mission – 1:1-10
2. Lesson Two: Genuine Ministry of the Church – 2:1-20
3. Lesson Three: Standing Fast in the Lord and the Apostolic Prayer for Holiness – 3:1-13
4. Lesson Four: Divine Call to Holiness and the Believers Hope – 4:1-18
5. Lesson Five: The Day of the Lord and Exhortations Towards Mutual Harmony – 5:1-28

2 THESSALONIANS

6. Lesson Six: The Church Commended and Comforted – 1: 1-12
7. Lesson Seven: The Church's Out-taking and the Day of the Lord – 2:1-17
8. Lesson Eight: Apostolic Request for Prayer and General Instruction Concerning Disciplinary Separation – 3: 1-18

1 THESSALONIANS

LESSON ONE: INTRODUCTION, GREETINGS AND CHURCH'S MISSION – 1:1-10

Historical Background of Thessalonica City

Thessalonica was the capital city of Macedonia. It was founded in 315 BC by the Macedonian general Cassander who named it after his wife, the daughter of Philipp and step-sister of Alexander the Great.

“Under the Romans it was the capital of the second of the four divisions of Macedonia, and when these were united to form one single province in 146 BC it became the capital as well as the largest city of the province. Thessalonica was a free city, and inscriptions confirm the accuracy of Luke in calling its rulers ‘politarchs’. It was strategically situated on the Via Egnatia, the great Roman highway to the East.”¹

The church at Thessalonica was founded by Paul on his second missionary journey as we read in Acts 17:1-4. At Troas Paul had been directed in a vision to cross over to Macedonia. After ministering at Philippi, where he was beaten and jailed, he traveled to Thessalonica. On the Sabbath, he went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.

Paul's successes stirred the jealousy of the Jews who gathered some mob from the marketplace and started a riot. They claimed that Paul was guilty of defying Caesar's decrees because he taught another king called Jesus. That very night Paul slipped out of town and made his way to

¹ Morris, 17-18

Berea (Acts 17:5-10). When Jews learned that he was preaching at Berea they followed him there and stirred up the crowds against him (v 13).

Authorship

1 Thessalonians was written by Paul to the church in the city of Thessalonica. He wrote this first letter to the Thessalonians in AD 51 after Timothy visited the church and reported back to him about developments there.

The letter is addressed specifically to the church of the Thessalonians (1:1). According to Acts 17:1-9, Paul was with Silas and Timothy came from Philippi to Thessalonica. Some Jews believed Paul's preaching of Jesus and their Messiah as did many God-fearing Greeks and several prominent women but then others stirred up opposition, so that Paul and his coworkers had to leave Thessalonica. When Timothy joined Paul at Athens, Paul sent him to Thessalonian Christians because he was concerned about how they were faring against their position. Timothy returned from Thessalonica with good news.

Purpose

*"1 Thessalonians was written to express his [Paul's] gratitude for the progress of the believers there and to encourage them in their walk with the Lord. It was also written to clear up confusion that existed in the church about the return of the Lord."*²

Several Reasons Motivated Paul to Write this Letter to the Thessalonians Namely;

1. He wanted to commend the Thessalonian Christians for their faith and devotion which had become widely known as an example to others (1 Thessalonians 1:7-10)
2. He realized that the persecution he had faced in Thessalonica had continued for those he left behind and wanted to encourage them to stand firm (1 Thessalonians 2:13-16). He had fear for them but delighted by the news of their steadfastness (1 Thessalonians 3:1-10).
3. There were those who had been misrepresenting Paul in Thessalonica, particularly the Jews who had initiated opposition to him when he was there (Acts 17:5). Therefore, Paul reminded them of his methods and attitudes among them (1 Thessalonians 2:1-12) and told of his desire and plans to see them again (1 Thessalonians 2:17-18)
4. It was necessary also to urge the Thessalonian Christians to live true to Christian standards especially in the matter of sexual morality (1 Thessalonians 4: 1-8). Other matters concerning their way of life and their relationships within the Christian fellowship also needed attention (1 Thessalonians 4:9-12; 5:12-22).

² Ellsworth, 350

5. Another major concern was to deal with the misconceptions of the Thessalonian Christians regarding those who had died and the second coming of the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). In relation to the future hope, there was also the question of “the times and the seasons” and Paul repeated the teaching he had given when he was with them (1 Thessalonians 5:1-11).
6. There may also have been a danger of disunity that led the apostles to emphasize the fellowship of all believers (1 Thessalonians 5:27), to urge them not to pour scorn on any spiritual gifts (1 Thessalonians 5:19-21), and not to fail in respecting their leaders (1 Thessalonians 5:12).

Greeting/Salutation – 1 Thessalonians 1:1

Greeting

I Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,

To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

Grace to you and peace.

The opening of this letter has not been altered in anyway. It begins like some of Paul’s other letters – a likely reflection of the good relationship that exists between the apostle and Thessalonian church as well as his overall pleasure at their spiritual condition.

Verse 1 ...To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

In this phrase Paul identifies the readers of this letter as the church of Thessalonians. The church of Thessalonians in this context describes the people of God whether they are assembled for worship or not as stated in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 23:2-3; 31:30; 1 Samuel 17:47; 1 Chronicles 28:8; Nehemiah 13:1). In 1 Thessalonians 1:1 Paul as a Jew seems unreasonable to doubt that he was thinking of the Christians of Thessalonica as members of the Church of God and that he is fully aware of the biblical background and theological implications of his use of the term ‘the church’.

The term ‘church’ (*ekklesia* in Greek) reflects Paul’s understanding of the predominantly Gentile church of Thessalonica as the new people of God is confirmed by his subsequent reference to the them later as those who are “loved by God” and who know their “election” (1:4) – terms used in the Old Testament to refer to Israel but now applied to the New Testament believers.

The phrase *in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ* is peculiar to this first letter to Thessalonians because in the other letters Paul usually says ‘in Christ’. In this letter he speaks of the Father and the Lord in one breath that he expresses the closeness of the tie linking the Thessalonians with their God in terms of Christ as well as the Father.

Grace and Peace to you – This is a combination of the usual Greek and Hebrew forms of Greetings. Grace is one of the great Christian words. In a Christian context nothing brings joy like the act of God in Christ whereby sin is put away and salvation is made available as a free gift. Peace (Shalom) “*is concerned with wholeness, soundness and signifies prosperity in the widest sense especially prosperity in spiritual things.*”³ As human beings, we will never have true peace until the grace of God has dealt with our sins.

The Thessalonians' Faith and Example – 1 Thessalonians 1:2-10

2 We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly I mentioning you in our prayers, 3 remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. 4 For we know, brothers 2 loved by God, that he has chosen you, 5 because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. 6 And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, 7 so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. 8 For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. 9 For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, 10 and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

Prayer of Thanks Giving – v 2-3

Paul always thank God for the new converts. Thessalonians according to Paul were like Philippians who have been a continual joy to him. Paul gives thanks for the faith, hope and love among the Thessalonians. Faith, hope and love are the three qualities that are linked a number of times by early church Christians (Romans 5:2-5; 1 Corinthians 13:13; Galatians 5:5-6; Colossians 1:4-5; Hebrews 6:10-12; 10:22-24; 1 Peter 1:21-22).

Your work of faith – Whenever Paul is emphasizing that salvation comes from faith and not from works; he set faith and works in sharp contrast. For sure, we are justified by faith in Christ not by observing the law, because by observing the law no-one will be justified (Galatians 2:16).

Labor of love – Paul also insists that faith is busy as he insists that salvation is all of God. In Galatians 5:6, he speaks of faith working through love hence faith leading to good works. When we talk of Thessalonians labor of love we mean more than small deeds of kindness done without hope of reward.

Love is a translation of *agape*; a word not used much before the Christians took it up and made it their characteristic word for love. They had not only a new word but a new idea we see in the love shown in Christ's death for sinners (John 3:16; Romans 5:8; 1 John 4:10).

3 Morris, 43

Agape is a love given quite irrespective of merit, and it is love that seeks to give. God loves us not because we are people worthy of that love but because He is a loving God and it is His nature to love for He is love (1 John 4:8, 16).

When the love of God comes to us we cannot ignore. Once we see that God loves as part of His nature we must make a decision. We yield to the divine agape to be transformed by it and to be remade in the image of the divine image. Those who yield themselves to God are transformed by the power of the divine agape so that they rejoice to give themselves in the service of others. This is why Paul thanks God because of what the Thessalonians have done by love.

Another reason as to why Paul is thankful is because of the endurance inspired by hope in the Lord Jesus Christ. Hope in a Christian context has an air of certainty about it. It is a confident expectation not unfounded optimism we often mean by the word. The Christian hope is directed towards the Second Advent which seems to be in mind here.

Before our God and Father – This phrase draws attention to Fatherhood as the essence of the Christian view of God. It links the Father and Son in the most intimate way.

What Causes Paul and His Companions to Give Thanks

1. Life in the Thessalonian church was marked by work produced by faith
2. Church life in Thessalonica was featured by labor prompted by love
3. Thessalonian's steadfastness inspired by hope in the Lord Jesus Christ.

A great Lesson for us from this Prayer of Thanksgiving

The above three features of the church in Thessalonica stirred Paul, Silas and Timothy to thank God constantly. We might be thinking that their prayers were far from lifeless but we should be aware of spiritual blessings prompts fervent prayer and praise. Sometimes we often fail to thank God because we fail to see how good he has been to us especially in Africans Teaching Africans. Our private and corporate worship will be transformed if we take more time to reflect on the blessings He has showered upon us.

The prayer of thanksgiving in Thessalonians, also help us to understand the source of vigorous, active, steadfast church life and Christian living. Thessalonians were a working, laboring, enduring group of Christians. We should also learn to work together as we labor in ATA ministry that God has given us. It is not programs or techniques which will help us move forward and be fruitful in ministry but faith, love and hope produced by the belief we have in the gospel. Young said that *“At heart, the greatest need of the Christian church in every age is for a continuous experience of the power of the gospel. Reliance upon anything less will always create a house of straw that will not stand the test of time or survive the scrutiny of God's judgement”*⁴

Thessalonians are God's Chosen People – v. 4-7

⁴ Young, 10

The act of God choosing us is a vigorous sign of spiritual life pointed to a deeper truth. God chose the converts in Thessalonica to be His people, a truth confirmed by the way in which the gospel had come to them and been received by them.

In assuring the believers in Thessalonica that they have been chosen by God (v. 4), Paul again reveals his spiritual roots. The idea that God chooses or elects people is embedded in the Old Testament. In Deuteronomy 7:6, Moses reminded the Israelites before they crossed the Jordan River into the Promised Land that they had been chosen and set apart from all other nations to be God's treasured possession.

Believers in the New Testament as well are also God's chosen people in the same way as the OT Israelites. We have been chosen before the foundation of the world in Christ to be the sons of God and heirs of glory (Ephesians 1:4; Romans 8:17). This is the main reason as to why Paul addressed the Thessalonians as "brothers live by God".

In Jesus Christ, we are together members of one family and the object of God's special love, more so in Africans Teaching Africans ministry. Through God's grace, we have become brothers and sisters in the Lord. All of us were once strangers to the promises and household of God (Ephesians 2:19) but we are now his people, destined to share in the glory of Christ as stated in 2 Thessalonians 3:14.

As true believers, we are not simply people who have been freed from a burden of sin and guilt but we are now God's children and His heirs. We ought to be profoundly thankful to God and be deeply affectionate to one another.

In verse 5, Paul clearly states that, the gospel that he himself, Silas and Timothy preached had come not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.

Remarkable Statements on Powerful Preaching of v. 5

1. The gospel came to the Thessalonians in word which Paul, Silas and Timothy had passed on the good news of God's grace in Christ in their preaching.
2. Preaching as the mere human activity of speaking the gospel in words is not all that counts in people coming to saving faith. Preaching is not in word only but also with power which is effective in the lives of people as they listened the gospel.
3. This power is connected with the ministry of the Holy Spirit because he is the source or agent of special convicting influence as stated in John 16:8. When Paul preached, he didn't rely on his own ability with words to create effect but on a demonstration of the Holy Spirit's power (1 Corinthians 2:4). As pastors, we just preach but God is the one who opens the minds of sinful people to understand and believe the gospel and relied totally upon the Spirit to use preacher's plain preaching of the cross of Christ as a vehicle for mighty work.
4. Paul, Silas and Timothy were fully aware that the Holy Spirit was at work through them as they preached in Thessalonica. The testimony of their hearts convinced them that something more than mere speaking was taking place.

Paul's experience in Thessalonica remains a model for gospel preaching in our generation. It reminds us that ultimately it is the gospel itself that God uses to save people (Romans 1:16). It also teaches us that effective preaching of that gospel depends entirely on the work of the Holy Spirit. As Bible students or pastors, we should always learn our great need of the Holy Spirit in evangelism and Christian ministry. Without the presence of the Holy Spirit, our efforts will be fruitless.

Response of the Gospel Preached – v. 6-7

Those who heard the gospel preached welcomed it and radically changed. They became imitators of Paul, Silas and Timothy and through them they also became imitators of the Lord. A radical transformation in Thessalonians and such superhuman joy meant that God had been at work and Thessalonians were His people.

A changed life however is still the best evidence that we have become Christians. We should rely upon our inward feelings and moods or past spiritual experience for assurance that we have eternal life.

As Christians, other people will be encouraged when they see positive changes in our lives. This was the case with the Thessalonians. News of their conversion soon reached all the believers in the provinces of Macedonia and Achaia as it is mentioned in v. 7. In this generation, how do people react when they see our lives? Do our lives challenge fellow Christians to greater holiness, boldness and perseverance? These are some of the questions we should ask ourselves.

A Missionary Sending Church – 8-10

In verses 8-10, we learn that News of the arrival of the gospel in Thessalonica soon spread far and wide. There was nothing secret about those who had received the gospel and remained loyal after its messengers had been forced to leave the city. The church in Thessalonica became a beacon of spiritual light in a world of pagan darkness. In another word, it became a missionary sending church. This church is a good pattern for us today. Remember that Jesus Christ wants his church in every generation to take the gospel to the whole world.

Radical conversion of Thessalonians - 9

There was a radical conversion when the Thessalonians heard the Gospel. As a result of it, some of them turned to God from Idols (v. 9). Idolatry has such a grip on people that they dreaded causing the least of offence to any of their numerous deities. They had decided to serve the living and true God. In this regard, they had not merely attached themselves to a new object of ritual worship but entered into a relationship with a living and personal Being.

Eager Anticipation of Christ coming – v. 10

In this church, not only did converts exchange their allegiance and experience and a reorientation of their lifestyle; they also became gripped with eager anticipation. Paul Gospel however, centered on Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It is not only that He died for the sins of his people according to

the Scriptures (1 Cor. 15:3), but that God raised him from the dead as a demonstration that he was indeed His Son (Rom. 1:4). Jesus had been exalted above all other powers and now reigned from heaven as Lord and Christ (Phil. 2:9-11). He will continue reigning until he returned to judge the peoples of the earth and bring the present age to an end.

It was to the return of the Lord that the Thessalonians looked with such eagerness. The expectation of these great events captivated the minds and hearts of the early Christians. They did not think of them as remote future events but anticipated them in their own lifetime. It filled them with such eager hope that some apparently even stopped working to wait for their fulfillment (1 Thess. 4:11, 12; 2 Thess. 3:6-15).

The gospel is not only about personal salvation from sin and its consequences. It also announces the mighty acts of God in Jesus Christ to restore all things to himself (Col. 1:20). If we truly believe that God is the Lord of history and that the return of His Son will signal the renewal of all things, we, like Thessalonians will eagerly wait for him to come from heaven.

LESSON TWO: GENUINE MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH – 2:1-20

Introduction

It is evident in this chapter that some of the Jews in Thessalonica had been discounting the apostles in his absence. Paul definitely defends himself against such detraction, asserting that his preaching had been with boldness, characterized by thankfulness, full of tenderness and prosecuted with earnestness. The faith they had exercised demonstrated that “the gospel was not.....in vain.” Their work of faith was the credential of the apostle’s spiritual authority.

Paul’s authority is further emphasized by their labor of love. Having received the Word and so working the “work of faith”, they had treated it as the very Word of God, and served even in suffering.

To “serve the living and true God” ever means a labor of love, that is to say, it is obedience to the law of love in the impulse of love, and this inevitably results in suffering in the midst of those who are antagonistic to God’s revelation of His will through the Lord Jesus Christ.

In answering the charges against himself, the apostle referred to the Lord’s return. He speaks of himself as “bereft” of the Thessalonians for a short season, but qualifies the statement by saying that; this is “in presence not in heart.” It is the coming of the Lord that he looked forward as the

one reward of all present toil and pain and suffering. They are at once his hope, his joy, and his crown.

Finally, Paul turns his thought to the ultimate vindication of his work. The detractors were busy, attempting to undervalue this work and to cast aspersions on his character, his honesty and his tenderness. All these will finally be answered in the splendor and the glory of that moment when the Lord shall receive to Himself in glory those who turned from idols to serve a living and true God and to wait for His Son from heaven.

The Preaching of the Gospel at Thessalonica – 2:1-16

Paul Proceeds to defend his conduct when at Thessalonica, with the Jewish slanders very much in mind.

i. The motive of a preacher – 2:1-6

Verse 1 shows Paul's confidence in his converts and it also directs their attention to facts within their own knowledge that would refute the accusations of Paul's opponents. If the result of his preaching was so manifest and so definite, then clearly he could not have been the time-server he was now accused of being.

Paul goes on to say that his entrance was not a failure. This gives the idea of a continuing result that not only did the preaching have immediate impressive consequences, but a permanent change was wrought in the lives of the believers.

Verse 2 – Far from the visit being 'a failure' Paul and his companions were bold in their preaching of the gospel. In this verse, Paul is not speaking of merely natural courage, but of the supernatural endowment with which God equips those who put their trust in him. It is also singled out in this verse that the gospel is not of human origin. It is nothing less than God's plan for man's salvation. The Christian faith is not the accumulated wisdom of pious souls, not the insight of men of religious genius but the divine plan for dealing with our sin.

Paul here points to the circumstances surrounding their coming to Thessalonica as proof of their genuineness. They entered Thessalonica still sporting the scars of woeful mishandling in Philippi. There they had suffered and been mistreated shamefully on account of the gospel. They had been arrested on the charge of causing mayhem in the city (Acts 16:20-21); they had also been bitten and imprisoned without a fair trial.

The most important point we should learn here is that Christians who serve out of sense of conviction and call persevere no matter how difficult their circumstance could be. God will strengthen them to stick to God's call especially in times of difficulty and opposition; it proofs how genuine we are.

Verse 3 – In this verse, Paul’s insistence on the purity of the motives of the preachers seems to indicate that he is meeting an accusation that their interest was not in their message, but in their profits. Paul makes three points here that the preaching was not from error, it was not from impure motives and they were not trying to trick the converts.

In verse 4, the apostle vigorously repudiates slanders and emphasizes the solemnity of his commission so far from seeking anything for himself, he could speak only because he was approved by God that the message originated with God; it is not something thought up to please men.

While Paul served men, he did not live to serve them. His service was primarily the service of God and he was very much delighted to refer to himself as ‘the slave of God’ or ‘of Christ’. In this generation, Christian preachers are always tempted to accommodate their message to the desires of their hearers. Paul does not want a message that tells them that they are helpless sinners and that they must depend humbly on God’s mercy for their salvation. These must not be their emphasis on those doctrines to which Scripture itself gives priority.

The phrase that “God test our hearts” means that the preacher must be completely sincere. Paul is saying that the whole of the motives and thoughts of the preacher are always open to God and further that his own preaching had been done in the full consciousness of this fact.

In verses 5-6, Paul turns from the general to the particular and from the positive to the negative. There had been three things from which the preaching at Thessalonica had been free from namely; flattery, pretext for greed and seeking glory from people.

Paul’s jealous concern to avoid all that faintly resembled manipulation is a powerful lesson to us. In contrast to what we often see today, his was a remarkably plain and transparent ministry. Plainness in itself is not necessarily a virtue in Christian ministry but transparent simplicity is absolutely necessary. As God’s servants, tested by Him, approved by Him, trusted by Him, and watched by Him, how can we be anything but to be honest?

ii. **Maintenance of Preachers – v. 7-9**

V. 7 – Here Paul uses a fact of being gentle as an added proof that his ministry among the Thessalonians had not been self-seeking. Rather Paul, Silas and Timothy had been gentle among them. They had acted toward them like a mother caring for her little children.

In verse 8, the apostles behaved in a genuinely affectionate manner towards the Thessalonians. Paul repeats the thought in different words; we loved you so much. They were delighted to impart the gospel of God to the Thessalonians and also to share their lives as well.

In verse 9, Paul calls on his readers to remember the toil and hardship that the preachers had endured. The double function of evangelism and earning their living had meant hard work for them and in this the Thessalonians knew quite well. Paul does not say what kind of work they did but he was a tentmaker (Acts 18:3).

To make the gospel without cost to its hearers ought to be the aim of every Christian institution, church and individual today. It is sad all too often to see how prosperity preachers have made the gospel to be a means of gaining wealth.

Remember that, a self-giving spirit is the mark of a genuine spiritual ministry. Christians should not serve in order to get, be it wealth, power or popularity. They should rather be ready to give in order to serve.

iii. **The Behavior of a preacher – v. 10-12**

In v 10, Paul solemnly maintains that the Thessalonians can bear testimony on his behalf and so certain is he that the preacher's behavior had been above reproach, that he says that God is witness too (cf. v 5). In this verse, Paul uses three adverbs to describe the conduct of the preacher i.e. holy, righteous and blameless.

V. 11-12 – From the way the preachers had lived and commended the message, Paul turned to the manner and the content of the preaching. He reminds his readers of the tenderness with which the gospel had been preached to them as well as of the thoroughgoing nature of the demands that had been made on them.

Paul's pastoral behavior was holy probably in the sense of being constantly centered upon God and devoted to him. It was righteous in that it was free from any injustice toward men. It was also blameless, not in the sense of being sinless or perfect, but in being above accusation. Preachers of the gospel should be above reproach in the way they lived.

In the case of Paul and his helpers, paternal care had demonstrated itself among the Thessalonians in a threefold way (v. 12):

- a. Theirs had been an exhorting ministry
- b. It has also been an encouraging ministry probably in the sense of providing sympathetic support and security in difficulty
- c. It was also a firm ministry.

As God's children, believers are to live to please their Father. As those in union with Jesus Christ, they are to live in the power of His Spirit and not in the strength of the sinful nature (Romans 8:12-13). The new life we have through the gospel demands a new way of living. The more vividly we see what Christ has done for us, the more likely we are to make progress in godliness and self-denying service. Gospel preaching will always provide a better spur to holiness than reciting rules of conduct.

The Powerful Word and the cost of believing – v. 13-16

In these verses, Paul says more about the way they welcomed the good news. In doing so he provides both climaxes to his historical reminiscences and a final compelling reason for remaining true to faith. In verse 13 Paul introduced the theme of the Word of God in the form of a fresh thanksgiving. They were very much thankful that the believers had received the gospel as the Word of God. While not intentionally aiming to give his readers a lesson on the inspiration of

Scripture, Paul's words at this point do witness to the fact that God speaks through men. He reveals his truth to chosen messengers in order that they might transmit it to others – either by word or in writing.

The gospel shows itself to be the Word of God by the way it transforms people. Paul could speak of that Word at work in believers. It was not an empty word, but a living, life-changing Word. It has begun to work in the Thessalonians when they first heard it. Many had been convinced through listening to the Christian preachers that their idols were useless, and they had turned from these to serve the living true God (1:9).

Welcoming the gospel as the Word of God had proved costly for the Thessalonians. It had brought upon them the hostility of their countrymen (v. 14) presumably their families and neighbors – an experience common to new convert not only in the first century but ever since. Paul regards this as an evidence of true faith.

In verses 15-16 Paul divert into outburst of personal anger and frustration against his countrymen. He speaks severely of their persistent opposition to the purpose of God and seemingly condemns them for it. Thessalonians needed to know that the Jews have a history of opposing God and attacking his servants.

Continuing concern for the church – v. 17-20

These verses explain why Paul takes pains to assure the church of the continuing concern he and his associates had for their welfare.

1. Intense feeling

Paul's words are charged with intense feeling as he takes up this subject, reflecting the depth of emotion that it stirred within him. Addressing them intimately and endearingly, he assured his readers of his great desire to see them.

No one could ever accuse Paul of a professional or mercenary spirit. His life was bound in the welfare of those he served (1 Thess. 3:8). He loved them, felt for them and agonized over them. What example does Paul provide for us as Christian workers in this age? What a rebuke he offers those who serve coldly out of duty, doing their minimal tasks without regard for anything but their own interests. The Christian church today needs pastors, elders, leaders and members who care deeply for people.

2. Earnest Efforts

Paul's care for his spiritual children went further than feelings. It inspired the most earnest practical endeavors to return to see them again (v. 17). These efforts to return to Thessalonica apparently started a short time after the missionaries had been driven from the city. The wrench they felt in leaving the young and vulnerable church there made them want to return to it just as soon as they could.

Those of us who are entrusted with the spiritual care of others need to learn from Paul's determination. Do we persist in our efforts to help people when we meet with obstacles or do we

greet them as welcome excuses for not pursuing difficult tasks? Urgent persistent, passionate effort is all too often missing in pastoral care in the church today. Its restoration would bring immense blessing.

3. Thwarted Plans

As earnest as Paul's attempts to revisit the church in Thessalonica were, he found his every attempt to do so blocked. He does not tell us what it was that stood in his way. Whatever the immediate cause, Paul recognized that Satan lay behind the hindrance (v18). Every time he tried to return to see the church it was as though he encountered a trench cut across his path and whatever form that trench took, he knew that it was masterminded by Satan.

Paul understood that he was caught up in a fierce spiritual warfare. He firmly believed that Satan was the leader of malignant spiritual powers set on resisting the purpose of God (Ephesians 6:20).

Christians often fall into one of two opposite errors in their attitude to Satan. They either treat him as though he does not exist or at least not a serious threat to the church, or else they become over absorbed with him and his activities. Paul here avoided both extremes. He recognized his powers but he resisted Satan in the power of Christ and urged others to do so too. As pastors, we must share this healthy awareness of Satan but without being drawn into harmful curiosity about him.

4. Future Glory

In spite of these setbacks, Paul's concern for the church in Thessalonica and his desire to return there burned as strongly as ever. He had been entrusted with a very specific commission (Acts 9:15). He was to preach the gospel and establish the new churches among the Gentiles (Ephesians 3:8). The evidence of work well done was that the Thessalonians and others like them would be in Jesus' presence at his coming (v. 19-20)

LESSON THREE: STANDING FAST IN THE LORD AND THE APOSTOLIC PRAYER FOR HOLINESS – 3:1-13

Introduction

Being concern for others sincerely expresses itself in more than deep feelings and kind words. It prompts us to find ways of providing practical help as well. Paul's concern for the Thessalonian believers showed itself in this way.

1. Standing fast in the Lord – v. 1-8

a. The apostle's concern – v. 1-5

The decision to send Timothy back to Thessalonica did not come easily. Paul did not resort to it immediately but only when he and those with him could no longer bear the anxiety of not knowing about the church. Only at that point did they decide that it would be best for him to be left and Timothy sent on a return visit (v. 1). This decision was a costly one for Paul. It resulted as he puts it, in being left behind in Athens. Sacrifices like

this must often be made in Christian service. Love for others calls us to lay down our lives for them (1 John 3:16). Often that means the loss of companionship as well as comforts. Costless ministry is a rarity, if it exists at all.

The nature of Paul's concern for the Thessalonians is reflected in the person he sent them. He might well have found a messenger from the crowds or a few converts at Athens to make a fact-finding visit to Thessalonica but he did not resort to such an alternative. Timothy was sent to establish and exhort the believers in their faith (v. 2).

The goal of missionary work according to Paul was not simply getting people believe the gospel. True faith needed to be nurtured and strengthened. It needed to be corrected where it erred and supplemented when it was weak or inadequate. Timothy was sent to provide that kind of ministry.

What made this nurturing ministry so crucial for the Thessalonians was the persecution they were facing. Paul was particularly concerned that none of the converts should be moved by the afflictions they were enduring (v. 3). The fact of persecution helps us understand the intensity of Paul's concern for the Christians in Thessalonica.

b. The apostle's reward – v. 6-8

Timothy's news was a profound encouragement to Paul and those with him. It reached him when he was burdened with his own deep troubles. Paul's entire life was bound up in the ministry of the gospel. He lived to see men and women changed by its power and brought into a living bond of faith with the Lord.

2. **The apostolic prayer for holiness – v 9-13**

a. The question – v. 9-10

How could Paul ever thank God? He was very much overwhelmed with the experience of joy that he could not find words to fully express his gratitude. Joy is the compensating blessings we experience as we suffer in the service of Christ. We may be beaten down and burned outwardly, yet at the same time be buoyed aloft by an inexpressible inward joy, a foretaste of the glory that awaits us (1 Peter 1:8)

b. The petition – v. 11-13

Paul prays that God would bring that desire to pass. Rather than presenting a direct request to God, the apostle speaks in a way that suggests he is expressing his wish. He addresses both the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ in his prayer. Both are viewed as active in responding to his request, and correspondingly, both are addressed in it. In doing so, he indicates his high view of the person of the Lord Jesus Christ that he

should pray to Him as he does to the Father. He considers Jesus to be equal be equal in dignity and function to the Father.

LESSON FOUR: DIVINE CALL TO HOLINESS AND THE BELIEVERS HOPE – 4:1-18

Introduction

At this point Paul's mind turns in a new direction. Up until now he has been countering his critics but in this chapter he begins to counsel his converts. With supreme tact and deep affection he used his pen to address the needs of his flock at a distance.

1. Divine call to holiness – v. 1-8

a. The authority behind the call – v. 1-3

The Thessalonian Christians had made a start in this new way of life. Paul is quick to encourage his readers by acknowledging that. He knows how easy it is to dishearten young believers by harping on about faults and weaknesses.

b. The call itself – v. 4-8

In this section, Paul wanted to see his converts in Thessalonica more firmly established in the faith. They had made a good start but there was still plenty of room for improvement and progress. The Christian life is to be marked by both radical restraint and purity in the sexual realm. Christians are to curb their natural sexual instincts and express them in a way that is holy and honorable. They are not to live in a passionate lust, gripped and borne along their desires. Paul's instructions on sex ethics speak just as urgently to our generation as they did to Pau's first readers. As our culture slides ever increasingly into moral decadence, Christians need to remember that as God's saints (Eph. 5:3), His holy people, they must aim at absolute sexual purity.

2. The elements of a holy life – v. 9-12

a. The basic elements of love – v. 9-10

The main qualities which made early Christians stand out from pagan neighbors was their moral purity and intense love for one another. The love which Paul has in mind is specifically brotherly love (v. 9) the love of Christians for one another. Thessalonians had not simply been taught about the subject of brotherly love; God himself had actually taught them to love. The brotherly love of the Thessalonian

Christians showed itself not only among themselves but toward other Christians as well (v. 10).

b. Other elements enjoined – v. 11-12

In these verses we could see that the congregation in Thessalonica seems to have been burdened with a class of people best described as idlers (5:14). Having just spoken about Christian love in the church (v. 9-10), Paul returns to deal with this new problem. It may well be that he considered the two matters closely related. Brotherly love in the church had generated a liberality and kindness that loafers were ready to abuse. Paul wants to make it clear that true Christianity expresses itself in a quiet and industrious manner of daily life.

In verses 12, Paul gives two reasons for pressing for a respectable lifestyle. The first is that their daily life might ‘win the the respect of outsiders’. The second reason offered for living in quiet and industrious lifestyle is so that they would not be dependent upon anybody.

3. **The believers hope – v. 13-18**

a. The blessed hope – v. 13-15

Here Paul pinpoints the root of Thessalonians anxieties. He traces them to a lack of knowledge, to ignorance. He introduced the Thessalonians to the idea that Jesus the Messiah would return again as God’s triumphant king but just how much they had told them about this was unclear.

b. The Lord’s coming – v. 16-18

In these verses, Paul assures anxious Christians that those who die in the Lord will not be left out of the events that take place when the Lord Jesus returns. He has already shown how death and resurrection of Jesus guarantee that they will be with him when he comes again. Now he goes on to describe what will actually happen to living and dead believers at that time.

Paul is not attempting to tell us everything that will take place at that time. He says nothing about what will happen to non-Christians when Jesus returns. The essence of what Paul says is that those who are alive will not precede those who have died (v. 15). The word “the dead raised first” assured us that when Jesus returns; the first thing that will happen to believers is that the dead in Christ will rise (v. 16). Paul gives a vivid account of the two events leading up to that.

i. The Lord himself will descend from heaven (v. 16)

- ii. His descent will be marked by mighty sounds – a cry of command, the voice of an archangel and the sound of the trumpet of God (v. 16). The command resembles the cry of a charioteer to his horses, the archangel is the powerful messenger of God and the trumpet is an instrument of summons and celebrations. The Lord returns as a conquering king and announces his coming with a mighty sound.

Following the resurrection of the dead, we who are still alive will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air (v. 17). This spectacular event is what has come to be known in Christian theology as rapture. “Rapture” comes from a Latin term meaning “to seize”. It aptly conveys the ideas of force, suddenness and irresistibility implied in the original verb Paul used. Believers both the transformed living and the resurrected dead will be snatched up from the earth to meet with the Lord in the air.

In verse 18, Paul tells his readers to encourage one another. Christian comfort is grounded in more than sympathy. It is based upon the hope conveyed by truth. The best thing we can do to comfort the grieving is to share with them, at the right time and in the right way, the promises contained in the gospel.

LESSON FIVE: THE DAY OF THE LORD AND EXHORTATIONS TOWARDS MUTUAL HARMONY – 5:1-28

1. The Day of the Lord – v. 1-11

a. What the day of the Lord is – v. 1-3

Having dealt with anxieties about the dead in Christ, Paul moves on to a new but closely related subject. His teaching on the coming of the Lord had aroused fears in the minds of some as to whether they would be ready for this great event. This in turn had prompted them to ask about its timing. They wanted to ensure that they would be ready for it and not miss out on their salvation.

Thessalonians knew that Jesus’ return would be an awesome event and they wanted to be better prepared for it. Their mistake lay in supposing that the best way to be ready for his coming was to know the exact time. Their reason for wanting this information was intensely practical. They knew that Jesus’ return would be an awesome event and they wanted to be better prepared for it. Paul says that he really has no need to write because in effect, he has no new information to give.

b. The day of the Lord and the believers – v. 4-11

The idea that the day of the Lord comes like a thief in the night naturally arouses dread. The unexpectedness of the event are calculated to make stoutest heart quake. In this matter, Paul does not want us to be disturbed at the prospect return of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul tells the Thessalonian Christians that what he has been saying about the destructive, thief-like coming of the Lord does not apply to them because they belong to a different category of people from those who will be overwhelmed by judgment (v. 4). On the contrary, we are children of the light and children of the day, therefore we belong to the light and not darkness (v. 5). A great change has happen to us as Christians. We have moved from a realm of darkness to a realm of light. However, being the children of light we are to live as as the children of light and of the day as we wait for the Lord to appear (v. 6-7).

The image which Paul draws in verse 8 is that of a soldier. The picture of a soldier standing on watchful is a clear indication of the attitude a Christian ought to have as he waits for the Lord. Paul argues that far from allowing ourselves to sleep or become drunk, we are to be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate and the hope of salvation as a helmet. Faith, love and hope are spiritual armor that we are to wear as wait for the Lord. Faith and love are to serve as a breastplate for us, steadying and strengthening the heart while the hope of our salvation is to act as a helmet protecting the mind against doubt or despair.

Our hope of being saved in the day of the Lord rests in God's purpose or appointment as it is stated in v. 9. Paul refers to Thessalonian converts as those who have been loved, chosen and called by God (1 Thess. 1:4; 2:12).

2. **Exhortations towards mutual harmony – v. 12-15**

a. Showing honor to those in places of responsibility in the Lord – v. 12-13

In this section, Paul begins with a note of a warm appeal in verse 12 when he said “we ask you brothers.....” as he make a genuine appeal for action. He wanted to discuss a number of practical matters and he asks for the full attention and hearty response of his readers to them.

The first concerns the way they relate to their leaders (v. 12-13). These leaders are the spiritual leaders of the young church. They are people who are in a position of being over them in the Lord, an expression that points to a role of authoritative rule and

responsible care. They are furthermore those who admonish them, who correct them when they are erring by calling to mind the right way of the Lord.

Brother in the congregation are to show these people respect or as the word is often translated, they are to ‘know’ them. They are to observe closely the quality of their personal lives and work and to regard them with esteem and affection on account of these. Church leaders watch over the spiritual welfare of those entrusted to them as those who must one day give account to their master (Hebrews 13:17)

b. General admonitions for harmony – v. 13 b-15

In verse 14, Paul leave the subject of relationships with their leaders and instructs the congregation in the way it is to respond to three classes of people within it; the idle, the faint-hearted, and the weak. The idle are probably the loafers referred to earlier, members who have ‘broken ranks’ with the rest of the congregation by refusing to work (4:11). The faint-hearted are those who are timid and lack courage in the face of persecution or other unknowns, such as events at the second coming of Christ. The weak are almost certainly those inclined to crumble when faced with either moral temptations (4:3-8) or spiritual scruples (1 Cor. 8:9-13).

The brothers are to respond to each other in ways appropriate to their case. They are to admonish the idle, warning and instructing them to correct their faulty behavior. They are to encourage the faint-hearted, coming alongside them offering the strength of well-chosen words of comfort in the midst of fears (4:18; 5:11). Also, they are to help the weak, cleaving to them closely so as to be on hand in times of temptations and trials.

In verse 15, Paul adds a further important admonition which is the call to non-relation. Given the severe persecution, the Thessalonians were suffering and the inevitable offences that form part of living closely with others in community, Paul’s readers probably had special needs of this reminder. Rather than being retaliate when wronged, we must always try to do good to one another and everyone else.

Relationships do account for Christians. We must live with our leaders, with fellow believers and with the non-Christian world in ways that reflect the power of the gospel. Tragically, those of us most concerned with correct doctrine often fail abysmally in the way we relate to other people.

3. **Various exhortations – v. 16-22**

a. Rejoice, pray and be thankful – 16-18

For most of the letter up to this point, Paul's attention has been occupied with pressing personal, moral and social needs in the congregation. Only as these have been dealt with and laid aside does he address what might be called the more directly spiritual aspects of the life of the congregation. Without thriving inner life, the church will never fulfill its moral and social obligations in the world. Holy living can flow only from a healthy heart.

In verses 16-18, we see the three short commands which allow us to pinpoint activities that should characterize the spiritual life of every Christian. Paul wants his readers to be always joyful, to pray without ceasing and to give thanks in all circumstances. Joy, prayer and thanksgiving should mark the life of the Christian community both in its individual and in its corporate expression.

Joy is a notable feature of New Testament Christianity. The good news of the gospel brought joy to those who received it. It was a lasting, deep-seated sense of well-being and pleasure produced by the Holy Spirit now living within them (Luke 10:21; Gal. 5:22).

Paul instructs his converts to pray without ceasing (v. 17). He assumes that they know about prayer and that they are already a praying people. Non-praying Christians, after all, are an anomaly. Prayer like joy is a spontaneous feature of true faith. Where it is missing, faith is also absent or at best weak.

The lives of Christians should also be marked by gratitude. They are to give thanks in all circumstances (v. 18). Believing that their lives are in the hands of a wise and Holy Father and that all things seemingly good and bad, come from him, they are to be thankful. This is true Christianity (Romans 8:28).

b. Do not quench the spirit – v. 19

In verse 19, Paul warns the Thessalonians not to quench the spirit. The Holy Spirit had come with the sign of fire at Pentecost (Acts 2:3) and continued to fuel the church's life with warmth and light. Anything that repressed his work might fittingly be described as quenching or putting out his fire.

c. Other injunction – v. 20-22

In verse 20, he tells the Thessalonian believers that they are not to despise prophecies. They were in danger of doing so. The excitement so evident in the congregation surrounding the Lord's return could easily have spawned claims to prophetic message about the events. While such prophecies would have thrilled some, they would likely

have offended others damaging the very status of the gift itself in the life of the church.

Thessalonians were also advised to test everything (v. 21) in much the same way that they might examine a metal or gemstone to test its purity. That which they found to be good, they were to hold on, but everything that was evil, they were to abstain or stand a loot from (v. 22). The gifts of the spirit were to be valued but exercised with discernment.

The church through the ages has been strong only when it has recognized that its life lies in God himself. When it has done this, its emphasis has not been upon its activities, its buildings, or its organization. Rather worship and prayer for mighty manifestations of the Holy Spirit have been the focus of its energies. This remains the path to spiritual strength today.

4. The sanctification for the whole man – v. 23-24

a. The whole man set apart for God – v. 23

In verse 23, Paul prays for the sanctification of the Thessalonians. The idea of sanctification has been behind much of what he has written in the last two chapters. Paul prays that the process of sanctification would be brought to completion. He wants them to be sanctified completely. He is well aware that in Christ they are already completely set apart to God and accepted as holy (1 Cor. 1:2). But it is not this aspect of sanctification he is thinking about. He is referring to the process of transformation that takes place in the life of a Christian as a result of being united to Christ.

Paul also prays that his readers will be kept blameless at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Since the Lord comes to judge the world and execute his Father's wrath upon to judge the world and execute his Father's wrath upon the sinners, nothing is more critical than that we should be prepared for his arrival.

b. The certainty of complete sanctification – v. 24

In verse 24, Paul also states more fully that the one who call is faithful and he will surely do it. In the end our security rests in the Lord himself. He is the one who is able to keep us from stumbling and present us blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy.

5. Closing charge – v. 25-28

Paul closes this letter with a request, two instructions and a benediction, all of which are laden with helpful instructions.

a. Request for prayer – v. 25-26

In verse 25, his request is a plea for prayer for himself and his associates, Silas and Timothy. The three missionaries have been praying ceaselessly for the church in Thessalonica (1:2-3; 3:10). Now Paul asks that it reciprocate and pray for them.

In verse 26, Paul wants the Christians in Thessalonica to be sure to greet all the brothers with a holy kiss. The practice of greeting one another was as common in ancient societies as it is today. As Christians greet one another, they do so in a way that reflects their relationship as fellow members of God's family.

b. Charge concerning reading – v. 27-28

Paul has one more instruction to add, and this concerns the reading of the letter itself (v. 27). This is no light request but has the strength of a demand made on oath. The Lord himself bears witness to what he is asking them to do.

In verse 28, Paul is ready to sign off his letter. This was a wish for good health and fortune. He expressed his hope that his readers would have the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with them (v. 28). For Paul the Christian life was a life of grace, saturated from beginning to end with the undeserved favor and blessing of God. It began in grace, was sustained by grace and would be consummated through grace.

CONCLUSION

This letter offers instructions in evangelism, ministry and worship. It provides encouragement to us in our trials but above all it challenges us as God's chosen people to live in ways that pleases him (4:1) as we wait in confident hope for His Son to appear from heaven.

2 THESSALONIANS

LESSON SIX: THE CHURCH COMMENDED AND COMFORTED – 1: 1-12

1. The church commended – v. 1-4

a. The greeting – v. 1-2

Second Thessalonians is like its earlier companion letter in its opening verses. It is intensely pastoral and practical in nature.

b. The commendation – v. 3-4

In these verses, Paul begins his letter on a note of thanksgiving. There are errors to correct and people to rebuke, but these can wait. Pastoral wisdom and genuine affection both dictate that he begin with an outburst of gratitude.

Paul does not write as he had in the first letter where he said “we give thanks to God for all of you” (1 Thess. 1:2). Instead he tells them that he, Silas and Timothy feel a constant sense of obligation to thank God for them (v. 3). They were so thankful because of the flourishing faith and love. In verse 4, we see that these three men were also encouraged with the spiritual progress of the Thessalonians that they were in the practice of singing their praises to others.

Paul was careful about boasting in that credit will never be given to man when it was due to God (1 Cor. 1:31; 4:6-7) yet he recognized that there was a place for speaking to others about the great things God had done in the lives of people.

Significantly, Paul does not attribute their liberty to their own open-handedness but to the grace God has given to them and he does so not to flatter the Macedonians, but to encourage the Corinthians to be like them (2 Cori. 8:1-7). So in this case, Paul can speak of his boasting about the Thessalonians among the churches of God – the other Christian congregations with which he was in touch. He tells them of their steadfastness and faith in the midst of all their persecutions and afflictions.

From the outset, the Thessalonian church had suffered fierce opposition yet in spite of that and the inevitable troubles it produced, they were showing unwavering loyalty to Christ. God’s grace was propping them therefore, Paul tells others about this, using them as an example to encourage and challenge those who may be showing less courage.

2. The church comforted – v. 5-10

a. The reason for their suffering – v. 5-6

Having spoken of their spiritual growth and steadfastness under persecution, Paul continues to say that the situation which appears to be so unjust is to be understood as open evidence that God's judgment is indeed righteous (v. 5).

Some people see Christian suffering itself as evidence of God's righteous judgment in action. Peter speaks of God preparing his people for glory by using trials and persecutions as means of judging them in this world (1 Peter 4:16-17). Judgment begins now for the household of God in order that they might escape it later. Understood this way, Paul would here be saying to the Thessalonians that their present sufferings are in fact a display of God's righteous judgment at work but this is not the only way and perhaps not the most natural way of understanding his words. Paul could also be speaking of the patience and prosperity of the Thessalonians in the midst of their sufferings.

This reminds us how careful we must be in interpreting the significance of suffering. Persecution and trial are not necessarily signs of God's displeasure. They are certainly never evidence of his injustice. He has many purposes in allowing his children to suffer.

As Christians we must never expect to have trouble-free lives. We must not become upset with God and begin to question his goodness when he allows unfair things to happen to us. What counts most is what God does in us and through us by means of our sufferings.

In verse 6, we see that the prospect of glory for kingdom sufferings rests on unshakable foundation, namely, that God is just. It belongs to the righteous character of God both to pay back affliction and to relieve those who are afflicted. We must never allow undeserved suffering for Christ to give rise to hard thoughts about God. He knows what he is about, has a good purpose in all that happens to us, and will one day set everything right.

b. The basis of comfort – v. 7-10

In verses 7-10, Paul provides a vivid sketch of awesome future events that desperately needs closer consideration. He mentioned first when these events will happen. Punishment for the oppressors and relief for the oppressed will come about when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven (v. 7b).

In 1 Thess. 4:13-18, the return of the Lord was discussed in connection with fears about Christians who had already died but in 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10, his return is connected with the punishment of persecutor and the relief of Christian sufferers.

In this section Paul has emphasized God's vengeance but he is not totally forgetful of other positive events associated with the revelation of the Lord. The day of the Lord will also be a day in which he is glorified in his people and marveled among believers (v. 10). The same revelation that excites terror in one class of people will prompt adoration in another. Those who have suffered patiently for him and indeed all who believe the gospel will gaze upon him with admiring wonder. His glory will far surpass anything they could have imagined and leave them struck with wonder.

The Thessalonians can be confident of being among the adoring assembly that welcomes the Lord. Since it comprises all who have believed, it includes them (v. 10). Their glad reception of the gospel (1 Thess. 1:6) guaranteed their joyful future. As Christians, our destiny hinges on our response to the gospel now. This should make us treasure that gospel ourselves and make it known to others.

3. Intercession for the church – v. 11-12

a. The prayer – v. 11

The reflection on the Thessalonians' future participation in the glory of Christ inspires the missionaries to pray for them. They pray that God may count them worthy of his calling. As Christians we need to look beyond ourselves to God in prayer for His enabling to do even the things that he has already made us want to do. Paul knew that the Thessalonians need the power of God to work out their faith in acts of practical service and since prayer is the channel God has provided for obtaining that power, the apostle and his fellow missionaries pray constantly that God would supply what their converts need.

b. The purpose –v. 12

The final happiness of the Thessalonian Christians is not their aim but the most important purpose is the glory of the Lord Jesus. Grace lies at the root of our conversion but in the future we will also recognize that grace is the only explanation for our glorification. We were called by grace, lived by grace and are finally exalted with the Lord Jesus Christ by grace.

LESSON SEVEN: THE CHURCH'S OUT TAKING AND THE DAY OF THE LORD – 2:1-17

1. The church's out taking and the day of the Lord – v. 1-5

a. A misunderstanding exposed – v. 1-2

In this section Paul begins by identifying the problem area. It concerns the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him. In 1:7-10, the apostle has been talking about the revelation or the unveiling of the Lord Jesus in connection with punishing those who were persecuting the Thessalonian Christians but in 2:1-2 his subject is the coming of the Lord Jesus and the gathering of his people to him. Paul is thinking here not so much of the revelation of the Lord as the judge of the wicked but of his coming as the Savior of his people.

Paul makes a strong plea in regard to this subject because he does not want the church to become unsettled or alarmed by rumors they might hear about the Lord's return (v. 2).

b. The error refuted – v. 3-5

In v. 3 Paul tells his readers that they should not let themselves be tossed about by such reports that the day of the Lord had already come; they must not let anyone deceive them in this matter. Warning against deception are often linked predictions of the return of the Lord Jesus. The spectacular character of the event makes it prone to counterfeit claims. Jesus warned of people who would deceive many by claiming to be the Christ (Mark 13:5) or by saying that he had appeared in this place or that (Mathew 24:26). His disciples were to be in guard against such delusions, precisely the counsel Paul gives the Thessalonian Christians here.

In v. 4, the central characteristic of the man of lawlessness is his total rejection of authority and especially of all that claims to be God. Apparently, this was information Paul's readers should already have known (v. 5)

2. The church's out taking and the man of sin – v. 6-9

a. The church's out taking and the Holy Spirit – v. 6-7

In v. 6 the Thessalonian Christians knew not only about this coming usurper but also about what was restraining him. The secret power of lawlessness already at work in the world (v. 7) was being held back by restraint that would remain until God's time for the revelation of the man of lawlessness.

b. The church's out taking and the man of sin – v. 8-9

In v. 8, what Paul want us to know along with the certainty of his appearance as a persecutor to the day of the Lord, is that he will be killed and brought to nothing by

the Lord Jesus Christ. The first thing about the coming of the lawless one is that it will be by the activity of Satan (v. 9). Satan will attempt to deceive people at the end of the world with a blasphemous substitute for Jesus. The climax of God's saving plan is marked by the Parousia (second coming) of Jesus. The culmination of Satan's opposition to God will be the coming of the man of lawlessness.

3. The church's out taking and latter-day truth rejecters – v. 10-12

a. The doom of truth rejecters – v. 10

The people mentioned here are those who perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. In this verse, Paul is referring to people who have rejected the gospel. They have heard the truth – which in Paul's terminology is essentially the same as the gospel – and been urged to embrace it. These people have willfully refused to receive it as the means of their salvation and as a result, they are on the road to destruction.

b. The reason for their doom – v. 11-12

In verse 11, Paul says that God actually sends a strong delusion upon those who refuse to love the truth so that they will believe what is false. In some way he disposes them to hear and believe the errors of Satan as spread by the lawless one. They have rejected the truth and because of this, God abandons them to the lie.

God uses Satan and the man of lawlessness so that who have not believed the truth but have taken pleasure in unrighteousness will be condemned (v. 12). They have rejected the truth not because it is beyond their comprehension or because it is logical but they have done so because they loved wickedness.

In mercy and love, God provides sinners with a gospel of reconciliation through Christ. If sinners received it, they receive life but if they reject it there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins but only a fearful expectation of judgment and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries of God (Hebrews 10:26-27).

4. The church's out taking and the Thessalonians – v. 13-17

a. The Thessalonians were a cause for thanks – v. 13-14

In this section as well, Paul and his associates felt that they ought to thank God for their brothers in Thessalonica (v. 13). In 1:3, we noted earlier that they felt it only proper to thank God on account of the progress the church had made in its spiritual life but here the apostles says they feel that same inner compulsion as they felt reflect on God's grace in securing their salvation.

b. They were objects of exhortation and prayer – v. 15-17

Having assured his readers of their destiny in the day of the Lord, the apostles exhort them to live appropriately. They urged them to stand firm and hold to the teachings they were given (v. 15). In verse 16, Paul refers to the object of prayer, the Lord Jesus Christ and the comfort (encouragement) and good hope and in verse 17 he asks that God would comfort, establish, encourage and strengthen them. He knows that their greatest need is for inner stability, for unwavering faith and constant hope and love as they wait for the coming of the Lord.

In conclusion to this chapter, we should know that inner strength is the basis of our Christian stability. No amounts of activity or positive thinking can compensate for the resolve and energy God creates in the heart through His Word and Spirit. As a matter of fact, we can only hope to withstand outward pressure as we constantly experience inward renewal.

LESSON EIGHT: APOSTOLIC REQUEST FOR PRAYER AND GENERAL INSTRUCTION CONCERNING DISCIPLINARY SEPARATION – 3: 1-18

Introduction

In this letter so far, we have seen that Paul has addressed two major concerns troubling the Thessalonian Christians. First, he has assured them that God has not forgotten them in their suffering (1:3-12). Secondly, he has calmed their fears regarding the coming of the day of the Lord (2:1-17). The matter which remains for him now to write about is the problem of persistent refusal by some members of the church to work as wait for the Lord to come but before he takes up this issue, he makes a request of his fellow believers to pray for them (v. 1).

1. Apostolic request for prayer – v. 1-5

a. The request – v. 1-2

In this section, Paul does not ask his readers to pray for his safety or for sufficient funds to support this mission in Corinth but he wants them to pray for the advance of Lord's word. His concern is not so much for the well-being of its messengers but for the success of the gospel. Paul realized as we must that only the Holy Spirit makes gospel preaching effective (1 Cor. 2:4-5). Prayer and preaching must be intertwined (Acts 6:4) if the word of the Lord is to spread rapidly and honored among men.

b. The basis for the request – v. 3-5

The threat posed by unbelievers does not dominate the apostle in a way that makes him cower and lose confidence. On the contrary, he knows that the Lord is faithful (v. 3) and will never forsake those who put their trust in him (Psalms 9:10). In this regard, Paul assures the Thessalonians that the Lord Jesus will establish them and guard them against the evil one. The Lord Jesus however is able to strengthen and

protect every form of evil that the devil contrives against us (Ephesians 6:10-17; 1 Cor. 10:13). In verse 4, Paul is aware that there are some who are defying his instructions but he is confident that the church as a whole is doing what he has commanded. His confidence rested in them not as people but in the Lord. This reliance upon the Lord prompts another fervent prayer wish from the apostle. Their continued obedience depends upon the state of their hearts, the inner source of life that controls words and actions. He wants their hearts to be filled with God's own love and Christ's steadfastness (v. 5).

2. **Instruction concerning disciplinary separation – v. 6-15**

a. The general principle of separation – v. 6

In this verse, Paul issues commands on how to deal with the rebellious faction in the church. The action he wants the congregation to take is toward those who are idle and are not following the teachings of the apostle and his missionary helpers. The congregation is to keep away from all who belong to this category. By this Paul means they are to withdraw from intimate fellowship with such people.

b. The apostolic example – v. 7-9

Paul's readers did not need any more teaching on the subject of idleness. Not only had they received plenty already but they had been shown how to live by the apostle and his associates while they were with them. Paul, Silas and Timothy had been both messengers of the gospel and models of how Christians were to live. The Thessalonians had understood from the outset that they were meant to follow their example (v. 7, 1 Thess. 1:6), even as the missionaries were following the example of the Lord Jesus himself (1 Cor. 11:1).

Their example had not been one of idleness but in contrary they had worked night and day to avoid being burdensome (v. 8). Though entitled to material support as ambassadors of the Lord Jesus (v. 9), the three men had foregone this right in the interest of the gospel.

c. The disorder specified – v. 10-12

Paul did not want new believers adopting a dependent or lazy lifestyle but wanted them to work quietly and productively with their own hands (1 Thess. 4:11-12). Not content simply to tell this – something that he obviously did repeatedly (v. 10) – the apostle set out to show them by his own actions how it was to be done.

The apostle knew that he was on firm ground in making so much of this issue. News had reached him though he did not let on the source of his information that idle members were indeed troubling the congregation (v. 11). The offenders appear to be

only a minority group in the church, but they are a troublesome group just the same. These idlers are to do their work quietly and earn their own living (v. 12). They are to stop their disruptive interfering in the lives of other people and take care of their own affairs.

d. The cure indicated – v. 13-15

Most of Paul's readers did not need stiff words of correction. He had something else to say to this large group. They did not need correction so much as encouragement. In v. 13, Paul identified himself with them in the Lord over against the smaller group he has been addressing, "do not go weary in doing good". In contrast to idlers, the majority were doing what was right, quietly working to supply their needs and minding their own affairs.

Persistent rebellion calls for stern measures than words. Paul recognized that there might well be need for such stern measures in Thessalonica and therefore outlines the action the church must take should there be any who does not obey these instructions (v. 14). In case of such a person, the church is required to three things:

- i. It must first take a special note of them (v. 14)
- ii. The church must have nothing to do with such a person so that he might feel ashamed (v. 16)
- iii. The church is to go about this act of discipline in the right spirit. They are not to treat the erring person as an enemy but warn him as a brother (v. 15).

3. **Concluding benediction – v. 16-18**

a. The salutation – v. 17

In this verse, the apostle draws attention to the fact that he is writing it with his own hand. Letter writers in his day commonly dictated their letters to a professional scribe and added the final greeting in their own writing as the equivalent of our personal signature. Apparently his readers know what Paul's writing looks like for he adds, 'it is the way I write'. Whenever they see that script on a letter, they can be sure it is from him.

b. The benediction – v. 16,18

The prayer of v. 16 signals the approaching end of the letter but it also flows out of the instructions that precedes it. Paul prays that the Lord would give them peace. He recognizes that peace in the broad sense of spiritual health and wholeness is what the congregation needs. He asked the Lord to give it to them at all times and in every

way. He wants the peace of the Lord Jesus to be their unbroken possession in every circumstance that confronts them.

In verse 18, the apostle bids farewell to his readers with the blessing, 'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all'. This expressed a genuine wish to his readers. He knows that the supreme need of all Christians is the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Given the pressures from a hostile world as well as the troubles bubbling within the church today, these words must breathe comfort into our hearts. The promised grace of all-powerful and all-loving Lord and Savior offered hope in our difficult circumstances. In him we find all that we need to continue our work, labor and our patient endurance as we wait for His coming. We can face whatever the future holds for us with confidence knowing that the limitless resources of our Lord Jesus are our disposal.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ remains the indispensable need for us Christians