



The First Epistle
to the
THESSALONIANS

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by Given O. Blakely

LESSON #1

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

" 1:1 *Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.*" (1 Thessalonians 1:1 ^{KJV})

INTRODUCTION

It is generally understood that this Epistle was the first of Paul's known letters. I say "known," because we are not sure how many letters Paul wrote which have not come down to us (i.e., like the Epistle to the Laodiceans, Col 4:16). This should present no problem to us, however, for the Holy Spirit has so orchestrated the compilation of Scripture that no essential teaching is missing.

Written somewhere between 52-53 A.D. (Approximately 15 years after Paul's conversion), this book is probably the earliest of all New Testament writings, with the possible exception of James. That makes it a particularly significant Epistle. In it, the general condition of the early church is indicated, together with their commendable response to the Gospel of Christ. Many of the heresies that were later addressed by the Apostle had not yet arisen, and questions concerning the implications of the Gospel were not common. Although the Thessalonians were not without a flaw in their persuasions, they possessed a purity of heart that is worthy of emulation.

The Thessalonians were being persecuted for their faith (1:6; 2:14), which gave rise to much of the teaching of this Epistle. Throughout the letter, they are exhorted to steadfastness in the faith. Some of the premier expressions concerning the anticipation of Christ's return are found in this book. They reveal to us HOW early believers were taught to consider this doctrine. There is a simplicity to this book that is refreshing, and yet a profundity that is challenging. There is a strong appeal to the simplicity of faith, which readily receives the Word of the Lord, and is willing to act upon it immediately.

PAUL, SILVANUS, AND TIMOTHY

" 1:1a *Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus . . .*" ^{KJV} Paul mentions Silvanus and Timotheus as fellow workers, and not co-authors of this Epistle. He was not ashamed to join his name with those who labored with him in the Gospel.

PAUL is the name that eventually was exclusively used by the Spirit for the former Saul of Tarsus. It is certainly not by coincidence that, in Scripture, "*Saul*" was a name shared by king Saul, also of the tribe of Benjamin (1 Sam 9:21; Rom 11:1). However, because Paul became so distinguished, he was known by a more unique name. Only one other person in the Bible had this name. It was Sergius Paulus, "*a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God*" (Acts 13:7). After that event, Saul became known as Paul (Acts 13:9), and was only referred to as "*Saul*" when recounting his conversion (Acts 22:7,13; 26:14). The name "*Paul*" means "small," or "little." It doubtless referred to his physical stature, as he was a giant in the Spirit. Some of conjectured he "*was little of stature*" like Zacchaeus (Lk 19:2).

Paul makes no other reference to himself, such as "*Apostle*," "*a servant of Jesus Christ*," or "*servant of God*" (1 Cor 1:1; Rom 2:2; Tit 1:1). The Thessalonians had so received him that there was no need for such introductions. His Apostleship had not been doubted as it was at Corinth (1 Cor 9:1-2), nor was his doctrine held in question as in Rome (Rom 3:8). The Thessalonian's unequivocal reception of Paul allowed him to speak freely.

SILVANUS is the Latin form of Silas, who was a significant believer in the early history of the church. Paul also uses this name for Silas in 2 Corinthians 1:19 and 2 Thessalonians 1:1. Peter also uses this form in 1 Peter 5:12. Silas is first mentioned as one of the "*chief brethren*" in Jerusalem (Acts 15:22). He was among those appointed to accompany Paul and Barnabas to Antioch (Acts 15:22-27). He is called a "*prophet*" in Acts 15:32, and was chosen by Paul to travel with him in the place of Barnabas (Acts 15:40). Silas was imprisoned with Paul in Philippi, an incident well known to believers everywhere (Acts 16:23-34). When Paul was in Athens, where he spoke his famous message to the Athenian philosophers, he was waiting for Silas and Timothy to join him (Acts 17:15-32). Here is man that stands out in the Acts of the Apostles.

TIMOTHEUS is Timothy, which means "dear to God." The word "*Timotheus*" is a transliteration of the Greek word (letter for letter translation), and "*Timothy*" is the translated name, being used in all later translations. Timothy is first mentioned in Acts 16:1. He is called "*a certain disciple*" who was the son of a believing Jewess, and whose father was a Greek. Though young, he was "*well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium*" (Acts 16:2). Paul referred to him as "*my fellow worker*" (Rom 16:21). He also told the Philippians he

had no one else like Timothy, who would "*naturally care for*" their condition (Phil 2:19-20). Timothy was also an "*evangelist*," whom Paul charged to energetically fulfill his ministry (2 Tim 4:5). Later Paul tells the Thessalonians he had sent Timothy to them as a "*brother, and minister of God, and our fellowlaborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith*" (3:2).

Paul greets the Thessalonians in the name of himself, Silas, and Timothy, because they had been with him when the church at Thessalonica was established (Acts 17:1-4). They had labored with him in the beginning, and their hearts were still knit to the work.

Here, then, is a marvelous trio of Kingdom laborers. A seasoned Apostle, a prophet, and an evangelist. They were not co-equals, but were co-laborers. Paul "*labored more abundantly than*" the other Apostles (1 Cor 15:10). Silas was among the "*chief men*" in the early church, and distinguished himself as a "*prophet*." Timothy was an aggressive young man held in high regard by the brethren. They did not compete with one another, but worked together. They did not go their separate ways, but joined in a common endeavor.

In this we see the glorious "*unity of the faith*." People from different age groups, backgrounds, and gifts, can join together in the work of the Lord. They can assist one another in better fulfilling their own ministries, while being of benefit in sharpening the kingdom skills of their fellow workers. Such an arrangement is not common in this day of religious specialists and fractured ministries. We can, however, experience such things.

THE CHURCH OF THE THESSALONIANS

" 1:1b . . . *unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ . . .*" ^{KJV} This is one of the two churches identified by its local members: "*the church of the Thessalonians*" (1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1) and "*the church of the Laodiceans*" (Col 4:16; Rev 3:14). Some might object to such an appellation, feeling it draws undue attention to the people. Notwithstanding, this expression has been sanctified by the Holy Spirit. "*The church*" means the "called out assembly." This letter, therefore was not a general letter to the citizens of Thessalonica, nor was it intended to be read in the city council or the marketplace. This is a letter to the citizens of that city who had been "*called out*" of this present evil world, and into the fellowship of God's dear Son. These were the people God recognized in that city.

Real churches are not part of a denominational brotherhood, nor are they under some regional religious authority. Congregations are autonomous, or independent, being individual entities of themselves. They are part of the whole body, and cooperate with each other in the good work of the Lord. They must master not being swallowed up with institutionalism, yet not divorcing themselves from other saints—all the while serving the Lord with fervency of spirit. Each church has unique gifts, opportunities, and ministries. There are also unique problems that must be addressed, as evidenced in the Epistles.

This congregation had a unique beginning. After Paul and Silas had their jailhouse experience (Acts 16), the magistrates of the city, fearing because Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, asked them to "*depart out of the city*" of Philippi. Following that, they entered into the house of Lydia, saw and comforted the brethren, and departed (16:38-40). Passing through Amphipolis and Apollonia, cities of Macedonia (in Turkey), they came to Thessalonica. There Paul, together with Silas and Timothy, reasoned out of the Scriptures for three days in the synagogue of the Jews. Paul "*explained and proved*" it was necessary for the Messiah "*to suffer and to rise from the dead*," affirming that Jesus was that Messiah (Act 17:1-3).

The results were remarkable. "*Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women*" (17:4). It was at this point that the church in Thessalonica was born. Because this took place in the synagogue, we understand "*God-fearing Greeks*" to mean those who had abandoned Grecian idolatry and become Jewish proselytes. "*Chief*," or "*prominent women*" are understood to be those who were wives of eminent men in the city, and themselves notable among the citizenry. Other such women include Drusilla, wife to Felix, and was a Jewess (Acts 24:24). Lydia, a business woman, and a number of other women with her, were also in this class (Acts 16:13-14). In Antioch of Pisida, when the Gospel was believed, a number of "*honorable women*" who were Greeks "*believed*" (acts 13:12). We must be careful to allow such distinguished women to remain among us.

However, all did not go well during this notable beginning. The Jews were "*moved with envy*" at acceptance of the Gospel, formed a mob, and started a riot in the city. Dragging Jason, who had received Paul and Silas into his house, before the city officials, these Jews charged, "*These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also*." Seeing the course of events, "*the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea*" (17:5-10). The church at Thessalonica did have a stormy beginning!

Notice the unique manner in which these brethren are described: "***IN God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.***" Individually and as an assembly, they were "***IN***" God and Jesus! They had been baptized "*into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*" (Matt 28:19), and were thus found "***IN***" them. Their lives were "*hid with Christ IN God*" (Col 3:3). This condition lifts "*true religion*" from mere from sectarian identity. It brings the personal aspect to spiritual life. To be "*in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ*" means we have access to all of the treasures hidden there (Col 2:3). The Person of the Father is accessible to us through the Son. Being in the Father and Jesus is what makes a church a church. That is what brings recognition from heaven and among the godly.

GRACE AND PEACE

" ^{1:1c}***Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.***" ^{KJV} The consistency of this greeting in Scripture makes it worthy of extended consideration (1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2; Phil 1:2; Col 1:2; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 John 3). In every case, "*grace*" is said to come "*from*" both "*God the (our) Father AND the Lord Jesus Christ.*" Among other things, that confirms the "***abundance of grace***" (Rom 5:17). Also, only a church that is "*in*" the Father and the Lord Jesus can receive "*grace*" and "*peace*" from them. Such is a church where the Father and Son preside, in Whom the people trust, and to Whom they intently listen.

There is a unity in the Father and the Son that is held before us in Scripture. The One does not work without the Other, and to receive One is to receive the Other. Jesus spoke of that unity in His Gethsemane prayer. "*That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in Us*" (John 17:12). The unity is so remarkable that Jesus could say, "*I and my Father are one*" (John 10:30). He declared those who know Him also know the Father (John 8:19). Those serving Jesus will be honored by the Father (John 12:26). The Father will also love those who love Jesus (John 14:21). When an individual loves Jesus and keeps His word, both the Father and the Son come into him and make their abode with him (John 14:23). Our fellowship is "*with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ*" (1 John 1:3). When one takes hold of the Gospel, as did the Thessalonians, this word is fulfilled in them: "*He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son*" (2 John 9).

The necessity of grace and peace is thus seen. Our identity with the Father and the Son is not a mere formality. It is not an institutionalized relationship, but a vibrant and productive one. Many a poor soul has never seen this truth, and thus attempts to live on supposed mountaintop experiences and emotions. The believer, however, must learn to look for grace and peace, not unusual experiences. The fact that both of these come from the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ underscores their importance and abundance. Also, neither of them is valuable to the flesh, nor have an appeal to those who are carnal.

Grace is Divine favor and preference. It is living under the smile of the Lord, and being found pleasing in His sight because of faith. Grace brings benefit, protection, and gladness. It causes us to reason, "*If God be for us, who can be against us*" (Rom 8:31). Grace is to us what Joseph's wagons were to Jacob (Gen 45:27). It brings the rich resources of heaven to us, together with strength (2 Tim 2:1), the power to believe (Acts 18:27), "*everlasting consolation,*" and "*good hope*" (2 Thess 2:16). Grace "*teaches us*" how to effectively deny fleshly inclinations and live uprightly in a wicked world (Tit 2:11-12). From beginning to end, salvation is "*by grace*" (Eph 2:5,8). To receive "*grace*" from the Father and the Son, therefore, is to receive an abundance of those things. It is to be enabled to see God is for us, believe, and live in consolation and hope. It is to be made adequate for the challenge of denying the encroachments of sin, and living alertly, uprightly, and Godlike in a wicked world.

Peace is a quietness and confidence within. It involves the calming of the soul and the presence of certitude and assurance (Isa 30:15; 32:17). The enemy of our soul is seen as powerless to separate us from the Lord (Rom 8:35-39). In peace there is a sense of Divine acceptance (Rom 15:7; Eph 1:6), and a certainty of good things to come (1 Pet 1:4). This is a peace that, as a heavenly sentinel, keeps both heart and mind (Phil 4:7). It can "*rule*" our hearts, dispelling fear and bring great assurance. To receive "*peace*" from both the Father and the Son means these effects flourish and abound in us, bringing a refreshment without which we cannot do well. This is not a peace like the world gives, which is only on the surface. Rather, this is a peace that yields the fulfillment of Jesus' word: "*Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid*" (John 14:27).

Thus, the Thessalonian brethren have been duly greeted by a trio of godly servants. They have been recognized as a valid assembly "*in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ.*" Because of that, both grace and peace have been conferred upon them from both the Father and the Son. Is that not an enviable position? And, it is for all believers.

LESSON #2

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

" ^{1:3} *Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father.* " (1 Thessalonians 1:3 ^{KJV})

INTRODUCTION

There is a fellowship within the body of Christ that transcends our several ministries. Whether an Apostle, a servant, minister of mercy, or some other function, we are "*one body in Christ, and every one members one of another*" (Rom 12:5). In all of His Epistles, Paul acknowledges this affinity by speaking personally with his readers. You sense his concern for their spiritual welfare, thankfulness for their progress, and interest in their destiny. His Apostolic office did not depersonalize him, and was never approached as a professional career. In this regard, he reflected the spirit of the Lord Jesus Himself. Salvation, in all of its aspects, is personal and productive. The person in fellowship with Christ will be observant of the qualities in others that have come from Him. Those observations will reflect heavenly values, encourage the brethren involved, and instruct others in proper Kingdom priorities. In the world, great and large matters are rarely personal, and often not practical. However, that is not the manner of God's great salvation, as confirmed by this text. In Christ, the benefits that are conferred are not necessarily limited to those receiving them. They can often be experienced by others.

REMEMBERING WITHOUT CEASING

" ^{1:3a} *Remembering without ceasing . . .* " ^{KJV} Other versions read "*constantly bearing in mind*," ^{NASB} "*We continually remember*," ^{NIV} and "*unceasingly remember*." ^{BBE} Here is an expression that reflects the manner of the Kingdom. There is a certain frame of mind that is produced by faith. It not only shapes how we consider the future, but how we reflect upon the associations of the present. In a religious institutional setting, a constant spiritual frame of mind is virtually unknown. The mind is too often devoted to things wholly unrelated to the children of God. The dominating nature of personal and mundane interests can be heard in the conversations of professed believers. Rarely, if ever, is there mention of the graces God has granted His people-specific people. This is a betrayal of a most serious deficiency, and is to be taken seriously.

When Paul says he remembered "*without ceasing*" he was not speaking of a routine remembrance, driven by mere human discipline. He did not maintain an impersonal prayer list, in which he fulfilled a mere Apostolic obligation to pray. He thought in such a manner as provoked the recollection of the people of God. This resulted from not loving the world or the things that are in the world (1 John 2:15-17). It was the consequence of setting his affection on things above, and not on things on the earth (Col 3:1-2). It was the natural outcome of living as a stranger and pilgrim in this world, which posture accentuates the value of the saints of the most High God.

What does it take to summon holy brethren into remembrance? Paul told the Philippians he thanked God "*upon every remembrance*" of them (Phil 1:3). He told Timothy "*without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day*" (2 Tim 1:3). He called to "*remembrance the unfeigned faith*" in young Timothy (2 Tim 1:5). He made mention of the Roman brethren "*without ceasing*" in his prayers (Rom 1:9). The Ephesian saints were also a source of constant thanksgiving in Paul's prayers (Eph 1:16). Apart from these references, I could find no expressions of this kind of remembrance or recollection of the brethren. It appears evident that certain brethren had made such advancement in the faith that the recollection of them was more constant.

Involved in the work. As Paul was involved in the work of the Lord, certain brethren were recalled to mind. He could not help but think of them because of their obvious association with the Lord, and their progress in the faith. While he loved all of the brethren, some were more present in his memory than others. Our Lord had this same manner, being the more attracted to those who were more devoted to Him. Thus, from the multitudes of those following Him, He chose seventy (Lk 10:1). He also chose the more select group of the Apostles from "*among His disciples*" (Lk 6:13). Among the twelve, there was also three who enjoyed special privileges: Peter, James, and John (Matt 17:1; Mk 5:37; 13:3; 14:33). There was also John, "*the disciple whom Jesus loved*" (John 20:2).

These were characterized by a more acute sensitivity, and were thus afforded unusual graces. The same principle is found in Paul's remembrance of the Thessalonians. As he was involved in the work of the Lord, he recalled them because of their obvious commitment to the Lord. God's work summoned the recollection of these brethren.

So it is in our time also. As we are involved in the good work of the Lord, certain brethren will come to our mind. They will be the ones who have distinguished themselves by unusual commitment to the Lord. It is good for each of us to strive to be in that category of people—those who come to mind as kindred spirits are working with God.

Helpful remembrance. The recollection of some people is painful. Thus Paul wrote, "*Demas hath forsaken me*" (2 Tim 4:10). John the beloved wrote, "*I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not*" (3 John 9). The remembrance of such individuals is not helpful, unless it is to warn us of falling into a similar category. There are those, however, whose memory brings help to the soul. There are holy recollections that can strengthen our hands, refresh our spirits, and enhance our joy. There are precious saints who are the source of joy and encouragement when they are remembered, though they may not be seen. The Thessalonians were such a people. It is good that we strive to fall into this blessed category of believers

YOUR WORK OF FAITH AND LABOR OF LOVE

"^{1:3b} **Remembering . . . your work of faith, and labor of love . . .**" ^{KJV} As already indicated, the remembrance of the Thessalonians was not an expression of the flesh or carnal associations. The Thessalonian brethren had endeared themselves by their involvement in the salvation of God. Paul does not cite the size of their assembly, their community outreach, or their missionary program. He does not refer to the credentials of their ministers, or various specialized ministries. While these are of great value in the modern setting, they are of little worth in the realm of eternal things. The NIV reads, "*work produced by faith*" and "*labor prompted by love*." That is, indeed, the sense of the text. This is a reference to Kingdom productivity and its cause.

Work of faith. Notice, this is not a speculative faith, or one associated with a mere position: i.e., their official belief. Let no one doubt the importance of believing the right thing. Those who "*believe a lie*," for example, have been sent "*strong delusion*" because they did not receive the love of the truth (2 Thess 2:11). "*Sound doctrine*" is imperative (1 Tim 1:10; 2 Tim 4:3; Tit 2:1). Still, this is not the point of commendation. The Ephesian church, for example, was commended for holding to right doctrine, yet rebuked for leaving their "*first love*" (Rev 2:1-4).

What is "*the work of faith*?" There are two perspectives in this expression. **First, faith itself can be seen as the "work,"** brought to the Thessalonians in the power of the Holy Spirit. In this sense, it was receiving grace to believe (Acts 18:27), obtaining faith from the Lord (2 Pet 1:1), and being "*given*" to believe (Phil 1:29). In this instance, the reason for the recollection was the willing acceptance of the Thessalonians. They did not quench the Spirit, but humbly yielded to His gracious working. Second, **there is a work that proceeds from faith**, causing the believer to be productive in the vineyard of the Lord. On one side, faith gains the victory over the world, triumphing over the delusions and temptations of the wicked one (1 John 5:4). On the other side, faith engages one in intense activity for the Lord. It ranges from obedience and working out our own salvation with fear and trembling, to working together with God in producing fruit for His glory. The building of the ark was Noah's work of faith. David defeating Goliath was a work of faith. Faith **always** does something! Without works, it is dead, or non-existent, "*being alone*" (James 2:17). Faith does not simply sit and spectate. It is not idle and unproductive. Third, **faith itself works in growing and increasing**—expanding one's grasp on the things of God. This aspect of faith is described in Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians. "*We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly*" (2 Thess 1:3). This also is a marvelous "*work of faith*."

Labor of love. This is a labor, or activity, that is sparked by spiritual love. This love is the first mark of the Spirit's fruit (Gal 5:22). It is wide in its scope, **including a love for God** (Rom 8:28), **Christ** (1 Cor 16:22), **the truth** (2 Thess 2:10), **and the brethren** (1 Pet 1:22). Ultimately, this love is produced "*because He first loved us*" (1 John 4:19). To be more precise, it comes when we **perceive** the great love God has for us. That realization comes because "*the love of God [His love for us] is shed abroad in our hearts by the Spirit*" (Rom 5:5). When love is spawned in our hearts for God, Christ, the truth, and the brethren, we move into action. Love, like faith, is a more powerful incentive than Law. It propels the individual into intense activity for the Lord.

This love will constrain the believer to endure all kinds of hardship for the Lord, counting it all joy when granted to suffer for His name (Acts 5:41). It will move people to even jeopardize their lives. Barnabas and Paul were referred to as "*Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (Acts 15:26).

Epaphroditus is described in these words: "*for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me*" (Phil 2:30). That is the sort of labor, or hard work, that proceeds from a profound and productive love. Help people love the Lord, and you will unleash an abundance of work and labor for the Lord. It simply is not possible to love Him without engaging all of your powers in thankfulness and for His glory.

LESSON #3

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

" ^{1:4} *Knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God.* ⁵ *For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.*" (1 Thessalonians 1:4-5 ^{NKJV})

INTRODUCTION

There are undeniable evidences of the work of God in the children of God. Our text declares some of them. It is comely when men and women of God recognize these traits, and commend the saints for their presence. It brings great encouragement to their hearts when believers are reminded what a great work has been accomplished in them. It is of even greater value when that work is traced back to the choice of the Almighty God. There is, in my judgment, a great need for a return to this type of thinking and speaking: **a recognition of who the people of God are by what has been done in them.** Faced with a Christian emphasis that has nearly removed God from all proclamation, this verse stands in stark contrast to what most believers hear. Notwithstanding, it is the truth, and possesses remarkable power. As we probe this text, your faith will bring great confidence and assurance to your heart. You will see more clearly that what has been wrought in you can only be traced back to God. You will also find that the clearer the choice of God becomes to your heart, the more aggressively you will live for Him, doing so with a thankful and rejoicing spirit. The choice of God is always accompanied with power.

KNOWING YOUR ELECTION BY GOD

" ^{1:3a and 4} *Remembering . . . knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God.*" ^{NKJV} The Apostle now explains why he remembered "*without ceasing*" their "*work of faith,*" "*labor of love,*" and "*patience of hope*" (v 3). These commendable traits confirmed their "*election by God.*" Other versions read "*His choice of you,*" ^{NASB} "*that He has chosen you,*" ^{NIV} and "*He chose you to be His own people.*" ^{NLT} The word "*election*" means chosen, picked out, or selected. **In its varied forms, this word is used seven times in Scripture and ALWAYS refers to God's choice-never man's** (Acts 9:5; Rom 9:11; 11:5,7,28; 1 Thess 1:4; 2 Pet 1:10). The word "*elect*" refers to those who are elected, or chosen, and occurs twenty times in Scripture (Isa 42:1^{Messiah}; 45:4^{Israel}; 65:9,22^{Israel}; Matt 24:22,24,31^{believers}; Mk 13:20,22,27^{believers}; Lk 18:7^{believers}; Rom 8:33^{believers}; Col 3:12^{believers}; 1 Tim 5:21^{angels}; 2 Tim 2:10^{believers}; Tit 1:1^{believers}; 1 Pet 1:2^{believers}; 2:6^{Jesus}; 2 John 1,13^{believer}). "*Elected*" is used once, and also refers to believers (1 Pet 5:13). This is not, then, a strange word. It should certainly cause no offense among the people of God. Once again, "*election*" refers to God's choosing. It is a selection made by God and at His discretion.

Although this doctrine is heavily contested among men, there are few teachings marked by such clarity as this one. Scripture identifies individuals that God "*chose,*" or elected. Among them are Abram (Neh 9:7), Saul (1 Sam 10:24), David (Psa 78:70), Solomon (1 Chron 28:5), and the twelve Apostles (Lk 6:13), Paul; (Acts 22:14). Some are said to be chosen by God "*from the womb,*" or before they were born. Among them are Samson (Judges 13:5,7), Jeremiah (Jer 1:5), and Paul (Gal 1:15). Jacob is also said to have been loved before he was born, "*neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of Him that calleth*" (Rom 9:11). All of the Prophets were chosen, and none were volunteers. Jesus also reminded the Apostles, "*Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you*" (John 15:16).

One of the premier examples of God's election is the nation of Israel. God reminds them they were "*chosen*" (Deut 7:7; 14:2; Psa 105:6; Isa 41:8-9; 44:1). The priests were "*chosen*" (Deut 18:5; 21:5; Num 16:7). Moses was "*chosen*" (Psa 106:23). Aaron the High Priest was "*chosen*" (Num 17:5-6; Psa 105:26). Zerubbabel was "*chosen*" (Hag 2:23). **Of all chosen ones, the Lord Jesus ranks the highest.** He is referred to with endearing words that are unmatched. "*Behold my Servant, whom I have chosen; My Beloved, in whom My soul is well pleased*" (Matt 12:18). When the early brethren set out to select an Apostle to take Judas' place, they asked God to show them the man whom He had "*chosen*" (Acts 1:24). Those in Christ are referred to as a "*chosen generation*" (1 Pet 2:9). There should, then, be no doubt about the reality of Divine choice, election, or selection.

It is quite true that only the Lord knows all who are truly His. As it is written, "*Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His*" (2 Tim 2:19). When Elijah wept under the juniper tree, thinking there were no faithful ones but himself, the Lord reminded him, "*I have*

reserved to myself seven thousand men" (Rom 11:41; 1 Kgs 19:18). It should not surprise us that this condition exists in our day as well, whether it appears to be true or not.

However, our text will confirm that there are certain evidences of God's election. Through them, the election of God can be confirmed, bringing solace and strength to the heart. The Thessalonian brethren, we will find, were undergoing severe trial, and needed to be built up in the most holy faith. Few things will fortify the soul like knowing you have been elected by God, and are His chosen ones! In Second Thessalonians, Paul again reminds these believers of this truth. "*But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth*" (2 Thess 2:13).

This Divine choice, or election, was implemented through means—the sanctifying work of the Holy spirit, and their belief of the truth. In our text, the recollection of the faith, love, and hope of the Thessalonians was also a confirmation of their election. **Those traits evidenced the choice of God!** They were not mere human effort, but God working in them both to will and to do of His own good pleasure (Phil 2:12-13).

THE WAY THE GOSPEL CAME TO THEM

"^{1:5a} ***For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance.*** . . ." ^{NKJV} The apostle elaborates on his knowledge of their "*election by God.*" He did not know this by revelation, but by evidence. Being familiar with the manner of the Kingdom, He knew some of the evidences of Divine choice. As we will see, the touchstone of confirmation was not their identification with a religious sect, or a particular denomination. **It should not surprise you that myriad of professed believers have no other way of identifying those they imagine are accepted by God, than identity with the organization to which they belong.** This was the error of the Jews, who thought Divine approval hinged upon their national identity (Rom 2:17-20). Behold now the remarkable evidence of God's election.

NOT IN WORD ONLY. The Gospel preached by Paul ("*our Gospel*") did not come to the Thessalonians "*simply with words.*" ^{NIV} He delivered a message, but not **merely** a message. The Gospel was preached in words, but not **only** with words. Words are important, to be sure. In fact, they are essential—"*the word of the Gospel*" (Acts 15:7)! But if the message does not get beyond words, no essential change will be made in men. There were words in the Old Covenant, but they were referred to as a "*letter*" that killed (2 Cor 3:6). Emphatically, we are told, "*For the kingdom of God does not consist in words, but in power*" (1 Cor 4:20). There are altogether too many places where the Gospel has come in "*word only.*" The truth has been declared, but nothing has happened.

BUT ALSO IN POWER. How, then, did the Gospel come to the Thessalonians? It was preached in words, but was experienced "*in power.*" By this, Paul does not mean he preached in a powerful way, or that his preaching was attended with powerful manifestations, although both are probably true. The confidence of the Thessalonians, however, will not be anchored to the manner in which the Gospel was preached, or to any accompanying signs and wonders. The idea here is that the power of the Gospel (Rom 1:16) was effective in them. What the Gospel promised was experienced by them. The deliverance it announced was wrought in them. The remission it proclaimed was realized by them. The reconciliation heralded by it was perceived and experienced by them. They tasted of the Lord, that He was gracious (1 Pet 2:3). Satan lost his hold upon them (Col 1:13)! Their conscience was purged from dead works (Heb 9:14). They were "*quicken*ed," or made alive to God (Eph 2:5). The eyes of their hearts were "*enlighten*ed" as they were "*illuminat*ed" to the truth of the Gospel (Heb 6:4; 10:32). Their "*stony hearts*" were removed, and they were given a "*heart of flesh*" (Ezek 36:26-27). The law of God was "*written*" upon their minds and "*put*" into their hearts (Heb 10:16). All of this, and more, confirmed their "*election by God.*"

IN THE HOLY SPIRIT. The preaching of the Gospel was also attended with the power of the Holy Spirit. His convicting power was present, as they became aware of their sin, Christ's righteousness, and the overthrow of the devil (John 16:8-11). The comforting power of the Spirit was present as they found hope instead of despair (Acts 9:31), and were given the "*garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness*" (Isa 61:3). The Spirit, who fills believers with "*all joy and peace in believing,*" filled them, and they abounded in hope through His power (Rom 15:13). They obtained the joy, and sorrow and their sighing fled away (Isa 35:10). The regeneration and sanctification that come through the Spirit were realized by them (John 3:8; 1 Pet 1:2). Not the least of this point is the power of an energized Gospel, or doctrine. God once said, "*My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distill as the dew*" (Deut 32:2). The idea is that it would generate refreshment and growth, life and spiritual vitality.

It is the Holy Spirit who makes the word of the Gospel productive. Where He is not quenched and the Gospel is believed, very real effects are produced. These effects, as briefly outlined above, confirm the election of God. They cannot be produced apart from God's election, and thus are the evidence of it. Men do not make these things happen, but

they are the work of God, confirming His gracious choice.

ASSURANCE AND KNOWING THE KIND OF MEN

" 1:5b . . . **and in much assurance; as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.**" ^{NKJV} Not only did the Gospel, preached with the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven (1 Pet 1:12), come with power and the working of the Holy Spirit, but it came "*in MUCH assurance.*" The text does not say the Thessalonian brethren grew and advanced into a state where "*much assurance*" was realized. Rather, the Gospel "*came*" to them with that accompaniment. It did not come with *some* assurance, but with "*much.*"

Much religion of our day is merely cerebral, or intellectual. It centers in the mind. True religion centers in the heart, for "*with the heart*" we believe "*unto righteousness*" (Rom 10:10). Assurance belongs to the heart, not the mind. While the mind is involved, it is secondary, not primary. When we "*know we are of the truth,*" we can "*assure our hearts before him*" (1 John 3:19).

"Assurance" is "*deep conviction,*" ^{NIV} or "*full conviction.*" ^{RSV} "Conviction" here means we have been convinced of what the Gospel announces-persuaded of its reality and applicability to us. The word used here means "*entire confidence or full assurance.*" The Basic Bible English version reads, "*you were completely certain of it.*" This is like being certain enough to step out of the boat and walk on the water (Matt 14:29). It is being certain enough to pick up your bed and walk, even though you are impotent, and have been a long time in that condition (John 5:8-9). "*Much assurance*" moves people to act upon the word of the Lord. It convinces them that what the Gospel promises can be experienced by them. The Thessalonians had "*MUCH assurance.*" That is how they **started** their life in Christ Jesus.

Isaiah said the "*effect of righteousness*" is "*quietness and assurance*" (Isa 32:15). Here a calmness of heart and a boldness of spirit are joined together. There is a "*full assurance of understanding*" that propels one into a confident understanding of the rich resources that are in Jesus Christ (Col 2:2-3). There is also a "*full assurance of hope*" that buoys up the human spirit in times of stress and hardship (Heb 6:11). We must not forget the "*full assurance of faith*" that enables the believing soul to come confidently to God, convinced of their acceptance by Him (Heb 10:22). The Thessalonians had such assurance, and it confirmed they had been elected by God.

YOU KNOW WHAT KIND OF MEN WE WERE. Later, Paul will remind the Thessalonians they had recognized who he really was—a messenger from God who spoke the word of God: "*ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God*" (1 Thess 2:13). He said much the same thing to the Galatians: "*but you received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus*" ^{NKJV} (Gal 4:14). In saying the Thessalonians knew what manner of men they were among them, Paul was telling them they recognized he had been appointed to bring them to the knowledge of salvation. They did not perceive Paul as a superman, or a holy entertainer, or some unique achiever among men. All too often this is precisely how men perceive effective messengers from God.

However, Paul was given "*power,*" or authority, "*for edification*" (2 Cor 10:8; 13:10). His appointed role was bringing men to realize the power of God unto salvation, and to make them stable in the grace of God. To put it another way, the Apostle's work was to persuade men that God loved them, had reconciled them to Himself in Christ, and had provided a glorious inheritance for them. The Thessalonians had seen this, and thus availed themselves of the Gospel which he preached.

Paul doubtless also referred to his total lack of confidence in the flesh as he ministered the Gospel. As he said elsewhere, he came "*in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling*" (1 Cor 2:3). He did not rely upon "*enticing words of men's wisdom,*" but came "*with the demonstration of the Spirit and of power*" (1 Cor 2:4). He also did not "*shun to declare*" unto them "*the whole counsel of God*" (Acts 20:27).

All of this was for the sake of the Thessalonians. Paul did not preach for his own sake, or for the sake of a lifeless institution. He preached for their sake—to bring the salvation of God within their grasp. And it did not end with them believing and obeying the Gospel. Paul's contact continued, confirming his genuine interest in them.

LESSON #4

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

" ^{1:6} *And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, ⁷ so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe. For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything.*" (1 Thessalonians 1:6-8 ^{NKJV})

INTRODUCTION

A Kingdom manner that is worthy of our consideration is the due recognition of comely spiritual qualities and advancement. In the flesh, such recognition often promotes pride and a distorted view of oneself. In the Spirit, however, it proves to be a great encouragement. Honesty and thankfulness merge together in this activity. It also requires spiritual insight, and a sense of Kingdom values. When one considers that believers are in a frail house of clay, an alienated world, and subjected to the harassment and attacks of the wicked one, progress in the faith becomes a cause for great thanksgiving and praise. The working of God is evidenced when men are receptive to the Gospel and their faith grows. This is not the result of religious discipline or institutional regimen. Thus Paul, a prince among Apostles, will give due recognition to the marvelous working of God among the Thessalonians. He will also give appropriate honor to the Thessalonians themselves, who had willingly submitted to the Lord and joined in His work. Paul will also acknowledge their progress is widely known among believers.

FOLLOWERS OF US AND OF THE LORD

" ^{1:6a} *And you became followers of us and of the Lord . . .*" ^{NKJV} In the world, a "follower" can be a demeaning description. It generally denotes someone who has no leadership capabilities, and lacks any creative skills. But this is not the way the word is used in Scripture. We will find that the Thessalonians exercised great influence as a result of being "followers"-something that does not occur in the flesh.

A "follower" is someone who imitates another. This refers to the reproduction of qualities found in one person in the person following them. It is not to be confused with "emulation," which is trying to copy someone else in the energy of the flesh, and comes from envy (Gal 5:20). "Following" reflects an intense and lawful desire to participate in the same grace perceived in someone else. It includes a resolve to abandon competing traits found in self, acknowledging the superiority of a higher order of life. The follower is not seeking advantage in this world, but in the world to come. By following, he is being lifted above the course of this world and participating in the life of Christ.

While, in the flesh, people may be followers by nature, that is not the way it is in the Spirit. As with the Thessalonians, those in Christ "**BECAME** followers." There came a point in time when they took up their cross, denied themselves, and **BECAME** followers of Jesus. This posture of life involves the subordination of all other relationships, and losing one's own life for Christ's sake. Jesus said it this way, "*He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it*" (Matt 10:37-39). This is not a common message in our day, but it is the word of the King.

Paul says they became followers of "*us and of the Lord.*" The thing that linked Paul with the Lord was the message of the Gospel. The described relationship is much like that of Israel of old: "*the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD, and His servant Moses*" (Ex 14:31). It is not as though Paul and Moses had additional qualities to those of the Lord. Rather, to the degree they reflected the mind of the Lord, particularly in their words, the people followed them and the Lord. As with Moses, the Lord was working through Paul and what he preached. When the people believed what he said, and embraced it by faith, they become followers of him and the Lord.

As will be confirmed, the primary trait of this following was the strong faith of the Thessalonians. Becoming followers of Paul and the Lord is, in fact, walking by faith, and not by sight (2 Cor 5:7). It is walking in the Spirit, not in the flesh (Gal 5:25). It is being "*saved by hope*" (Rom 8:24-25). People become "followers" of God's messengers and the Lord Himself, when they embrace the Gospel and begin preparations for the world to come. They do this at all cost, even if it results in persecution and rejection in the world.

In a day when religious recruitment is emphasized, this perspective needs to be embraced with great zeal. Churches are filled with people who are not following people of faith or the Lord Jesus. They are living their lives in practical alienation from God, consumed with a quest for domestic and financial security and happiness. But this is not

acceptable to the Lord. Jesus will not receive or teach those who hesitate to take up their cross and follow Him (Lk 14:26,27,33).

When Paul commended the Thessalonians, he was not referring to a sort of supra-elevation of spiritual life. They had not excelled the norm, but had rather embraced it. **Actually, there is no such thing as salvation apart from becoming a follower of the Lord and those who are living unto Him and declaring His message.** The blessing is being among those who are with the Lord, being led by Him to glory. With us, it is much like Israel en route to the promised land. "*We are setting out to the place of which the LORD said, 'I will give it to you'; come with us and we will do you good, for the LORD has promised good concerning Israel . . . So it will be, if you go with us, it will come about that whatever good the LORD does for us, we will do for you*" (Num 10:29-32). **When Hobab joined them, he became a follower of Moses and of the Lord.** In that sense, the Thessalonians had become "*followers*" with those in a quest of a "*better country*" (Heb 11:16).

RECEIVING THE WORD IN AFFLICTION AND JOY

"^{1:6b} . . . **having received the Word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit.**" ^{NKJV} In a very real sense, a saving identity with the Lord begins when we "*receive the Word*" of the Gospel-when we believe and act upon it. Thus we read of those responding to the Gospel on the day of Pentecost, "*Then they that gladly received his word were baptized*" (Acts 2:41). When the whole city of Samaria turned to the Lord, it was described in these words, "*Now when the Apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the Word of God . . .*" (Acts 8:14). The same was said of the household of Cornelius. "And the Apostles and brethren that were in Judaea heard that the Gentiles had also **received the Word of God**" (Acts 11:1). The noble Bereans were also said to have "*received the Word*" (Acts 17:11).

Jesus described those who receive the word of God in this manner. "*But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty*" (Matt 13:23). Thus "*receiving the Word*" involves hearing it with understanding, and producing the spiritual fruit that results from the powerful working of that Word.

Much of what is called evangelism is the result of hard-sell techniques, polished spokesmen, and pleasant religious surroundings. Professional religion puts the emphasis upon technique. The Lord puts it on the message-"*the Word.*" That marvelous message will yield a harvest wherever it is "*received.*" The results will transcend any that can be produced by the wisdom and techniques of men. They will prepare the individual for glory, and summon up the commendation of holy men of God.

IN MUCH AFFLICTION. As soon as the Word was received, the Thessalonians experienced "*much tribulation,*" ^{NASB} "*severe suffering,*" ^{NIV} and "*persecution.*" ^{NRSV} Their faith drove a wedge between them and the world, and the world knew it. The word "*affliction*" is a very strong one meaning "trouble, anguish, burden, oppression, and distress." The word literally means a "pressing together." The idea is of two contrary things being pressed together, thus causing violent friction and disturbance. It would be like two chemicals being mixed that caused eruption, agitation, and even explosion.

Receiving the Word of God produces an unavoidable variance with those who do not receive it. It also causes Satan and his hosts to assert themselves more aggressively than they ever did before, thereby causing "*much affliction.*" This distress is much like a gate that leads to life, for "*we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God*" (Acts 14:22). Harmony with the world to come produces disharmony with "*this present evil world.*" **Note, this is a point of commendation!** It is something that confirmed their election of God. In explanation, Jesus said, "*because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you*" (John 15:19).

WITH JOY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. This is the joy **produced** by the Holy Spirit, and is integral to the Kingdom of God. As it is written, "*for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit*" (Rom 14:17). This is not an irrational joy, as is often promoted in our time. Rather, it is a joy that flows from comprehending the marvelous love of God and the glorious hope set before us. This joy makes "*much affliction*" tolerable, enabling us to bear up under it with resolution and encouragement. Believers cannot become eager and determined to follow the Lord simply out of routine, or because it is a requirement of the Law. This can only be experienced through the "*joy of the Holy Spirit.*" Though we experience tribulation from the world, we receive blessings from the Lord. That is what causes the fountain of joy to spring up.

Isaiah prophesied of the day of salvation when he wrote, "*Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation*" (Isa 12:3). This confirms that the joy of reference comes from an awareness of the implications of the Gospel. Rejoicing in the Lord comes when the truth of the Gospel is perceived and we are convinced it is for us. That joy causes our afflictions to become "*light*" and momentary (2 Cor 4:17). They confirm to us that we have been lifted above this world, and are being prepared for the world to come.

EXAMPLES TO ALL WHO BELIEVE

"^{1:7} *So that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe.* ⁸ *For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything.*" ^{NKJV} What a word is this: "*examples to all.*" The idea is that all who heard of their faith were stirred up by it, emboldened and encouraged by the report. The communication of their faith had stimulated other believers to follow their example, and press fervently toward the goal. The Thessalonians had become "*followers,*" and therefore themselves became "*examples*" to be followed by others. Thus, they fulfilled the admonition to be a "*pattern of good works*" (Tit 2:7).

MACEDONIA and ACHAIA. Both of these areas were in Greece and covered a wide territory. Philippi was in the northern part of Macedonia, and Corinth was in the southern part of Achaia. The area mentioned covered approximately 120,000 square miles. Throughout this vast region, the Thessalonians had become "*examples*" to all who believed. Even though the churches in Corinth and Philippi were formed before the one in Thessalonica, yet the aggressiveness of the Thessalonians had set the standard for them. Thus, the first became last, and the last first (Matt 19:30). Because of the Thessalonians, every gathering of believers should be encouraged about the impact and possibilities of their faith.

THE WORD SOUNDED FORTH. The Thessalonian church became a sounding board for the word of God. It not only came **to** them, it also came **from** them. At this point the very nature of spiritual life is unveiled. Although scarcely known, those who believe become a resource themselves. Jesus said, "*He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water*" ^{NASB} (John 7:38). The text goes on to explain, "*But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified*" (v 38).

Those so moved by the Spirit are much like young Elihu, who sat and listened to Job's accusers. When he finally spoke, he said, "*For I am full of words; The spirit within me compels me. Indeed my belly is like wine that has no vent; It is ready to burst like new wineskins. I will speak, that I may find relief; I must open my lips and answer*" (Job 32:18-20). On an even larger scale, the Word had "*sounded forth*" by the Thessalonians. **Like a mighty trumpet blast, the Gospel went out from this body of believers!**

But the spreading of the Word from Thessalonica did not stop with Macedonia and Achaia. Not only was it heard in Philippi, Berea, Athens, and Corinth, **but also in other parts of the world**- "*abroad,*" ^{KJV} "*in every place,*" ^{NKJV} and "*everywhere.*" ^{NIV} We understand that Thessalonica was a trade-city of Macedonia, visited regularly by ships from around the world. Upon leaving Thessalonica, those ancient vessels not only carried various commodities of trade, but the news of the faith of the Thessalonians.

FAITH TOWARD GOD. And what was it that was reported of the Thessalonians? It was their "*faith toward God!*" I cannot help but observe how **unlike** our Christian world this is. Today we hear of mega-churches, famous people, etc., but very little of "*faith toward God.*" Their words and deeds testified of their faith, not organization skills or profound external impressions. Their faith was so powerful and effective that it could not be contained where they lived. It was "*spread abroad!*" Their fame was so extensive, Paul did not need to testify of the Thessalonian's faith. Everywhere, it was well known.

This text is a great encouragement to all who have taken up their cross and are following Christ. An impact can be registered throughout the world because of your faith. The word of God can sound out from us, as well as it did from the Thessalonians. Even from this very assembly, the Word is being sounded forth throughout the country, and even the world. Great encouragement is being brought to other believers because of this. We ourselves have been profited by hearing of the faith of others, and being the recipients of some faithful word from brethren far from us-or even brethren who long ago departed to be with the Lord. It is to our advantage to be more attentive to churches like Thessalonica than to those who peddle religious methods and techniques.

LESSON #5

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

TEXT

"^{1:9}For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to 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, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come." NKJV
(1 Thess 1:9-10)

INTRODUCTION

The report of the Thessalonian's conversion had spread abroad, and the Apostle was quick to acknowledge it. It was important that the suffering brethren in Thessalonica know their faith had been recognized among men. How much more, then, would it be acknowledged in heaven. When the saints of God are subjected to opposition and suffering, there is great value in having their conversion confirmed to their hearts. Trials have a way of eroding our comprehension of what really happened when we believed and obeyed the Gospel. When we have to grapple with the enemy of our souls, or with circumstances that are provoked by him, we experience difficulty in properly assessing the marvelous transition that took place when we came into Christ. This is largely owing to the whole-hearted effort required in standing against the wiles of the devil, and in the evil day. This limitation is the result of having God's treasure in an earthen vessel, which is a most significant handicap. The Lord Jesus intercedes for us during such times (Lk 22:32; Heb 7:25), and the Holy Spirit also helps our infirmities through His faithful intercession (Rom 8:26). There is, however, an additional ministry that the saints have to one another during these times. Our text is an example of such a ministry. It is a help that is not limited to the Apostles. Reaffirming the validity of our beginning in Christ assists in clarifying our vision when our eyes are dimmed with the tears of suffering and trial. When we are enabled to look back to the time when we were "*illuminated*" (Heb 10:32), we gather fresh strength for the battle. This is a benefit we can minister to one another, and is of incalculable benefit during times of spiritual stress.

THE MANNER OF ENTRY, AND HOW THEY TURNED

"^{9a}*For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols . . .*" "*They,*" are the people of Macedonia, Achaia, and "*in every place*" where the faith of the Thessalonians had "*spread abroad*" (1:8). Their report was not a simplistic one, but one which brought great glory to God. We will hear how the recounting of the Thessalonians included what they turned **from**, as well as what they turned **to**. Their new life in Christ Jesus sharply contrasted with their former lives, thereby attesting to the Divine work that was done within them.

THE MANNER OF ENTRY. Other versions read, "*what kind of a reception we had with you,*"^{NASB} "*what kind of reception you gave us,*"^{NIV} "*what kind of welcome we had among you,*"^{NRSV} "*the wonderful welcome you gave us.*"^{NLT} Paul had come with good news from heaven, and the Thessalonians were glad to hear it. They "*gladly received*" the Word, as those early believers did on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41).

Jesus takes note of HOW His disciples are received. When He first sent out the twelve, our Lord spoke of how they were to respond when they were and were NOT received. "*And into whatsoever city or town ye shall enter, inquire who in it is worthy; and there abide till ye go thence. And when ye come into an house, salute it. And if the house be worthy, let your peace come upon it: but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you. And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet. Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city!*" (Matt 10:11-15).

While men may think it of no consequence when the truth of the Gospel is NOT received, such reactions are recorded in heaven, and are most serious. Conversely, when the messengers of God ARE received, that also is duly noted in heaven. The "*manner of entry*" of Paul into Thessalonica was one of happy reception. The message he preached was heartily embraced. Word of it was blazed abroad to the glory of God.

When the Gospel was first preached in Thessalonica, Paul explained and proved that the Messiah "*had to suffer and rise from the dead*" (Acts 17:3). At that point a "*great multitude of Greeks*" and "*a number of leading women*" believed (Acts 17:4). It was, however, amidst great hostility that these people believed. It is said of the Jews in that city, "*But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar*" (Acts 17:5). They even dragged those who had harbored Paul and Silas before the rulers of the city, charging they all had "*acted contrary to the decrees of Caesar*" (17:6-7). Yet, in spite of this display of evil aggression, the Thessalonians had believed! What a "*manner of entry*" Paul and Silas had there!

YOU TURNED TO GOD. The Thessalonians **were** idolaters. They were steeped in idolatry, for that was their culture. Those of that city who believed were NOT proselytes to Judaism, for, in such a case, they could not have maintained allegiance to idols. However, though they were devoted idols, they "*turned to God from idols.*" They did not require a lengthy orientation course to do this, or numerous disquisitions on the logical and spiritual flaws of idolatry. They "*turned to God*" upon hearing the Gospel, and powerful proofs that the Messiah, or chosen Savior of the world, suffered and was raised from the dead. This confirms the Gospel is truly "*the power of God unto salvation*" (Rom 1:16). When believed, it moves individuals away from devotion to false gods, whether they be idols of wood and stone (Deut 4:28), "*imaginings*" (2 Cor 10:5), or "*covetousness*" (Col 3:5).

But believing does more than turn men "*from idols.*" It turns them "*to God,*" in full recognition of His Person and His salvation. In His commission to Paul, Jesus declared he was chosen to go to the Gentiles. His mission among them was "*To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Me*" (Acts 26:18). There can be no forgiveness, inheritance, or sanctification by faith until the heart is turned "*to God.*" That involves commitment as well as conviction.

Part of Apostolic preaching was the requirement to turn from vanities to God. How well this is stated in Acts 14:15. This was said in Lystra, where Paul was later stoned: "*telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God.*" How appropriate for our time, when so many "*worthless*" things are being served! God be thanked for those who have turned to God!

TO SERVE GOD AND TO WAIT FOR HIS SON

"^{9b} . . . *to serve the living and true God, ¹⁰ and to wait for His Son from heaven . . .*" As you can see, turning from idols to God is **in order to** "*serve the living and true God.*" The power required to achieve such a turn comes from above. It is the result of being drawn by God to Jesus (John 6:44,65). It is also the result of Jesus drawing men to Himself (John 12:32). The Holy Spirit works to convince men of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:8-11). It is no small thing when men "*turn from idols to serve the living and true God!*"

TO SERVE GOD. The objective is not simply to turn from idols, but to become servants of God, for that is what "*to serve*" means. This service speaks of single-heartedness, for "*no man can serve two masters*" (Matt 6:24). Serving God is doing His will "*with all humility of mind*" (Acts 20:19), and in "*newness of spirit*" (Rom 7:4). It involves being "*fervent in spirit*" (Rom 12:11), and doing the will of God while possessing "*righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit*" (Rom 14:17-18). Serving God is embracing God's work as our own, and living our lives to please Him and further His cause.

Living and True God. Note how precise the Holy Spirit is on this matter. He does not say we merely serve God, but that we have "*turned to God*" to serve "*the living and true*" God. This stance is compared to a merely traditional religion, where a dead letter is embraced, and conformity to a mere creed is followed. As it is written, "*But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter*" (Rom 7:6). God is living and true whether we serve Him that way or not. The benefits of serving God, however, are directly proportionate to our persuasion that God is alive, and is the "*true God.*" This persuasion is the direct result of Christ's teaching. "*And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life*" (1 John 5:20).

WAITING FOR HIS SON. The Gospel Paul preached included the word of a returning Lord. As soon as men believed his message, they started to "*wait for His Son from heaven.*" Serving God demands this kind of hope -

that we will soon "*see Him as He is*" (1 John 3:1-3). When Jesus ascended into heaven in the sight of His disciples, an angel of God told them, "*This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven*" (Acts 1:11). That return was prominent in all Apostolic preaching. The return of the Lord is the pole star of our hope. Apart from this, living for God makes no sense. It is all done in view of the coming of Christ. When He returns, Jesus will "*change our vile body, that it might be fashioned like unto His glorious body*" (Phil 3:20-21). True believers are described as "*waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (1 Cor 1:7). The grace of God teaches us to refuse "*ungodliness and worldly lusts,*" and live "*soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world,*" all the while "*looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ*" (Tit 2:11-13).

Much of the religion of our day is totally void of such "waiting." Some are anticipating the "rapture," while others live in dread of "the great tribulation. But those who have turned from idols to serve the living God are anticipating the return of their Lord "*from heaven.*" They know that until that expected time, they have a warfare on their hands, and that God is to be served in the midst of it. Without the expectation of Jesus coming "*from heaven,*" life is too burdensome to live with any degree of consistency. This accounts for the erratic lives of many professing believers. They cannot serve God well because they are not "*waiting for His Son from heaven.*" Many of these poor souls have heard precious little about a returning Lord. It is not a subject of preaching or informative discussion. Other things are considered more important. But those things, however, worthy of attention they may appear, cannot constrain souls to "*wait*" for God's "*Son from heaven*"-and that is something we MUST do!

While I do not desire to linger on this thought, I feel compelled to mention it. It should be obvious to you that the distinguishing traits of the Thessalonians are not common today. Turning **from** idols, turning **to** God, **serving** God, and **waiting for** His Son from heaven, however, are evidences of real believers. These characteristics confirm the powerful working of the Gospel. Where they are not found, a most serious condition exists. In such a case, there really is no evidence of affiliation with God through Jesus Christ. Faith cannot be confirmed in such a case. We cannot ignore the absence of turning, serving, and waiting. They are vital!

A RISEN AND DELIVERING JESUS

"^{10b} . . . *whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.*" One of the marks of inspiration is the centrality of the Lord Jesus Christ. Scripture is not the mere writing of facts, or even the orderly declaration of them. There is a focus in Scripture that always gives precedence to the declaration of Jesus Christ. If Moses is speaking to Israel concerning the Levitical order and its responsibilities, it is in order to inject a word about the coming Messiah (Deut 18:15). If God is speaking to Abraham about a nation that is to come from his loins, He will accent a single Seed through which the world will be blessed (Gen 22:18; Gal 3:16). The holy Prophets placed the accent upon a coming Deliverer, even though they announced many other things (Isa 7:14; 9:6-7; 32:22; Jer 23:6; 33:16; Mal 4:2, etc.). The testimony of Jesus IS "*the spirit of prophecy*" (Rev 19:10) - its life and vitality. Jesus affirmed the primary message of the Scriptures was Himself: "*They testify of ME*" (John 5:39).

Thus, when the Spirit identifies the real people of God as turning from idols to God, serving Him, and waiting for His Son, **He is constrained to elaborate on the One for whom they are waiting.** He will not leave believers to speculate about their Savior, but will direct them in **HOW** to think of Him. Jesus is a personal Savior, praise the Lord, but we cannot think of Him within the framework of human experience. **The most productive thoughts about Christ center in His relationship to the Father Himself.**

RAISED FROM THE DEAD. The text affirms, "**HE**" (God) "*raised*" Jesus "*from the dead.*" This is a vital point with the Holy Spirit. "*Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death . . . whom God hath raised from the dead . . . whom God raised from the dead . . . The God of our fathers raised up Jesus . . . But God raised Him from the dead . . . But He, whom God raised again, saw no corruption . . . Him God raised up the third day . . . in that He hath raised Him from the dead*" (Acts 2:24; 3:15; 4:10; 5:30; 10:40; 13:30,37; 17:31).

The world judged Jesus worthy of death, and thus consigned Him to die. Religious and political people conspired together in His death. Leaders and common people joined together in the sentence. But God raised Him from the dead, confirming that Jesus was, in fact, His Son (Rom 1:4). In raising Jesus from the dead, our justification was secured (Rom 4:25). In His resurrection, Jesus was elevated above all principality and power, and given to the church as "*Head over all*" (Eph 1:20-23).

God brought Jesus back from the region of the dead. He did so that He might be the "*Firstborn from the dead,*" thereby guaranteeing the future ingathering of the saints of God (Col 1:18; 1 Cor 6:14). The apprehension of a

resurrected Christ is vital to the people of God. He came back from seeming defeat, and so will they. He was elevated above His enemies, and they will be also! Death could not hold Him, and it cannot hold them either! These are realities of which we are to be put in constant remembrance.

DELIVERS FROM THE WRATH TO COME. There is wrath ahead! It is coming! There is a "*day of wrath*" (Job 21:30; Rom 2:5), a time when this subdued part of God's nature will erupt "*against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men*" (Rev 1:18). This wrath will "*come upon the children of disobedience*" (Eph 5:6; Col 3:6), and will be "*poured out without mixture*" (Rev 14:10). This is the part of God that is called "*a consuming fire*" (Heb 12:29). Presently, we are in "*the day of salvation*" (2 Cor 6:2), when grace is being offered to the sons of men. But that grace has not, nor will it ever, remove the day of God's wrath.

Isaiah's prophecy is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. "*A man will be as a hiding place from the wind, And a cover from the tempest*" (Isa 32:2). Jesus is to us what the blood of the Lamb was to Israel when the angel of the Lord swept through the land, killing the firstborn in every house unmarked with that blood (Ex 12:13).

There is a twofold sense in which Jesus delivers us from the wrath to come. **First**, He removes the hovering cloud of Divine wrath from our heads **now**. Is it not written, "*he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him*" (John 3:36). Thus we have been brought under the loving favor of God NOW, when He is "*for us*," and not "*against us*." **Second**, He will keep us from the wrath "*which shall devour the adversaries*" (Heb 10:27). In that awful day of recompense, the Lord Jesus will stand fast by us, and we will "*not be hurt by the second death*" (Rev 2:11). These things are particularly precious to those who are suffering for righteousness sake. It helps to keep them running in the race, even when they are assaulted by storms and fiery trials. How precious to hear about them!

LESSON #6

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

"^{2:1} For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain: ² But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention. ³ For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile: ⁴ But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts." ^{KJV} (1 Thess 2:1-4)

INTRODUCTION

In Scripture, the success of the Gospel is never considered a small or incidental thing. It is never viewed as the success of men, or the result of a superior procedure or technique. The Apostles could never have held a workshop on "Successful Evangelism." In spite of man's effort to do so, the work of God cannot be systematized. It always relies upon the Lord Himself, and His involvement with His servants. The second chapter of this book recounts how the work of God was initiated among the Thessalonians. At no point was there a reliance upon human wisdom or fleshly analyses. **Spiritual fruit cannot come from carnal means.** It is particularly important to have a grasp of this during times of stress and trial. Testing causes the flesh to cry out for attention. But Paul will confirm to the Thessalonians that their remarkable beginning in Christ was completely independent of the flesh. He will show that he came in boldness, even though he suffered for it (verses 1-2). He came trusting in the Lord, with all honesty of heart (verse 3). He did not use flattering speech, or seek his own personal advantage (verse 5). He was gentle in his approach, seeking to ensure the protection of the young lambs (verse 7). He was even willing to lay down his life for the Thessalonians, that they might enjoy the benefits of the Gospel (verse 8). He even labored with their own hands so he would not be a burden on the brethren (verse 9). He was wholly righteous in his presence among them, giving no occasion for stumbling (verse 10). The rich fruitage enjoyed by the Thessalonians sprang from good seed, planted in a good manner. They had reason to be confident.

OUR ENTRANCE WAS NOT IN VAIN

"^{2:1} For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain: ² But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention." Note the personal aspect of this passage. There is a total absence of lifeless professionalism. Paul and those with him (Silas and Timothy) had to wade through opposition and hardship to bring the Gospel to the Thessalonians. What he calls an "entrance" was by no means simplistic or without great difficulty. Getting the Gospel of Christ into Thessalonica was no small achievement.

It was not in vain. That is, their entrance was effective, producing godly results. "Vain," in this case, means more merely being pointless. It means they did not come in a mere external show, or with fleshly flair. Their "entrance" was not an appeal to the flesh, with a mind to snare the people in the spirit, so to speak. That is a ploy that has become all too common in our day. Fleshly vanity is used to attract people with the notion they will then hear the Gospel. But this is a totally false concept. Men cannot make the quantum leap from flesh to Spirit as some suppose. If vain and carnal means are employed, there will be no spiritual results. You cannot gain Thessalonian believers by bringing a Roman circus to town! Paul will establish this truth even more firmly in the verses that follow.

We had suffered before. Paul and Silas had just come from Philippi where they were "shamefully mistreated," ^{NASB} or "spitefully treated." ^{NKJV} It was there Paul and Silas went out of the city on the Sabbath, and preached the Gospel to Lydia and other women who were praying by a river (Acts 16:13-15). Immediately following that, they encountered a woman with the spirit of divination who followed them, constantly crying out "*These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation.*" We are told she brought substantial financial gain to her masters, who capitalized on her powers of divination. After "*many days,*" Paul was grieved and banished the spirit with his word (Acts 16:16-17). Realizing their source of gain was now gone, the woman's masters siezed Paul and Silas, dragging them into the market place. Boldly they declared, "*These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice.*" ^{NIV} The multitude joined in the attack on Paul and Silas. The city magistrates then "*tore their robes off them, and proceeded to order them to be beaten with rods. And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely.*" The jailor promptly "*threw them into the inner prison, and fastened their feet in the stocks*" ^{NASB} (Acts 16:19-24). You probably remember the events that occurred that midnight, how the jailor and his household believed and were baptized (Acts 16:25-34). The next morning, the city magistrates sent word to release Paul and Silas.

When told, Paul remonstrated, saying, "*They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out.*" ^{NIV} Hearing Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, the magistrates feared. They came and released them, escorted them out of the city, and begged them to leave the city (Acts 16:38-39).

Paul refers to this lengthy circumstance in these words, "*we were shamefully entreated,*" or "*spitefully treated.*" ^{NKJV} It will suffice to say, a person cannot speak in this manner who is not wholly devoted to the Lord. The Philippi experience would have driven many a soul out of "*the ministry.*" In the case of Paul and Silas, however, they became more determined than ever to preach the Gospel.

We were bold in our God to speak. Cleaving to the Lord with purpose of heart, Paul and Silas had the courage to preach the Gospel to Thessalonica amidst much "*contention.*" They were not deterred by past or present opposition. They perceived the preaching of the Gospel as an important work, and would not allow difficult circumstances to stop them. They did not preach while dominated with the "*fear of man,*" which brings a snare (Prov 29:25). Their preaching created a tumult in Thessalonica (Acts 17:5-9). The "*contention*" was so sharp, Paul and Silas had to leave the city. It is written, "*And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea*" (Acts 17:10). Our text refers to the MANNER in which Paul and Silas conducted themselves under these circumstances. It was a "*manner*" that resulted in good fruit for God's glory!

OUR EXHORTATION WAS NOT DECEITFUL

³ "*For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile.*" The NIV says the exhortation "*does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you.*" Paul was not the promoter of a sect or denomination. He had not been snared by some wayward manner of religious thought. He had no hidden agenda or ulterior motives, and the faith and stability of the Thessalonians was proof of it.

EXHORTATION. It is interesting that Paul refers to his preaching as an "*exhortation.*" This word is not common in the contemporary church, and does not blend well with much of its manners. The word "*exhortation*" is rich with meaning. It includes the idea of a persuasive discourse that calls one person to the side of another. It also involves admonition, encouragement, and comfort. ^{Robertson} "*Exhortation*" presumes a fundamentally comforting and beneficial message. True preaching calls upon distressed minds to take hold of the comforting Gospel. It calls out to those who are aware of their own unrighteousness to avail themselves of the righteousness of God. It is the nature of the message, not the manner of the speaker, that makes such preaching "*exhortation.*" Sensitive souls will detect a certain drawing influence when hearing the Gospel. There is a good sound to it. That is why it is called "*glad tidings*" (Rom 10:15).

DECEIT. "*Deceit*" means the exhortation delivered by Paul was not the result of he himself being deceived. He was not hawking, or marketing, a message he had been deceived into believing. There is a certain camaraderie in denominationalism that demands the embrace of proclamations that are not found in Scripture. Men are moved to embrace slogans and emphases that promote the institution rather than the Gospel of Christ. Early Jews, seeking to promote themselves, said, "*Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved*" (Acts 15:1). Similar contemporary messages include, "We believe in the baptism of the Holy Ghost with the evidence of speaking in tongues." "Once you are saved, you are always saved." "The Sabbath day is the only valid day of rest and worship," etc., etc. In each of these, and more, the person is solicited to embrace a view, not the Christ. But that is not the manner or heart of the Gospel of Christ. By saying his message was not the result of himself being deceived, Paul acknowledged he was preaching the "*truth of the Gospel*" (Gal 2:5). The Thessalonians themselves were proof of this.

UNCLEANNES. Not preaching with "*uncleanness*" is not preaching out of an impure motive. True preaching is compelled by pure motives. An example of an impure desire is doing the work of God "*for filthy lucre,*" or in a quest of riches (1 Pet 5:2). Such an attitude is strictly forbidden in the household of faith (1 Tim 3:3). Another example of impure motives is "*flattering people for the sake of gaining an advantage*" ^{NASB} (Jude 16). Another would be to "*give flattering titles unto man*" (Job 32:21). Under the Law, contact with unlawful things made a person "*unclean,*" or unqualified to be within the camp of God's people (Lev 5:2; 11:24-39). Likewise, those who allow their hearts and minds to be motivated by carnal advantages become "*unclean.*" That uncleanness permeates their message, and will produce undesirable results in those who embrace it.

GUILE. "*Guile*" is deceit, or trickery. In this case, it is the speaker seeking to delude someone in doing something they would not otherwise do. Elsewhere, this is called "*hidden things of dishonesty,*" "*walking in craftiness,*" and "*handling the word of God deceitfully*" (2 Cor 4:2). This is using the Word of God to accomplish results

God did not intend. It may be to promote a sect, certain dietary practices, or ways of financial gain. "*Guile*" is totally out of place in the Kingdom of God. It misrepresents in order to gain an advantage for **the speaker**. The Gospel is unvarnished truth that gives the advantage to **the hearer**. "*Guile*" is like bait, used to snare the unsuspecting. It is subtlety that is related to the "*old serpent*" himself. It has no place in any form in the preaching of the Gospel of Christ. Whether it is offering food, or an evening of entertainment, to unsuspecting souls, "*guile*" has no place in the ministration of the Gospel of Christ.

Although Paul was a tentmaker, he did not come as a tentmaker, but as a minister of the Gospel. Everything about his preaching pointed to God and accented the Gospel of Christ. Enough cannot be said about the necessity of this type of preaching. Men and women need to consider "*the manner of entering*" of those who preach. That manner must not be deterred by difficulty or tainted with misdirected motives.

ALLOWED TO BE ENTRUSTED WITH THE GOSPEL

"⁴ ***But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts.***" How and why did Paul come to Thessalonica? He did NOT come compelled by a message he was deceived into embracing. Nor, indeed, did he come contaminated by impure motives, or with deceptive speech. He came as an "*ambassador for Christ*" and by God (2 Cor 5:20). A sacred charge had been committed to him! He had been "*entrusted with the Gospel*."^{NIV}

ALLOWED OF GOD. The word "*allowed*" means "*approved*," and is so translated in later versions. The expression means the seal of God had been placed upon Paul's message and ministry. Both his manner and message had been examined by God and found acceptable. In him the saying was fulfilled, "*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*"^{NKJV} (2 Tim 2:15). It is one thing, of course, to be approved by God, and quite another to **know** it. As God's spokesman walk in the light, and fellowship with Christ, God will make His approval known to them. Effective laborers for Christ must be able to work in confidence, knowing they are accepted by the One they represent.

ENTRUSTED WITH THE GOSPEL. Although it does not appear to be that evident to some, God does not entrust everyone with His Gospel. Those who bring the glad tidings of the Gospel of peace must be "*sent*," else they cannot go (Rom 10:15). When Jesus dwelt among us, He sent men out (Lk 10:1). He told His disciples to pray the Lord of the harvest "*that He will send forth laborers into his harvest*" (Matt 9:38). Before returning to heaven, He said to His disciples, "*as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you*" (John 20:21). Although I have often heard men scoff at the idea of being "*sent*" by God, such a thought is not strange to the one acquainted with the Lord and Scripture.

To be "*entrusted*" with the Gospel is to have it handed over to ones care. The person so entrusted becomes responsible for carrying the Gospel, delivering it forthrightly, and taking care that it is not corrupted. Such a sacred trust is to be taken seriously.

The idea here is this: "If God approved of me, putting the Gospel into my care, then I will not fail to faithfully preach it." He is showing that the WAY in which he preached the Gospel was in perfect agreement with the responsibility God had given to Him.

EVEN SO WE SPEAK. That is, "We speak in strict conformity with our calling and the stewardship of the Gospel. We do not speak as Jews, sectarians, or promoters of some novel idea. We speak as messengers of God, with a strict regard to the message He has given to us." Paul did not take from the message or add to it. He did not mix something with it that gave the advantage to him, but kept it pure, so that God might receive the glory. This is the kind of speaking described in Second Corinthians 12:19: "*We speak before God in Christ.*"^{NKJV} It is driven by "*the spirit of faith*," which prompts one to say, "*I believed, and therefore have I spoken*" (2 Cor 4:13). The rareness of this kind of perspective is just cause to fervently seek to possess it. Many a soul has rarely heard such speakers.

NOT AS PLEASING MEN. In religion, the dominance of those who are "*menpleasers*" is staggering! If pleasing men is forbidden for slaves in regards to doing their master's will, how much more is it forbidden in the matter of preaching the Gospel (Eph 6:6; Col 3:22). Those entrusted with the Gospel are not to cater to men. They are not to shape their message and present it in such a manner as to gratify men. This is such a critical thing that Paul insightfully confessed, "*for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ*" (Gal 1:10). The words "*yet pleased*" mean "*still trying to please men.*"^{NIV} This is not an occasional attitude, but one that compels the deceiver in everything he says.

Pleasing men is preaching to gain their favor, esteem, and honor. It is seeking their applause and approbation. It also

involves making every effort to avoid their displeasure, persecution, and disapproval. Those who please men try and make the message more palatable and less offensive to the flesh. This practice is altogether too common in our day!

Rather than seeking to please men, the real man of God seeks to please "*God, who tests our hearts.*"^{NKJV} In these words, the Spirit shows us that those who endeavor to please men do not have pure consciences. They are not in fellowship with the Son, and the Father is not abiding in them. They are oblivious to the fact that God is testing their hearts, and will hold them in strict accountability for what they preach and teach.

LESSON #7

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

" ^{2:5} *For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloak of covetousness; God is witness:* ⁶ *Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ.* ⁷ *But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children.* " ^{KJV} (1 Thess 2:5-7)

INTRODUCTION

It may appear strange that Paul makes such a strong appeal to the manner in which he delivered the Gospel to the Thessalonians. Some might be disposed to think it is of little consequence HOW the Gospel is delivered, as long as it is preached. There is an element of truth to this, but it is by no means the whole of the matter. The Scriptures teach us that a contaminate manner of presentation corrupts and taints the message itself, luring people away from the Lord instead of drawing them to Him. Carnal manners eventually cannot mingle with the Gospel of Christ. When motives are impure, it is not long until the words of the Gospel will not fit into the preacher's mouth. The listeners are then disadvantaged by the message preached. A thought that is wrapped in a carnal package cannot remain pure. If men attempt to carry [what they think to be] the Gospel of Christ in a container created by the wisdom of men, the results they obtain will not glorify God. If the priests of old could not carry out their office with unholy means (Lev 10:1-2), you may be sure the ministers of the Gospel may not do so. That would be equivalent to the Savior coming into the world as a Pharisee, Scribe, or Lawyer. It would be like Him attempting to deliver the Gospel in the words of the tradition delivered by the elders of Israel. Christ's distinction was seen in His MANNER as well as His message. Not only did He bring the truth of God to men, He did it as One who was "*meek and lowly in heart*" (Matt 11:29). He never allowed His appearance to overshadow the message, nor did He attempt to make the message palatable to disinterested souls. So the godly teacher and preacher are noted for their manner as well as their message. Their manner will not chaff against the one with a tender heart, nor will it appeal to the one who is hard of heart.

GOD IS WITNESS CONCERNING OUR MANNER

" ^{2:5} *For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloak of covetousness; God is witness.* " There is a good reason why Paul elaborates on their manner or entrance among the Thessalonians. A flawed message and a carnal approach can never move men to turn from idols, serve the living God, and wait for His Son from heaven (1:8-10). **Holy objectives cannot be realized by worldly means.** It is not merely that worldly methods are unlawful, they are impotent. They CANNOT produce godly results. This is why Paul did not preach with Roman rhetoric or Grecian wisdom. He did not wrap the Gospel with practices from which Jesus came to deliver us (Gal 1:4). After confirming the conversion of the Thessalonians was real, Paul now tells them WHY it was.

FLATTERING WORDS. "*Flattering words*" are smooth sounding words that lead the listener to think more high of himself than he ought to think (Rom 12:3). They are exaggerated praise-like "buttering" someone up. The English word for a person resorting to this practice is "*fawner*." It is to seek favor by overstating the value of a person. Some contemporary synonyms are "apple-polishing" and "pandering." This type of approach moves the pretender to wink at people's sin, and address them as though they were not sinners. It vaunts the seeming worth of human nature, and assigns value to human traits and accomplishments that God does not honor. A speaker using "*flattering words*" would never tell a person out of Christ that he was "*dead in trespasses and sins*" (Eph 2:1-2), or that the wrath of God is upon him (John 3:36), or that God commands him to repent (Acts 17:30). Such would paint the lost person as not **too** lost, and the sinner as not **too** sinful.

When young Elihu finally spoke to Job and those with him, he said, "*For I know not to give flattering titles; in so doing my Maker would soon take me away*" (Job 32:22). David said, "*The LORD shall cut off all flattering lips*" (Psa 12:3). Solomon counseled, "*meddle not with him that flattereth with his lips*" (Prov 20:19), and "*a flattering mouth worketh ruin*" (Prov 26:28). Peter referred to "*flattering words*" when he described false prophets. "*For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature*" ^{NIV} (2 Pet 2:18). Flatterings are ministers of Satan, not God.

On a more practical note, "*flattering words*" would accentuate the human will, tone down the enormity of sin, and accent human goodness. Such words leave people thinking more of what THEY can do than what God has and can do. They make people comfortable with putting off coming to the Savior, and delaying obtaining mercy.

Paul says they did not use such an approach "*at any time*." Had they used "*flattering words*," they might have avoided the beating and imprisonment in Philippi, and the need to leave Thessalonica by night. They might have escaped the confrontation with the Jews in the Thessalonian synagogue. But such an approach would NOT have brought men to Christ, causing them to turn from idols, serve God, and wait for Jesus from heaven. They refused to

present their doctrine in a way that pleased men.

A CLOAK OF COVETOUSNESS. Other versions read "*a pretext for greed*,"^{NASB} "*a mask to cover up greed*,"^{NIV} and "*secretly desiring to profit ourselves*."^{BBE} As reprehensible as it is, there is a phenomenal amount of personal fleshly gain realized in the realm of religion. Some men actually use so-called *Christianity* to become independently wealthy. A "*cloak of covetousness*" moves men to seek their own gain rather than God's glory. It deceives men into placing the accent upon this present evil world rather than the world to come, where worldly treasures have not part.

We are living in a time when covetousness is exalted in the professed Christian community. Book writers, musicians, singers, motivators, entertainers, etc., are all about us. They come in the name of the Lord, yet demand high salaries. They market their goods at exorbitant prices, and amass great wealth to themselves. Can you imagine men paying to hear Jesus or Paul preach? Or, can you envision Paul selling his Epistles for personal gain? He did not preach in this manner, and the Thessalonians knew it.

Jesus declared the manner of the Kingdom when He said, "*Give, and it shall be given unto you*" (Lk 6:38). The primary objective of those who labor for the Lord is to give, to dispense, and to pour out. They have no need to be covetous, for the Lord cares for them. At the point a person attempts to serve the Lord for "*filthy lucre*," or out of a covetous compulsion, he ceases to be a servant of God and becomes an idolater (Col 3:5).

WE DID NOT SEEK GLORY FROM MEN!

^{5b-6a} . . . ***God is witness; Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others . . .*** "

Remember, the Apostle is accounting for the genuineness of the Thessalonian's conversion by declaring the way in which he conducted himself among them.

GOD IS WITNESS. Paul calls God to witness to the integrity and accuracy of his statements. This is not a mere formal statement—a form of oratory designed to underscore what has been said. By saying "*God is our witness*,"^{NIV} Paul is saying the day of judgment will confirm the truth of what he has said. Also, this is a form of an oath, where an appeal is made to God to validate what Paul has declared. He knew that God, through His anointing, can "*teach*" the hearers if the messenger is from God or not. As it is written, "*But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things . . . These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you. But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him*"^{NKJV} (1 John 2:20-27). Because the Thessalonians had turned to God to serve Him, and because Paul preached the Gospel in a befitting manner, he could call upon the Lord to confirm his motives, knowing that He would.

SEEKING GLORY FROM MEN. The servant of God is distinguished from all other servants. It is the manner of men to seek glory and praise from one another. Solomon said, "*So to seek one's own glory is not glory*" (Prov 25:27). To seek glory from men is to order your life so men will honor you. It is to preach and teach with the aim of pleasing men and receiving applause from them.

Jesus set the tone for His Kingdom when He affirmed, "*Yet I do not receive testimony from man*" (John 5:34). Again He said, "*I do not receive honor from men*" (John 5:41). And again, "*And I do not seek My own glory*" (John 8:50). If Jesus had courted the favor of men, He never would have been delivered over to Pilate and Herod. He knew and taught that a person cannot seek God's favor and that of man at the same time.

During the latter part of Christ's ministry many of the chief rulers of the Jews believed on Him. Yet, "*because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue.*" In explaining this circumstance the Holy Spirit said, "*for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God*" (John 12:42-43). Thus, these rulers altered their conduct because of their preference for the adulation of men.

Their rejection at Philippi did not constrain Paul and Silas to water down their message in order to be accepted by men. They took up their cross and followed Jesus! They did not tailor their message to avoid conflict in Thessalonica, or anywhere else. This matter was so serious that Paul once said, "*If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ*" (Gal 1:10). Earlier, Paul declared what motivated him to preach the Gospel of Christ. "*But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts*" (2:4). Now he tells the Thessalonian brethren this is confirmed by the response they had to his Gospel.

Holy men and women seek to please others in the sense of bringing them good and edifying things. "*Let each of us*

please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification" (Rom 15:2). In this case, the pleasing is not praise being heaped upon the one bringing the message, but the spiritual satisfaction that comes to the hearers when they are edified, built up, and strengthened in the faith. That is the result God-sent messengers seek.

No spiritual good will come from catering to people, seeking their approbation, and shaping the Gospel so as to remove the offense of the cross. As you must know, there is altogether too much of this in our time. None of us should work to make the Gospel distasteful, or be offensive in our presentation of it. But neither should we seek to make it appealing to the flesh. To do so is to seek honor and glory from men.

What Paul preached did not come from men, and it was not designed to bring the honor of men to himself. It only had an appeal to those who were convicted of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8-11). If men did not receive what he said, he did not change his words to make them more agreeable to the flesh. His dominating desire was to please God in his preaching and teaching. He knew that God's good pleasure would move Him to work through the message, bringing men and women to Himself.

NOT BURDENSOME, BUT GENTLE

"^{6b} . . . *when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ.* ⁷ *But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children.*" The gentleness of the Apostle comes through in this text. The receptivity of the Thessalonians constrained Paul and Silas to conduct themselves in this considerate manner. The NASB reads, "*even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority.*" The NRSV reads, "*though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ.*" The NLT reads, "*As apostles of Christ we certainly had a right to make some demands of you.*"

BURDENSOME. The demanding, or burdensome, approach Paul could have taken was not in order to destroy the people. As he once wrote, "*For even if I should boast somewhat more about our authority, which the Lord gave us for edification and **not for your destruction***" (2 Cor 10:8). Notwithstanding, with some people, as the Corinthians, Paul had to resort to this manner: i.e., "*Now to the married **I command**, yet not **I but the Lord***" (1 Cor 7:10). He also strictly charged the Corinthians to deliver a fornicator in their assembly "*to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord*" (1 Cor 5:4). He also spoke in this authoritative manner to the Galatians. "*If anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed . . . You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace*" (Gal 1:8; 5:4). Indeed, there were times when Paul spoke with undeniable authority.

Being "*burdensome*," or demanding, was not wrong of itself. It was, however, a manner that was not appropriate for the tenderhearted. If people rejected the Gospel, or were hardened against it, neither Jesus nor the Apostles were gentle with them (Matt 23:13-51; Acts 13:10,46). But when people were humble and contrite of heart Jesus and His Apostles **were** gentle with them. It is not Christ's manner to break a bruised reed or quench a smoking flax (Matt 12:20). However, whoever rejects the appointed foundation Stone will suffer the consequences: "*Whoever falls on that stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder*" ^{NKJV} (Lk 20:18).

Those who are tender toward the Gospel will receive a tender and gentle response from God and those who have His Spirit. Such will be treated as the Thessalonians, who turned from idols to serve God and to wait for His Son from heaven.

GENTLE AND CHERISHING. The gentleness of reference is spiritual consideration, not a mere fleshly inoffensive manner. Being "*gentle*" is taking care not to hinder the work God has begun. It is being careful not to "*destroy*" the work of God in the people (Rom 14:15,20). Being "*gentle*" is the opposite of lording it over God's heritage (1 Pet 5:3). This attitude of gentleness was reflected in Jacob's consideration for his household. When Esau suggested they travel together, Jacob said, "*My lord knows that the children are weak, and the flocks and herds which are nursing are with me. And if the men should drive them hard one day, all the flock will die*" (Gen 33:13). That is how Paul was with the Thessalonians. They were not advanced spiritually, but they were devoted and tender of heart. Thus, as the Savior, he led them "*gently*" (Isa 40:11).

This is precisely the attitude seen in the blessed Savior when He said, "*I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light*" (Matt 11:29-30). Blessed is the spiritual leader who can recognize tender hearts and be gentle among them. Recovery and growth will be experienced under such a ministry. Those, however, who are obstinate, refusing to yield the obedience of faith, forfeit their right to such considerate ministers.

A NURSING MOTHER. This is a most tender scene. Young believers are like infants who are crying out for

milk, yet cannot speak plainly or explain why they are hungry. By likening himself to a mother nursing her children, Paul is acknowledging his responsibility to feed and nourish those converted under his ministry, or that of others. We will see the gentle manner in which Paul will instruct the Thessalonians when they had an incorrect view of the coming of the Lord (Chapter 4). The tenderness of their hearts, and their desire for the things of God, were matched by the gentle and considerate teaching of the Apostle. He cared for them as his own "*children*" (2:11).

God is greatly to be praised for both obedient children and tender instructors. He has a way of bringing such individuals together, making them a comfort to one another.

LESSON #8

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

"^{2:5} *So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us.* ⁹ *For ye remember, brethren, our labor and travail: for laboring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God.*" ^{KJV} (1 Thess 2:8-9)

INTRODUCTION

Professional and institutional religion does not have **heart**. In them, there is really very little concern for people. The institution and a personal career take the precedence over personal interest in those called "*the flock of God*." Every religious institution has a history of hurt people, ground to powder under the wheels of the progressing establishment or profession. All of this has depersonalized the modern "church," contributing to its fulfillment of the descriptive appellation, "*Babylon the Great*" (Rev 17:5). From the bloody persecutions of the Roman Catholic Church, to the calloused institutionalism of our day, "*heart*" has been largely removed from the *Christian* community. We have much the same situation as existed when the Scribes, Pharisees, Lawyers, and Sadducees, driving the institutional wheels of Judaism. They pioneered a professional religious spirit, with recognition being given purely upon the basis of appearance and fleshly distinctions (Matt 23:5-7). They did not require spiritual substance, only strict conformity to the institution. The chapter before us shows a total absence of heartless religion, standing in stark contrast with the general religious tone that is around us. Here we will see how those with the Spirit of Christ minister, and the extent to which they will go to bring the Gospel of Christ to the people.

AFFECTIONATELY DESIROUS OF YOU

"^{2:8a} *So being affectionately desirous of you . . .*" Other versions read, "*affectionately longing for you,*" ^{NKJV} "*a fond affection for you,*" ^{NASB} "*We loved you so much,*" ^{NIV} "*So deeply we do care for you,*" ^{NRSV} "*yearning over you,*" ^{DARBY} "*we felt so devoted to you.*" ^{NJB} This is obviously a very strong and personal expression of spiritual love. It declares a firm and unusual attachment to the Thessalonian brethren. The expression reminds us of Christ's words on the eve of His betrayal: "*With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer*" (Lk 22:15). Only a godly person can fathom the depth of this word.

As I have noted before, this was not the response of the Apostle to all congregations or individuals. To the Galatians he said, "*I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain*" (Gal 4:11). Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "*For I fear lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I wish*" (2 Cor 12:20). Of one man he said, "*Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works*" (2 Tim 4:14).

The strong affection Paul had for the Thessalonians was the response of a spiritual man to those who heartily embraced the Gospel of Christ. While there is a sense in which we love all men, including our enemies (Lk 6:27), it is not with the same love we have toward those who are in Christ Jesus. This is "*brotherly love,*" which is loaded with kind affection (Rom 12:11). It is the kind of love that comes from being "*taught by God to love one another*" (1 Thess 4:9). This is a love in which we "*prefer*" one another in "*honor*" (Rom 12:10). Such love is "*unfeigned,*" or unpretentious, and is "*fervently*" expressed from a "*pure heart*" (1 Pet 1:22) toward those who are living by faith.

From time to time, you will hear people say that God "*loves everyone the same.*" Some have gone as far as to say the Lord loves the lowliest sinner as much as He loved Paul the Apostle. Nevertheless, this is foolish talk, and ought not have a place in our speech. There are people who are "*greatly beloved,*" or "*highly esteemed*" by God-like Daniel (Dan 9:23). God cannot say of every man what He said of David, "*I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart*" (Acts 13:22; 1 Sam 13:14). He does not call every man His "*friend,*" as He did Abraham (Isa 41:8), or "*My servant,*" as He did Moses (Num 12:7). In old times, God did not speak with every man "*mouth to mouth,*" or "*face to face,*" as He did Moses (Num 12:8). There are people toward whom special favors are extended by the Lord of glory. As it is written, "*The eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry*" (Psa 34:15). A foreshadowing of this distinctive love was seen in Israel. "*For I am the LORD your God, The Holy One of Israel, your Savior; I gave Egypt for your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in your place. Since you were precious in My sight, You have been honored, And I have loved you; Therefore I will give men for you, And people for your life*" (Isa 43:3-4). This love for men is brought to its highest in the body of Christ, who are "*a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people*" (1 Pet 2:9).

The highest expression of Divine love is found in God's love for His Son- "*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*" (Matt 3:17). God's profound love for the Son is expressed in these words, "*For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does*" (Matt 5:20). Confirming God's love is NOT an unconditional love, Jesus said, "*for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God*" (John 16:27). And again, "*And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him . . . If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him*" (John 14:21,23).

All of this is not unrelated to our text. The Thessalonians had found a special place in Paul's heart because of their bold response and commitment to the Gospel of Christ. He enjoyed being with them. As with the Philippians, Paul's desire for them flowed from his relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ. "*For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ*" (Phil 1:8). There is a fellowship with Christ that goes beneath the surface-one in which the very heart of Jesus is experienced by the believer. When this takes place, those who are especially dear to Christ become dear to us also. There are disciples whom the Lord loves in an unusual way-like John (John 20:2). They not only are close to Jesus, but lean upon Him in a more profound way (John 13:23).

This closeness to Christ is not the result of mere religious discipline, or a favorable personality. It is the outcome of a hearty embrace of the Gospel of our salvation. Those who put themselves at risk by taking hold of the truth are endeared to those who declare that Gospel. So it was with the Thessalonians. Paul wanted to be with them.

WILLING TO IMPART THE GOSPEL AND OUR SOULS

^{8b} . . . *we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us.*" Willingness is a Kingdom trait, and is realized in Christ Jesus. Prior to the New Covenant, few people were noted for being "*willing*" toward God. But that is not the case now. We are "*willing*" when our desires are brought into harmony with the will of the Lord-a most remarkable circumstance. This is the situation prophesied by David in the 100th Psalm. "*Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power.*" The NASB reads, "*Thy people will volunteer freely in the day of Thy power.*"

Isaiah described the effects of such willingness in these words: "*If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land*" (Isa 1:19). This is the opposite of having a "*stiff neck*" (Psa 75:5), "*hardness of heart*" (Mk 16:14), and being stubborn and rebellious (Psa 78:8). Where willingness is **not** found, grace has not been received.

In its essence, willingness is the very spirit of Christ Himself. It involves the abandonment of personal considerations in preference for the will of God. Thus, Jesus said, "*Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God . . . My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work . . . nevertheless not My will, but Thine, be done*" (Heb 10:9; John 4:34; Lk 22:42). In our case, willingness involves receiving a new heart and spirit, having our hearts circumcised, and being made a new creature in Christ Jesus.

WILLING TO IMPART. To "*impart*" means to share something that has already been ingested by the person who is sharing. In the strictest sense of the word, you cannot "*impart*" what you yourself have not experienced. This is nothing less than "*rivers of living water*" flowing from the "*belly*," or inmost part of one's person (John 7:38).

Imparting is not the communication of a lifeless creed or sectarian dogma. It is not swelling the numbers of a religious sect by perpetrating the teachings of that sect. Rather, it is sharing something that gave life to us, and will give life to others.

THE GOSPEL OF GOD. At its heart, the Gospel is "*the Gospel of God*" (Rom 1:1; 15:16; 2 Cor 11:7; 1 Pet 4:17). It is the announcement of "*the wonderful works of God*" (Acts 2:11). It proclaims how God set Jesus "*to bless*" men, in turning them from their iniquities (Acts 3:26). It tells men that God sent, sustained, raised, and exalted the Lord Jesus Christ-that He has made Jesus "*both Lord and Christ*" (Acts 2:36). The Gospel proclaims that "*God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself*" (2 Cor 5:19).

It is one thing to be willing to "*impart*" such a Gospel under favorable circumstances. It is quite another to be willing to do so when envious Jews reject what is preached, cause a riot in the city where it was preached, and are the cause for having to leave that very city (Acts 17:1-10). One of the acid tests of an approved minister of the Gospel is whether he remains willing to preach in the face of adversity. When Peter and John were strictly charged by the Jewish council "*not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus*," they responded, "*we cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard*"^{NIV} (Acts 4:18-20). That is a willingness to impart the Gospel of God-even in the face of personal harm. Such were the circumstances under which the Thessalonians heard the Gospel.

WILLING TO IMPART OUR OWN SOULS. Here again, the superior nature of the Kingdom of God is

clearly seen. It moves people to do what is utterly unreasonable to the flesh. When Paul says they were willing to impart their *"own souls,"* he is saying they were willing to give their lives so the Thessalonians could receive the Gospel. That is clearly the very spirit of Christ, who gave Himself for us (Gal 2:20; Eph 5:25). Jesus said, *"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends"* (John 15:13). At the lowest end of this condition, the true minister will put himself at a disadvantage in order that the Gospel might be known by others (Gal 2:5). At the highest end, he can say, *"neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God"* (Acts 20:24).

And how is it that the Thessalonians received such marvelous consideration? Is this something enjoyed by everyone who heard the Gospel? It was their response to that Gospel that so moved Paul: *"because you had become dear to us."*^{NKJV} As with the Lord Jesus Himself, those who followed Him and eagerly received His word, always got more than the others. That soul that presses hard after Christ will not be disappointed! Both Jesus and His faithful servants will pour themselves out for such hungry and thirsty souls!

LABOR AND TRAVAIL, NIGHT AND DAY

"⁹For ye remember, brethren, our labor and travail: for laboring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God." Here is a profound consideration! Because the Thessalonians had received the Gospel *"in much affliction"* (1:6), the messengers were careful not to be the source of additional burden to them. They preached the Gospel to these suffering saints in great personal inconvenience. With *"toil and hardship,"* Paul writes, *"we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you."*^{NIV} He is referring to a work that was hard, or difficult, as well as lengthy and inconvenient.

OUR LABOR. This is a description of work that wearied the worker, nearly wearing him out. It is no casual and easy labor to which he refers. Paul was willing to *"gladly spend and be spent"* for the sake of those receiving the Gospel under much duress (2 Cor 12:15). As the travels associated with the Savior's ministry *"wearied"* Him (John 4:6), so the Apostle became fatigued with the labors that **attended** his preaching. As he said elsewhere, *"Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory"* (2 Tim 2:10).

The *"labor and travail"* to which he refers was not the preaching itself, but the work in which he engaged to support his labors. Following his departure from Thessalonica, we learn that Paul's *"craft"* was tentmaking. Because this was the same trade as that of Aquila and Priscilla, *"he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers"* (Acts 18:3). It was this trade to which Paul referred when he said to the Ephesian elders, *"You yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me"* (Acts 20:34). He also mentioned this practice to the Corinthians (1 Cor 4:12).

Frequently, Paul forfeited his right to be supported by the fruit of the Gospel. He did so in Corinth, lest those who questioned his Apostleship would think him to be covetous (1 Cor 9:6-15; 2 Cor 11:8-9). In the case of the Thessalonians, they had enough burdens without having any additional ones placed upon them.

NOT CHARGEABLE. The meaning of the words *"not chargeable"* relates to the reason why Paul worked *"night and day."* It was *"in order not to be a burden to anyone."*^{NIV} Among other things, this confirmed the Apostle did not seek His own interests, but those of others. He was living out this principle of the heavenly Kingdom: love *"does not seek its own"*^{NKJV} (1 Cor 13:5). And again, *"in honor preferring one another"* (Rom 12:10). And again, *"but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves"* (Phil 2:3).

Paul wanted nothing to detract from the Gospel and its great benefits—not even undue concern for himself. Even though he worked *"night and day,"* yet he apparently was not able to make ends meet. We learn from his letter to the Philippians that *"again and again"* they sent *"aid"* for his *"necessities,"* **while he was in Thessalonica** (Phil 4:16). Still, he would do nothing to be a burden to these afflicted Thessalonians. For this reason, God brought him what he needed from another quarter, commanding his sustenance as He did Elijah's.

In a way, he helped to carry their burden by not placing an additional one upon them. How unlike the Lawyers, to whom Jesus said, *"Woe unto you also, ye lawyers! for ye lade men with burdens grievous to be borne, and ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers"* (Lk 11:46).

WHILE WE PREACHED THE GOSPEL.^{NIV} Here is an interested perspective. Paul does not say he worked night and day, and preached the Gospel on the side. Rather, he preached the Gospel while he worked and toiled

night and day. His vocation was preaching. His avocation, or secondary activity, was tentmaking. Further, the language strongly suggests that he preached WHILE he worked.

Ponder the circumstances under which Paul and his brethren preached to the Thessalonians. They experienced the aggressive opposition of the Jews. There was also a disturbance in the city and among its officials. They toiled night and day, working with their hands. They expended their energies in the preaching of the Gospel. They were mindful of the newborn Thessalonians, who themselves were undergoing affliction, as well as the joy of the Spirit. That sort of activity is nothing less than the presentation of the body as a "*living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God*" (Rom 12:1). Such labors will not be forgotten by God, for they are "*a work of faith and labor of love*" (Heb 6:10).

LESSON #9

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

" ^{2:10} *You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe;* ¹¹ *as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children,* ¹² *that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.* " ^{NKJV} (1 Thess 2:10-12)

INTRODUCTION

One of the primary benefits of this second chapter is its focus on the NATURE of Kingdom ministry. In a day of *professionalized* and *spectating* religion, the impact of the WAY a minister lives and the FOCUS of his ministry is often little known. Much of the *Christianity* of our time leaves the people unchallenged to live for the honor and glory of God. While it is not in order to merely complain about the situation, it is imperative that those who speak for God determine to glorify God and give eternal advantages to His people. It is not a light thing to labor in the vineyard of the Lord-to feed His flock, and care for His people. The thrust of true ministry must leave the saints of God eagerly advancing toward glory, and preparing themselves for an abundant entrance into "*the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*" (2 Pet 1:11). The number of people to whom we minister has no bearing whatever on this high calling. We have no idea how many people were in the Thessalonian congregation, but Paul and his fellow workers poured themselves out for them. This is the only acceptable manner in which the people of God can be served. Let every soul who feeds the flock in any way take heed to the words of this text. They are most vital to their ministry.

YOU AND GOD ARE WITNESSES

" ^{2:10} *You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe.* " There is a certain manner that characterizes true Kingdom laborers. It passes the test of God and godly people. This is involved in the affirmation of Romans 14:17-18. "*For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men.*" The godly minister has a great regard for what God thinks of his ministry and how godly people regard it.

WITNESSES CALLED. Paul started this Epistle by reminding the Thessalonians they knew how he had conducted himself among them (1:5). Godly ministers can challenge those to whom they minister to witness to their integrity and faithfulness. Mighty Samuel called upon the people to find any fault in his conduct among them (1 Sam 12:3-5). Paul challenged the Ephesians elders to witness to his faithfulness among them (Acts 20:18-19). He told the Corinthians he could commend himself to their conscience, for they knew well how he had ministered among them (2 Cor 4:2). Truly, ministers of God are "*known and read by all men*" (2 Cor 3:2). Much of this has been greatly obscured by a professionalized ministry that has little regard for bringing advantages to God's people.

Paul also calls God, who weighs the spirit of motives of men (Prov 16:2), to witness to His faithfulness. Because of His fellowship with the Lord, he knows God will confirm what he says. This is the same as ones conscience bearing him witness "*in the Holy Spirit*" (Rom 9:1). The person who walks in the light is not afraid to have it shine strongly upon him. Faithful ministers can call for God to confirm the truth of what they say.

DEVOUTLY. Other versions read "*holily*," ^{KJV} "*holy*," ^{NIV} "*pure*," ^{NRSV} and "*piously*." ^{DARBY} This is living **with God in mind**, seeking to do His will and please Him primarily. It is living "*in all good conscience*" (Acts 23:1), walking "*in the light*" (1 John 1:7), and with "*the help of His countenance*" (Psa 42:5). The person who lives "*devoutly*" has his affection set on things above. He is running with patience the race set before him, while looking to Jesus. He is fighting the good fight of faith, laying hold of eternal life, and pressing toward the mark for the prize of his high calling in Christ.

JUSTLY. While "*devoutly*" has to do with living before God, "*justly*" has to do with **living before men**. It is not living to please men, but living to the glory of God before them. This is living "*uprightly*," ^{NASB} "*righteously*," ^{NIV} and "*free from all evil*." ^{BBE} The person who lives "*justly*" does not have respect of persons, and is "*impeccably fair and upright*." ^{NJB} This is the person who is running the race with patience, while looking to Jesus (Heb 12:1-2). It is one who is obviously pressing toward the mark for the prize (Phil 3:14), fighting the good fight of faith, and laying hold on eternal life (1 Tim 6:12). The awareness of his own reconciliation to God by His grace moves him to seek the eternal advantage of men

BLAMELESSLY. What a strong word this is! "*Blameless*" means without obvious flaw or fault. It does not mean absolutely perfect, for such a condition cannot be attained while we are in the body (Phil 3:12). We can, however, be above reproach. God's people are to be "*blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the*

midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world" (Phil 2:15). God's purpose for them is that their *"whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (1 Thess 5:23). The objective is to *"be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless"* (2 Pet 3:14). In such a condition it is apparent that one is separate from the world, a stranger and pilgrim in a quest of a better country. In saying they were *"blameless,"* Paul was acknowledging that he and those laboring with him were heavenly citizens. It must be the aim of all who labor for the Lord to call heaven and earth to witness to their holiness, justness, and blameless living.

AMONG YOU WHO BELIEVE. While Paul did preach in market places (Acts 17:17), among philosophers (Acts 17:18-19), and even barbarians (Acts 28:4-10), his primary area of ministry was among them *"who believe."* There is where his primary fruit was found, and there is where his ministry was most full. Only among them could he speak in this manner, for they alone were capable of judging with righteous judgment (John 7:24). They knew he had avoided falling into sin, treating men unjustly, and being charged with lawlessness and calumny. Such a reputation must be zealously sought.

EXHORTATION, COMFORTING, AND CHARGING

¹⁰ *As you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children."* I am more and more impressed with how Paul appeals to the Thessalonians to confirm the nature of his ministry. This was not a common appeal by Paul, which confirms the tenderness and sensitivity of the Thessalonian brethren.

WE EXHORTED. To *"exhort"* is to urge, intreat, admonish, and to summon. It is to awaken people to the business of living for the Lord and doing his will. This is such a pivotal activity in the Kingdom of God that He has given the gift of exhortation to the church (Rom 12:8). Those so endued move people to holy activities, constraining them to be up and about their Father's business. John the Baptist was noted for his exhortations. He moved people to do something, not leaving them complacent in inactivity (Lk 3:18). Even the prophet is noted for exhorting, or stirring up, the people (1 Cor 14:3). Paul told Timothy to give attention to the matter of exhorting (1 Tim 4:13). On the day of Pentecost, Peter moved those who had believed with powerful exhorting: *"And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation"* (Acts 2:40).

We live in a time and place where academia and gentle speech are dominating the church. People are not being stirred Godward, challenged to rise from their slumber and put their hand to the plow. Such was not the case with Paul and his co-laborers. They moved people to action, and did so in a holy, just, and blameless manner.

WE COMFORTED. Here is another strong word, depicting an indispensable ministry. To be *"comforted"* is to be encouraged and strengthened for the life of faith. It involves being consoled and cheered with the prospect of Divine assistance and good things to come. The early church were edified and multiplied with they enjoyed the *"comfort of the Holy Spirit"* (Acts 9:31). That comfort was realized amidst effective ministry of the Word. *"Comfort"* is to the soul what refreshing water and sleep is to the body. It allows the recuperation of spiritual energies, and the clearing of the eyes of our understanding. How powerfully God spoke through Isaiah when He said, *"Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned"* (Isa 40:12).

While *"exhortation"* stirs the people to activity, *"comfort"* is like a tender hand that gently lifts the fallen and discouraged. Faithful ministers both exhort and comfort. They provoke to love and good works, and gently console fatigued and discouraged hearts. This is a godly trait, for God comforts us *"in all of our tribulation,"* so that we can comfort those who are *"in any trouble"* with the comfort we ourselves have received from God (2 Cor 1:4). Comfort brings relief to those who are fighting the good fight of faith, and encouragement to those who are running the race set before them. Holy men of God do not neglect the saints of God, but see to it that they have due encouragement from the Lord.

WE CHARGED. Here is another strong word, and sorely required among them the saints. To *"charge"* is to implore, plead with, or strongly appeal to. It is the kind of activity Jesus referred to in His parable of the supper of salvation. *"Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled"* (Lk 14:23). This is not moving people with empty words. It is constraining them by the testimony of the Gospel, insisting that they embrace the truth heartily. Paul *"charged"* that his letters be read (1 Thess 5:27). He also told Timothy to *"charge"* wayward preachers that they *"teach no other doctrine"* (1 Tim 1:3). Those who were rich in this world were *"charged"* not to trust in their riches, but in God, while doing good works (1 Tim 6:17). There are responsibilities in the Kingdom of God. *"Charging"* is calling upon men to meet those responsibilities.

AS A FATHER. Paul did not minister as a professional, but as a "*father*" to those who received his message. Unlike the "*hireling*" (John 10:12), or professional minister, he was obligated by his calling to do everything within his power to bring the saints to spiritual maturity. Today is the time of the professional counselor. He does not deal with men as with his own children, but as a professional, with expertise in psychological matters. There is no place for such heartless activity in the "*Father's business*." Before, Paul referred to himself as a "*nurse*" (2:7). Now he likens himself to a "*father*." Both have an intense interest in the welfare and growth of those in their care. They will provide the spiritual nourishment necessary for these results. The Thessalonians knew this was Paul's manner.

WALK WORTHY OF GOD

"¹² . . . *we . . . charged every one of you . . . that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.*" As you can see, the real nature of the work of the Lord differs significantly from the experience of many believers. How often is this solemn "*charge*" heard? "**WALK WORTHY OF GOD!**" Other versions read, "*walk in a manner worthy of God,*" ^{NASB} "*live lives worthy of God,*" ^{NIV} "*live your lives in a way that God would consider worthy.*" ^{NLT} The words sound strange in the context of contemporary religion. There are, no doubt, many people who have never heard these words.

WORTHY OF GOD. There is a sense in which we are "*unworthy*." As Jacob well said, "*I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which Thou hast showed unto Thy servant*" (Gen 32:10). John the Baptist said of Jesus, "*whose shoes I am not worthy to bear*" (Matt 3:11). The centurion that besought Jesus to heal his servant confessed, "*I am not worthy that Thou shouldst come under my roof*" (Matt 8:8). However, there is a sense in which unworthiness is to be avoided at all cost.

Ponder the words of Jesus, "*He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after Me, is not worthy of Me*" (Matt 10:37-38). In one of His matchless parables He spoke of those who "*were not worthy*" to sit at his table (Matt 22:8), declaring they surely would not sit at it. Paul and Barnabas told some rebellious Jews they had judged themselves "*unworthy of everlasting life*" (Acts 13:46). Let us, therefore, put behind us the notion that worthiness has no place in the family of God.

What does it mean to be "*worthy of God?*" It means befitting of Him, or in a way that does not cast a bad light upon Him. Walking worthy of God is living a life that "*adorns*" the doctrine, or is a complement to the Gospel of Christ (Tit 2:11). It is to "*walk worthy of the calling wherewith you were called*" (Eph 4:1), so that your life is not in opposition to what the Gospel declares.

Paul prayed that the Colossians would be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, in order that they might "*walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing*" (Col 1:9-10). Let no person imagine that he may live in a way that displeases the Lord, yet derive all of the benefits of salvation. Such a thing will not occur, even though some have formulated doctrines that lead men to this conclusion. Those who dare to live lives that contradict the Gospel are on dangerous ground. Thus, Paul implored men to live "*worthy of God.*" This means a life that would not require God to become unrighteous in order to bless, lead, and nourish. Be sure, God will not honor such a life.

I have often pondered how much *Christian* activity I have observed that is a reproach to the God of glory. The existence of such things should move us to join Paul in pleading with men and women to live lives that are worthy, or befitting, of God-lives to which He can respond, "*Well done, good and faithful servant. Thou hast been faithful . . .*"

GOD'S KINGDOM AND GLORY. Here the Spirit affords a brief snapshot of the purpose of God's calling. He has summoned us to participate in "*His own kingdom and glory.*" ^{NASB} We have a lofty calling—a "*heavenly calling*" (Heb 3:1). This is the "*hope of His calling*" (Eph 1:18), the reason for which He has drawn us to Christ.

His Kingdom. Now we participate in its characteristics: righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom 14:17). In the world to come, we will participate in its government and rule (1 Cor 6:1-3; Matt 5:5:5; Dan 7:18,22,27). This is the kingdom the faithful will "*inherit.*" Those who walk unworthy of God will not inherit it (1 Cor 6:9-10; Gal 5:20-21; Eph 5:5). Our calling to this Kingdom involved a deliverance from this present evil world (Gal 1:4). Our lives are to be harmonious with that kind of calling.

His glory. We are also called to participate in God's glory—be His sons in appearance as well as in character. Thus He has predestinated that we be "*conformed to the image of His Son,*" who is "*the brightness of His glory*" (Rom 8:29; Heb 1:3). Even now, the blessed Holy Spirit is changing us from one stage of glory unto another, moving us

along in the great purpose of God (2 Cor 3:18). When His glory is revealed at the appearing of Jesus, the glory to which we have been called will also be revealed. As it is written, "*When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him **in glory***" (Col 3:4). Now, let us live in a manner that is compatible with, and honoring of, that marvelous calling.

LESSON #10

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

" 2:13 *For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.*" ^{KJV} (1 Thess 2:13)

INTRODUCTION

One of the great benefits of the Epistles is the spiritual perspective they provide. They reveal a set of values that has been obscured by institutional *Christianity*. Equally true, they confirm that life in Christ releases us from a purely earthly view of the saints. Believers in Christ are more than mere friends, or comrades in social interests. They are not just *members of the same church*, as ordinarily conceived. Their identity with the church is, of itself, a great and marvelous work. They have become part of something supernatural, something that produces unceasing thanksgiving in the hearts of all who see things as they really are. There is something wonderfully common among these people. It is not where they live, or the group of believers with whom they are identified. It is not their occupation, or earthly interests. It is not their political or national identity. Nor, indeed, is it their level of education, or institutional commitment. However noteworthy these things may appear, they are not adequate as a basis for fellowship among believers. This short, yet pungent, verse will develop the common trait that binds those who are believing together. It is something they all have in common—something which testifies to the working of the Lord among and within them. You will find it to be an exceedingly rare trait in the professed church—one that is seldom lauded or extolled. Too often, you will not be able to conclude from their activities and conversation that it even exists among them.

THE WORD WORKS IN THOSE WHO BELIEVE

" 13c . . . *which effectually worketh also in you that believe.*" The evidence that the Word of God comes from Him is not only found in the message itself. It is also revealed in the **effects** of that message upon those who receive it. Other versions read, "*which also performs its work in you who believe,*" ^{NASB} "*which is also at work in you believers,*" ^{NRSV} "*which has living power in you who have faith,*" ^{BBE}. From these we see there is a work the Word performs within. That work is a continual one, and it is also a living, or vibrant, work.

EFFECTUALLY WORKETH. This expression is particularly significant in view of the ineffective work that much of the church experiences. This is a life-changing work, where transformation and re-creation are realized. Much of the modern emphasis on discipline and empty routine is nothing more than an admission that the message being declared has no real power, or effectiveness. Powerless messages reply on flesh, not God.

The word "*effectual*" **means** efficient, fervent, or actively at work. This work does not end with conversion, or coming into Christ. That is why the text says "*worketh,*" or works (IS working, as compared with "worked"). This "working" is why Jesus said to His disciples, "*Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you*" (John 15:3). It is why the Colossians were told the Word was "*bringing forth fruit*" in them (Col 1:6). Not only does the Word of God probe the thoughts and intents of the heart, distinguishing between the soul and the spirit (Heb 4:12), it works **EFFECTIVELY** within the believer. That effectiveness relates to the will of God being worked out in the person who receives the Word.

Everyone who is in Christ has realized this effective working. The new birth itself is traced back to the proficient working of God's word. "*Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures*" (James 1:18). "*Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever*" (1 Pet 1:23). Regeneration is our initial personal proof that the Gospel is "*the power of God unto salvation*" (Rom 1:16). By delving into the thoughts and intentions of the heart, the Word brought us to see our need of salvation, call out for it, and heartily obey the Gospel.

That marvelous working, however, does not end there. Elsewhere, this continual working is described as the Word of Christ **dwelling in us richly**. The word "*richly*" **means** copiously, or abundantly. This does not speak of a meager Christian existence, where one is just bearly keeping alive spiritually. Although that condition is common, it is altogether unacceptable. Such a state confirms that the Spirit has been quenched.

When the Word dwells abundantly within us, it **produces spiritual expressions**. "*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him*" (Col 3:16-

17). Ponder the magnitude of those results. Wisdom, or the ability to handle the Word of God and the challenges of life to God's glory. The truth is articulated to the benefit of our brethren in teaching and admonition-moving people to make advancement in their life toward the Lord. Songs erupt by the individual, flowing out from grace that is saturating the heart. All things, whether words or deeds, are done to honor the Lord who bought us, and are wrapped in thanksgiving to God through Christ.

Why can such glorious expressions be found within us? Can they be produced by the hammer of the Law, or motivational speeches? Indeed not! This is the kind of thing that happens when the Word of God is received as HIS Word, and not the word of men. It is not received as a word from one of OUR preachers, or a word that fits in well with what we already believe. When you receive the Word as the Word of God, it is received as though you heard it right out of heaven. You sense you are responsible to the One who originated it, and are eager to allow it the place of prominence in your heart and thoughts.

ONLY IN THOSE WHO BELIEVE. As with all other Divine benefits, the Word has no power for the individual until it is believed. The "*effectual working*" is realized ONLY "*in you that believe,*" or "**ARE believing.**" From another view, **if we believe and embrace the Word of God, it will effectively work in us.** It is not possible for the Word to have no effect upon us if we believe it. This is not mere intellectual assent. It involves the heart more than the mind. Believing the Word means we do not question it, but take hold of it with both hands. We eagerly run to do what it commands, and rejoice at the good news that it brings. Such a response will find the believer experiencing the effective work of God Himself.

NOT AS THE WORD OF MEN, BUT THE WORD OF GOD

"^{13b} . . . *ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God.*" Receiving the Word of God differs from the reception of all other messages. Some people are simply gullible. They receive whatever is told them because of their fundamental disinterest in what is being affirmed. Thus it was said of the Galatians, "*I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ*" (Gal 1:6-7). The message they had received "*betwicked*" them" (Gal 3:1) and caused them to fall from grace (Gal 5:4). The Galatians had listened as men hearing men. They made no association of the message to which they were subjected with the Living God. The Thessalonians did not hear the Gospel in that manner. They made a connection of the message with the One who inspired it, and provided a minister through whom it was declared (1 Cor 3:5).

THE WORD OF MEN. Precisely what is "*the word of men?*" It is not simply a word that men speak, as compared to a word angels verbalize (Gal 1:8; Heb 2:2). The "*word of men*" is a message that men have created. It is a communication that was conceived in the mind of men. It reflects a purely human perspective. It does not come from God, yet is presented as though it had something to do with God and spiritual life. Those who bring such a word are described as those whom God "*sent not*" (Jer 14:14). They speak as though they were God's representatives, yet God says of them, "*I sent them not*" (Jer 14:15). Such speakers cannot benefit the people of God, as confirmed by God's word to Jeremiah. "*I sent them not, nor commanded them: therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the LORD*" (Jer 23:32). Their words were of human origin, and therefore had no Divine power.

But our text means even more than this. The Thessalonians did not hear the message of Paul as they heard other men. They did not listen to him as they would to some Grecian philosopher or orator. They listened to Paul like the household of Cornelius listened to Peter: "*Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God*" (Acts 10:33). They did not pay attention to the preaching of the Gospel like Athenians and foreigners who "*spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing*" (Acts 17:21). They did not hear Paul as an educated or learned man. They did not listen to him because of his background, or because he was famous.

Because of the message Paul declared, and his obvious commitment to the Lord, the Thessalonians knew this was no ordinary word. He did not come with psychological observations, historical analyses, or etymological expertise-things that people imagine distinguish some speakers from others. The real distinction is the MESSAGE.

THE WORD OF GOD. The Word of God, and particularly the Gospel of Christ, bears the mark of Divinity. It cannot be heard without becoming acutely aware of God Himself. It is His message, and declares His accomplishments. The Word of God is harmonious with His nature, or character. He declares matters He alone would say and do. When a person hears the truth of the Gospel preached, he comes away thinking primarily of the message, not the messenger. Such are moved to obedience because of the message. They are willing to endure affliction to embrace what they have heard, because they sense it has come from God Himself. Mind you, the Word is from God, whether the people know it or not. Yet, when it is perceived as coming from God, it becomes powerful in the hearer.

I should add that the word Paul preached was primarily a **MESSAGE**, not a discipline of life, or a religious procedure. He was not hawking, or peddling, a lifeless religious system. The "*Word of God*" is not a mere interpretation of life. In the case of the Gospel, it is not an analysis of how men ought to live, or how they can manage their circumstances and be successful. Rather, this is a Word that announces Divine provision, or "*the wonderful works of God*" (Acts 2:11). It declares a blessing that is not only sorely required, but cannot be realized through human energy alone.

Countless congregations are filled with people who have never made an association between the Word and the God who gave it. Whether it is read or preached, it lacks power for them because it is not received "*as the Word of God*." This condition accounts for the general lack of interest in the declaration of the Scriptures. It is why people are satisfied with secondary sources, like Quarterlies, etc. It is not that such resources are, of themselves, wrong. Rather, they are not sufficient. When people hear the Word as it is, in truth, the Word of God, they will be more demanding to hear it, and will more faithfully respond to it.

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LESSON #11

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

" 2:14 *For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews:* ¹⁵ *Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men:* ¹⁶ *Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.*" ^{KJV} (1 Thessalonians 2:14-16)

INTRODUCTION

There is a certain spirit in the text of Scripture—a character that cannot be found in any other literature or writing. In the world, writers reflect their private perspective, generally promoting their own interests. Words are carefully chosen to promote a private agenda or idea. When dealing with matters pertaining to this world, there is nothing particularly wrong about this. However, when it comes to the salvation of God, such private agendas and views are completely out of order. We are reminded that "*no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation,*" and "*prophecy never had its origin in the will of man*" ^{NIV} (2 Pet 1:20-21). The text before us demonstrates this reality. The Apostle, moved along by the Holy Spirit, speaks of conditions from the heavenly perspective. There is no "varnish" on his words, but they are straightforward and to the point. Men and circumstances are viewed from a heavenly perspective, with no regard for how it will be viewed by critics. This will particularly be seen in the reference to the Jews. What is here affirmed contradicts many assessments of the death of Christ. The powerful effects of the Gospel are also affirmed to include the aggressive opposition of those with whom the saved were formerly identified. While these circumstances may vary slightly among us, all believers recognize their reality.

FOLLOWERS OPPOSED BY THEIR OWN PEOPLE

" 2:14 *For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews.*" Remember, this entire chapter is devoted to an assessment of the Thessalonian's conversion. An extensive commentary like this confirms that more happened in our salvation than can be seen from a cursory, or surface, view. Often, words like "evangelism," "missions," "soul-winning," etc., (none of which are found in Scripture) focus undue attention upon approaches, neglecting the marvelous results of Divine working. Those addicted to the use of such language rarely speak of what was actually involved in the conversion of the people.

"**FOLLOWERS.**" The Thessalonian believers "*became followers.*" Most other versions use the word "*imitators.*" Some more liberal translations use the expressions "*took as your examples*" ^{BEBE} and "*modeled yourselves after.*" ^{NJB} The concept of "*followers*" presumes the faith-life has been lived out before the people. They have seen faith in action, and joined others in the journey to glory. It reflects the reasoning of Moses to Hobab, son of his father-in-law: "*come thou with us, and we will do thee good . . . if thou go with us, yea, it shall be, that what goodness the LORD shall do unto us, the same will we do unto thee*" (Num 10:29-32). Earlier in this book, Paul reminded the Thessalonians they had become followers of himself, Silas, and Timothy (1:6). There is a certain distinction in true believers that draws upon the hearts of those who believe the Gospel. It calls upon them to be "*followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises*" (Heb 6:12). This perspective is rarely seen in an institutional setting, where the observance of faith is supplanted by human agendas.

The idea of a "*follower*" is seen in several different expressions of Scripture. One is being "*an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity*" (1 Tim 4:12). Another is pursuing "*righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart*" (2 Tim 2:22). Just as with the Thessalonians, there came a point in time when those in Christ started going the same direction as other believers. It was a time when their view became harmonious with those in Christ Jesus. Then, they began making progress toward the mark for the prize of the high calling in Christ (Phil 3:14).

CHURCHES OF GOD IN JUDAEA. Nothing in the text suggests the congregations in Judaea (well over 1,000 miles away) were known to the Thessalonians, and that is not the point of the text. The churches in Judaea were among the first to believe the Gospel (Acts 1:8; 8:1). Now, about seventeen years later, the Thessalonians believed the Gospel and realized the same results as brethren in far-removed Judaea. Those in Judaea were Jews, and those in Thessalonica were Gentiles, but faith put them on the same road, causing them to have the same experiences. God took them both "*out*" of a fleshly society for His own name (Acts 15:18). Faith produces a unity among those possessing it (Eph 4:13). That unity comes because believers are on the same highway (Isa 35:8), desire the same country (Heb 11:16), and are looking to the same Lord (Heb 12:1-2). It only remains for such brethren to meet face to face for this to be confirmed to their hearts. "*The churches of God in Judaea*" were **God's people** in Judaea—those for whom

Jesus was interceding and in whom the Holy Spirit was working. They were the ones in that area whose names were written in heaven.

SUFFERING FROM YOUR OWN COUNTRYMEN. As soon as the Thessalonians believed, opposition arose from fellow-citizens. In particular, the opposition came from Jews who met in a local synagogue (Acts 17:1-8). These Jews "*rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city*" ^{NIV} (Acts 17:5-8). All of this did not happen because the Thessalonian believers had caused some form of social disruption, fomented an insurrection against the government, or ceased to function as good and profitable citizens. Neither, indeed, were oppressors imported from some other area to wreak havoc against these new believers. The opposition came from their "*own countrymen*" because they had chosen to believe and embrace the Gospel. Their opponents sensed the Gospel had put the people at a variance with this world, and particularly with powerless religious systems. The Thessalonian Jews knew there was a vast difference between the Gospel embraced by some of their countrymen, and their lifeless and ritualistic religion.

EVEN AS THEY THE JEWS. In the beginning of the church, believers were opposed by their own countrymen, or people. The Apostles were vigorously opposed by the Jews when the numbers of believers began to swell (Acts 4:1-7). Paul may have reference to his own persecution of believers who were scattered from Jerusalem into Judaea and Samaria (Acts 8:1-4; 9:31). The point is, **faith produces similar experiences in those who have it.** When you are suffering, the knowledge of this will bring consolation to your heart (1 Pet 5:9).

THE AGGRESSIVENESS OF RELIGIOUS OPPOSITION

" ¹⁵ *Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men.* " These are unusually strong words, and have been energetically opposed by many. I have more than once heard unlearned people say the Jews did not kill Jesus. In fact, it has become fashionable to make such foolish assertions. The Holy Spirit, however, has no regard for fleshly sympathies. He will move Paul to speak truthfully about his own people, yet not be hopeless about their future.

THEY KILLED THE LORD JESUS. On the surface, this may appear to contradict Christ's own words. "*I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself*" (John 10:17-18). Based upon that, men might be tempted to think Jesus was not killed, or murdered. That, however, is not the meaning of His word. Jesus meant no man could have taken His life if He did not submit to die. To put it another way, His death was the result of His decision, not that of the people. However, they also were responsible for what they did. "*They killed the Lord Jesus.*" On the day of Pentecost Peter told the Jews, "*ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain*" (Acts 2:23). Later he told another crowd they had "*killed the Prince of life*" (Acts 3:15). He again told the Jews they had "*crucified*" Jesus Christ of Nazareth (Acts 4:10). Standing before the Jewish council, Stephen charged them with being "*the betrayers and murderers*" of "*the Just One*" (Acts 7:52). Let there be no doubt about the Jew's involvement in Christ's death. Zechariah foretold the death of Christ when he said the Jews would eventually "*look upon Him whom THEY have pierced*" (Zech 12:10). The irony of the situation is that Jesus actually came to **them**- "*His own, and His own received them not*" (John 1:11). Although they did not personally nail Christ's hands and feet to the cross (Psa 12:10), hoist him into the air, and pull His life from Him, they were guilty of His death. They were guilty because they rejected Him, opposed Him, and delivered Him to Pilate, when Pilate "*was determined to let Him go*" (Acts 3:13). "*The people of Israel*" gathered together "*against*" Christ (Acts 4:27). We should also add, that to fail to duly remember Jesus at His table is to also be "*guilty of the body and blood of the Lord*" (1 Cor 11:27) - even though, like the Jews, it is not done directly.

THEY KILLED THEIR OWN PROPHETS. There is nothing worse than corrupt religion. Not only did it move the Jews to kill their own Messiah, they also killed "*their own prophets*," sent to warn them, and turn them from their evil ways. Jesus told the Pharisees they were "*the children of them which killed the prophets*" (Matt 23:31). Weeping over Jerusalem, Jesus said, "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee*" (Matt 23:37). Stephen told the council who determined he should be stoned, "*Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One*" (Acts 7:52). Through Jeremiah, God told Israel, "*your own sword hath devoured your prophets, like a destroying lion*" (Jer 2:30). Those who are not serious about their religion must take into account what corrupt religion can drive a person to do. To this very day, vigorous opponents of true Gospel preachers come from Christian circles. Many of us have suffered at the hands of "*our own countrymen!*"

THEY HAVE PERSECUTED US. Not content to have killed the prophets, and the Lord Jesus Himself, the Jews militantly opposed Paul, hounding and persecuting him wherever he went. Early in his ministry, the Jews in Damascus *"took counsel to kill him"* (Acts 9:23-24). In Antioch of Pisidia the Jews *"raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts"* (Acts 13:50). They persecuted him in Iconium (Acts 14:1-4), stoned him in Lystra (Acts 14:19), and beat him with *"forty stripes save one"* no less than five times (2 Cor 11:25). They also opposed him in Corinth (Acts 18:12-18). Once certain of the Jews banded together *"and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul"* (Acts 23:12).

When the Gospel is believed, people are endeared to others who have believed the Gospel. They are drawn to kindred spirits, and noted for their love of them (John 13:35). When, however, the Gospel is NOT believed, yet religiosity is retained, animosity and opposition result. This accounts for the hostilities that exist in the Christian community-hostilities that bring hurt to the saints of God. The real circumstance is that some have believed and some have not. Faith **never** moves one to oppose Jesus or those in Him.

THEY ARE CONTRARY TO ALL MEN. This expression means the unbelieving Jews did not confine their opposition to Paul. They challenged anyone and everyone who preached the Gospel. In this, they *"please not God,"* or *"displease God."*^{NIV} All who are aggressive against believers, for whatever reason, are displeasing God and incurring His wrath. Eventually, God will come to the defense of His people—either here or there!

FILLING UP SINS AND THE WRATH OF GOD

¹⁶ *Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins always: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.* This is a continuation of the thought expressed in verse fifteen. Other versions read, *"They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men, hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles,"*^{NASB} and *"They displease God and are hostile to all men in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles."*^{NIV}

FORBIDDING. The idea is that, in being hostile against Gospel proclaimers, they were **hindering** the spread of the Gospel to the Gentiles, for which purpose Paul had been called into the apostleship (Acts 9:15). The Jews did not actually stop the Word from getting to the Gentiles, although that was their intention. The Thessalonians received the Gospel, even though the Jews vigorously sought to stop them from doing so. The fact that this happened, however, did not relieve the Jews of the responsibility for trying to stop the Gospel from reaching the Gentiles. Their sin is credited to them just as though it had been 100% effective. Whether it is for good or for evil, what men INTEND to do, is what will be credited to them. In the case of good, for example, those who have little, yet give beyond their means, will be credited for giving much-as was the case with the widow in the Temple, and the churches in Macedonia (Lk 21:3; 2 Cor 8:1-3). The same is true of evil intentions.

THAT THEY MIGHT BE SAVED. Men do not stumble into salvation. The Gospel is spoken to them by *"ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?"* (1 Cor 3:5). Those who make it more difficult for this message to be preached, whether by outright persecution, disparaging words, or discouraging conduct, are duly noted by God, and will receive their just dues. After aggressively persecuting the church, Paul himself was shown *"how great things he must suffer for"* Jesus' sake (Acts 9:16).

This provides a more thorough view of the nature of the day of judgment. Those who have thrown up roadblocks to hinder godly men and women from speaking will be judged as though they had stopped the preaching of the Gospel altogether, snatching from men the opportunity of being *"saved."* This is a most arresting consideration.

FILL UP THEIR SIN ALWAYS. There are technical details in the Kingdom of God that we must see. Sin, for example, accrues judgment, piling up one after another. All sin is not the same, and one sin is not the same as ten or twenty. In fact, the responsibility for sin—especially hindering the Gospel—multiplies exponentially—like the doubling of interest every day. Other versions read, *"Thus they have constantly been filling up the measure of their sins,"*^{NRSV} and, *"In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit."*^{NIV} There comes a time when the sin of men reaches a point where God must judge them—here and now. That is why God did not judge the Amorites until their sin had *"reached its full measure"* (Gen 15:16). Daniel also spoke of a time when *"the transgressors have run their course"* (Dan 8:23). This point was reached when God sent the flood—the cup of iniquity was full (Gen 6:6-7).

There is such a thing as *"storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God"*^{NASB} (Rom 2:5). James reminded sloppy Christians, *"You have heaped up treasure in the last days"* (James 5:3). Just as faithful believers lay up for themselves treasures in heaven, so their opponents treasure up wrath for themselves. In this day of religious gentility, this is rarely heard. Yet, it is a sobering reality.

WRATH IS COME UPON THEM. The words are so strong they cause the timorous to shrink back: "*for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost,*" ^{KJV} "*but God's wrath has overtaken them at last.*" ^{NRSV} Paul is not saying the fulness of Divine wrath had already come upon the Jews, for they were still energetically opposing them. He is, rather, foretelling their judgment, as Jesus did in the 24th chapter of Matthew. They had already gone too far, and it was only a matter of time until God would pour His wrath upon them. Approximately eighteen years later (70 AD), Jerusalem would be destroyed, and their house would be left desolate until they said, "*Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord*" (Matt 23:38-39). It is to be understood this judgment would not exclude those Jews who chose to believe the Gospel-that "*remnant*" that remained "*according to the election of grace*" (Rom 11:5).

Let every professed believer take care they are a source of encouragement and support for the preaching of the Gospel. Everyone either promotes or hinders that preaching. They either are a source of encouragement or discouragement to Kingdom laborers. Suffice it to say, those who extend themselves to strengthen the hands of those declaring the Gospel, will themselves be strengthened by God-sent laborers. The Thessalonians, and this Epistle to them, are proof of that reality.

LESSON #12

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

" ^{2:17} *But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire.* ¹⁸ *Therefore we wanted to come to you; even I, Paul, time and again; but Satan hindered us.* " ^{KJV} (1 Thessalonians 2:17-18)

INTRODUCTION

The Thessalonians had received the Gospel so eagerly they were willing to suffer the reprisals of their own countrymen. Their conversion was not attended with popularity. They could not boast of identity with a mega-church, recognized in the community. They had become followers of, what was considered, a small but growing sect. One place early believers were called "*the sect of the Nazarenes*" (Acts 24:5). Another place, it was called "*the way which they call heresy*" (Acts 24:14). Still another place, it was referred to as a "*sect. . . that is everywhere spoken against*" (Acts 28:22). All of these views were articulated well after the Thessalonians had believed the Gospel, turned from idols, and started serving God while waiting for His Son from heaven. They had NOT embraced a popular religion, but had risen above the desires of the flesh in their embrace of the truth. They set a noble example for succeeding generations. That is why Paul could speak so extensively about them abandoning idolatry, turning to serve God, and anxiously awaiting the return of His Son. Now, after an extensive review of the powerful effects of the Gospel upon them, Paul comments about his own desires. The spiritual nobility of the Thessalonians had endeared them to Paul. He is now compelled to share his deep desires with them, and how they had been thwarted. He too had suffered for righteousness' sake, being a "*companion in tribulation*" (Rev 1:9).

TAKEN AWAY, BUT NOT IN HEART

" ^{2:17a} *But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart . . .* " In Christ, there is a bond between the teacher and the ones taught, the leader and the ones led. Nothing is merely academic or formal. Salvation is an infinitely larger enterprise than merely learning some facts, or becoming acquainted with a movement. Professional religion has always been an enemy to spiritual progress. Careers, formalism, and institutionalism rob the soul, bringing no spiritual benefit to the people. Yet, to this day, such things dominate the Christian world.

TAKEN FROM YOU. This expression is unusually strong—one of violence. Other versions read, "*we were torn away from you,*" ^{NIV} "*we were made orphans by being separated from you,*" ^{NRSV} and "*we had been deprived of you.*" ^{NJB} **The expression denotes a mother, or nurse, being violently removed from her children—children who required her tender care.** Paul's removal from the Thessalonians was not voluntary, as it was at Caesarea (Acts 21:8) and Ephesus (Acts 20:31-38). Remember, because of the uproar that had been caused in the city, "*the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea*" (Acts 17:10). Even though they were linked with omnipotence, they were suddenly forced to be separated from the Thessalonians like parents are suddenly severed from their children by death.

Imagine the impact this must have had upon young believers! Yet, they were not totally dependent upon Paul and those with him, just as the Ethiopian eunuch was moved along without the benefit of the one who brought the Gospel to him (Acts 8:39). While this is not a consistent circumstance, it does serve to confirm that the growth of the saints depends more upon the Lord than upon kindred spirits. As this text will confirm, faith will sustain those who live by it. That is because the believer is personally related to the Jesus proclaimed in the Gospel, and sustained by the Holy Spirit who inspired its utterance and recording.

One also senses that the expression "*taken from you*" includes the idea of a Sovereign God—as though He was in the matter more than the enemies who threatened Paul and his co-laborers. From a higher vantage point, Paul, was moved along to another place where there were also hungry souls, waiting to hear the good news. We learn from this that the heavenly Kingdom does not depend upon a single group of people, nor is all grace focused upon them alone. The work of the Lord is infinitely larger than our own involvements.

A SHORT TIME. This is a phrase addressed to faith, for the time no doubt seemed long to the flesh. Whether he would be afforded the blessing of coming to them again in the body, or whether he would meet them "*in the air*" (4:17), it would only be a brief time—brief as compared with eternity, and "*short*" when laid along side the life of faith. The life of faith does not remove trouble, but it views it as "*short*," brief, and soon to be ended (1 Cor 7:29; Rev 12:12; Psa 37:10; Isa 10:25; 29:17; Hag 2:6; Heb 10:37). This is a perspective that can be enjoyed by all believers. It helps to alleviate the many sorrows that come to the saints, including separation from kindred spirits, persecution, and longing for the Lord's return. I cannot leave this point without observing that contemporary religion utterly fails to

promote this needful perspective. That deficiency has occasioned the fall of many.

IN PRESENCE, NOT IN HEART. Faith enables the relationships of the godly to continue, even though they are not attended by the bodily presence of the ones we love. Thus, Paul could say the Thessalonians were deprived of his presence, but not his "heart." Other versions read "not in spirit," ^{NASB} "not in thought," ^{NIV} and "never in affection." ^{NJB} This is much like an expression written to the Corinthians: "You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts" ^{NIV} (2 Cor 3:2). Again, Paul said to the Corinthians, "you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together" (2 Cor 7:3). This is another way of saying they had been knit together in Jesus Christ-made ONE in Him. This unity is very close and remarkable. In the Lord we become "members one of another" (Rom 12:5; Eph 4:25). That relationship is not severed or rendered ineffective by physical separation!

But there is something else here that is noteworthy. Because believers are joined in heart, they can actually benefit from one another, even though they are deprived of a face-to-face relationship. Thus, the Corinthians could gather together with Paul's "spirit," even though he was not bodily with them (1 Cor 5:4). As with the Colossians, it is possible to be "absent in the flesh," yet "with you in the spirit" (Col 2:5). The extent of this experience cannot be fully known this side of glory. We have, however, been called into the fellowship of all "whose names are written in heaven," including "the spirits of just men made perfect" (Heb 12:23). There are no doubt untapped benefits for us in this remarkable relationship.

EAGERLY ENDEAVORING TO SEE THEIR FACE

" ^{17b} . . . *endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire.*" While it is possible to benefit from one another in separation, yet there are advantages that can be realized only in being together. The grace of God can be more thoroughly ministered in face-to-face relationships, even though it is not confined to them. What Paul is expressing is more than mere sentimentality. This is not an emotional outburst, but the articulation of his heart. It is obvious that he had gained spiritual advantages from the receptivity of the Thessalonians. How well this experience was articulated to the Romans: "that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me" (Rom 1:12). This was not a "we-belong-to-the-same-church" attitude—a sort of club or community spirit. Other versions accentuate the strength of this desire. "All the more eager with great desire to see your face," ^{NASB} "our intense longing we made every effort to see you," ^{NIV} and "great eagerness to see you face to face." ^{NRSV} Being ripped from their presence by adversity, the heart of Paul had not cooled toward the Thessalonians.

ENDEAVORED. The mutual ministries of the brethren cement them together. As it is written, "the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love" ^{NKJV} (Eph 4:16). Faith causes the saved to be mutually dependent upon one another. When this is realized, there is a strong desire for the fellowship of those aligned with Jesus. Thus Paul says he "endeavored" to be with the Thessalonians. The word "endeavor" means to make every effort, do your best, give diligence, try hard to, and exert one's self. It involves intense personal initiative, looking for any opportunity, and being diligent about it.

Some believers, because of erroneous teaching, approach life from a fatalistic point of view. They do not extend themselves for any preferences or desire. They feel as though "whatever will be will be," and thus they disengage their hearts and minds from any resolves or purpose. But this was NOT the case with Jesus or the Apostles. When it came time for the Lord Jesus to lay down His life, He "steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem" (Lk 9:51). Paul was determined to preach the Gospel to those in Rome "as much as is in me" (Rom 1:15). In old time, Solomon "**determined to build an house for the name of the LORD**" (2 Chron 2:1). Early believers "**determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea**" (Acts 11:29). On one occasion, when he was going to Jerusalem for the day of Pentecost, Paul "**determined to sail by Ephesus, because he would not spend the time in Asia**" (Acts 20:16).

The point to be seen in all of this is that being directed by the Lord does not mean we disengage our minds, or that we make no resolves. Many believers deprive themselves of great spiritual advantages simply because they never make solid determinations. They do not extend themselves to obtain advantages or to be involved in the work of the Lord. Those who would be blessed must be "vigilant" and alert, looking for opportunities to fulfill their desires. This is involved in "watching unto prayer" (1 Pet 4:7). This attitude is expressed very well in Colossians 4:2. "**Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving.**" One of the disadvantages of being slothful, sluggardly, and haphazard in ones spiritual life is that desires and opportunities are missed. They pass by men without them ever realizing they were there. Paul was eager to see the Thessalonians, being constantly alert to any

opportunity that would afford him that blessing.

TO SEE YOUR FACE. What blessings are afforded by the sight of holy brethren! Should such an occasion take place, the affirmation of Psalm 119:74 is fulfilled. *"They that fear thee will be glad when they see me; because I have hoped in thy word."* In their presence, Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus *"refreshed"* the spirit of Paul and the church in Corinth (1 Cor 16:18). The spirit of Titus was *"refreshed"* when he saw the growing Corinthian brethren (2 Cor 7:13). Paul said Onesiphorous had frequently *"refreshed"* his spirit (2 Tim 1:16). Philemon was noted for *"refreshing"* the hearts of the saints (Phile 7). All of these references, and more, speak of face-to-face meetings.

The desire of Paul to see the Thessalonians in person was so strong that he said later, *"Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face."* He had many things to say to them that were withheld because of his swift and unplanned departure. He earnestly wanted to supply what was lacking in their faith (3:10). He knew they were suffering, and there were great Kingdom realities that could help them in their trial. How pleasant it would be to see a revival of this kind of eager and diligent spirit! We would soon see such marvelous growth in the saints of God as would cause joyful shouting and more firm resolves to please God.

WE WANTED TO, BUT SATAN HINDERED US

"¹⁷ Therefore we wanted to come to you; even I, Paul, time and again; but Satan hindered us." It is the tendency of men to either complicate or over simplify life in Christ Jesus. Some have chosen to present Satan as utterly powerless-one who can have no effect upon us at all. While he is a defeated foe, his defeat does not mean he can cause us no trouble. Rather, it means that we can *"overcome"* him. As it is written, *"because ye have overcome the wicked one"* (1 John 2:13-14). Overcoming involves confrontation! It includes resisting the devil (1 Pet 5:8; James 4:7), and standing against his *"wiles"* (Eph 6:11). With zeal, we must avoid simplistic views of our adversary that paint him as harmless and powerless. Many simple souls have gone down in defeat because they underestimated the foe.

Note this text, for it is pregnant with instruction. Here was the Apostle who *"labored more abundantly than they all"* (1 Cor 15:10). With unrelenting fervor, he was pressing *"toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus"* (Phil 3:14). He confessed he was *"able to do all things through Christ"* who strengthened him (Phil 4:13). Now he earnestly wants to see the Thessalonians. His objective is to benefit them in Christ, and to be strengthened by their mutual faith. *"Time and again"* he determines to go to them, looking for an opportunity to do so. His motives are pure. His objective is holy. Surely such a godly desire will be honored, and he will find himself with the Thessalonians.

Rather than the holy desire being fulfilled, Paul acknowledges *"Satan hindered us!"* Other versions read, *"Satan thwarted us,"* ^{NASB} *"Satan stopped us,"* ^{NIV} *"Satan blocked our way,"* ^{NRSV} *"Satan kept us from coming,"* ^{BBE} and *"Satan prevented us."* ^{NLT} Does your view of the Kingdom allow for such a confession? It is important to note that Satan did not hinder God, but Paul. He did not hinder the purpose of God, but Paul's desire. Satan is not making war with Jesus, but with those who *"keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ"* (Rev 12:17). We should not expect that war to be simplistic or without discouraging effects. The devil **can** *"hinder"* us, impeding the fulfillment of our spiritual desires.

When addressing the church at Smyrna, Jesus said *"the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days"* (Rev 2:10). Satan is NOT invincible or omnipotent, and he must obtain permission to harass the saints. But often he is granted that request, as with Job (Job 1:9-12) and Peter (Lk 22:31-32). When Paul was given a *"thorn in the flesh,"* it was assigned by God, but was *"the messenger of Satan"* (2 Cor 12:7). To overcome Satan, we must confront him, and *"wrestle"* against his hosts (Eph 6:12). Away with the notion that we can shout some trite saying at the devil, causing him to run in terror from us! If such a privilege was vouchsafed to us, would Paul not have used it in the matter of desiring to be with the Thessalonians?

Satan's hindrances were accomplished through his people-the tares, who are called the *"children of the wicked one"* (Matt 13:38). He does not always use a blasting wind, as he did against the children of Job (Job 1:19), or grievous boils as he did with Job himself (Job 2:7). In the case of Paul, he also used unbelieving Jews, who laid in wait for him (Acts 20:3). He also used Alexander the coppersmith, who did much evil to Paul (2 Tim 4:14). There were three shipwrecks (2 Cor 11:25), detainment in prison (Acts 16:23), and the idolaters of Ephesus (Acts 19:24-35). From the higher point of view, the Lord was moving Paul along to other appointed places. However, from the experiential point of view, his purposes were hindered by Satan. It was much like the experience of Joseph. He confronted the animosity of his brothers, who sold him into slavery. Yet, God used what was intended for evil to bring about good (Gen 50:20). Thus, Satan is seen as hindering men from doing what they will. However, the Almighty God hinders Satan from doing

all that he wills.

The thing to learn from section is to avoid views of the Kingdom that will yield unfavorable results. Do not think that because you desire to do good, all will go well with you. Do not imagine that Satan will back away from you if you intend, as it were, to go to Thessalonica! If Satan could hinder Paul "*time and again*," he can surely hinder you. However, his hindrance will not be the last word! It may be grievous, and even life-threatening! You may be forced, against your will, to leave the place you prefer to be-like Paul was forced to leave Thessalonica. But you must not allow that to dampen your spirit! If you are hindered, determine again! If you are thwarted in your desire, still seek an opportunity to fulfill it! Embrace the "*time and again*" principle! Is it not written, "*for though a righteous man falls seven times, **he rises again***"^{NIV} (Prov 24:16). Let that be YOU!

LESSON #13

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

"^{2:19} *For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?*"²⁰ *For ye are our glory and joy.*"^{KJV} (1 Thessalonians 2:19-20)

INTRODUCTION

In Christ Jesus, what is the relationship between the teacher and the taught, the preacher and the believer, the one who brings the Gospel and the one who receives it. Viewing the average church, one might imagine it was a professional relationship, or maybe even one of casual friendship. Our text presents quite another picture, one that is harmonious with the nature of salvation. Those who preach the Gospel are called "*ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man*" (1 Cor 3:5). This does not allow for an unjust veneration of such individuals. Rather, they are to be seen as a Divinely appointed means of inducing faith in men and women. Too, those who preach the Gospel are to have a godly view of those to whom they declare that Gospel. Everything is seen from a heavenly perspective, with eternal investments considered. All of this is confirmed in Paul's lengthy recollection of his providential ministry among the Thessalonians. He does not view them after the flesh, but in the Spirit. Their value is seen in the blazing light of the Gospel of Christ. They had responded to an "*everlasting Gospel*" in a manner that brought glory to God and honor to Jesus. They did not allow tumultuous circumstances to turn them from the work of faith. When dishonorable people were present during the hearing of the Gospel, they did not conclude it was a shameful message, but took hold of it with zeal. When those who preached the Gospel were forced out of town by the Jews and town officials, they maintained their faith, refusing to allow that hardship to turn them from the salvation of God.

OUR HOPE, JOY, AND CROWN OF REJOICING

"^{2:19a} *For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? . . .*" This is an exceedingly powerful expression, and as rare as it is powerful! There is an objective to preaching the Gospel of Christ. It is not a mere career, but an investment in eternity. It is a fulfilling ministry that looks to the future with joyful anticipation. Salvation is "*eternal*" (Heb 5:9), and thus brings expectations that reach beyond this present time and this present evil world.

OUR HOPE. Here, the word "*hope*" is used differently than elsewhere. The "*one hope*" (Eph 4:4), common to all believers, is a foundational one-an "*anchor of the soul*" (Heb 6:19). It is the "*hope*" by which we "*are saved*" (Rom 8:24,25), and for which we were begotten by God (1 Pet 1:3). That "*one hope*" is embodied in a Person, the Lord Jesus Christ, who "*is our Hope*" (1 Tim 1:1). However, this is not the sense of "*hope*" in our text. Even though it is taken from the same original word, it is used in a different sense. This is a subsidiary hope-a sort of branch of the "*one hope*." It depends upon the hope by which we are saved, which is an anchor of the soul, but it is different. Here, the converts themselves are the objects of "*our hope*." The idea is that Paul had earnest expectations for the Thessalonians. Those expectations were related to the Lord's appearing, yet his soul was not anchored to them. His thoughts concerning the Thessalonians were not limited to this world and time. For him, it was not enough that they had come into Christ-that they had embraced the Gospel. Their new birth was not the end of the matter, but the means to an appointed end.

Paul expressed a similar thought to the Corinthians. "*And our hope of you is steadfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation*" (2 Cor 1:7). While not precisely the same, it confirms that a true minister of the Gospel has prolonged desires for those who have received Christ. While we long for the lost to be found, and the alienated to be reconciled, our desires do not stop there. Those who would leave us satisfied when people are "*added to the church*," are not our friends.

OUR JOY. It is true that "*joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance*" (Lk 15:7). It is also true that Jesus portrayed Himself as a shepherd who found a straying sheep and "*rejoices more over that sheep than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray*" (Matt 18:13). However, we greatly err if we imagine this suggests there is no care for the "*flock of God*." In fact, the latter text is speaking about a sheep that strayed from the flock. The first text does not suggest there are people who "*need no repentance*." Christ's love and care for the church should confirm He has a profound interest in them.

This is the attitude expressed by Paul to the Thessalonians. He confesses to the delights that are related to life in Christ Jesus. They are not temporal pleasures or passing fancies. Again, this "*joy*" is not his primary joy, but one that springs from it. Foundationally, believers "*joy in God*" and "*rejoice in Christ Jesus*" (Rom 5:11; Phil 3:3). Related to that gladness is a joy having to do with the advancement and stability of those to whom we have ministered. Fallen

believers are no source of joy to those who have preached to them!

The believer who "*holds on his way*" (Job 17:9) is a source of joy to those who have ministered to him/her. As we will see, that joy is not limited to the here and now, although it is surely experienced "now." There is a coming joy for those who labor for Christ in which the faithful believers to whom they have ministered will play a vital part.

OUR CROWN OF REJOICING. Other versions read, "*crown of exultation*," ^{NASB} "*crown in which we will glory*," ^{NIV} "*crown of boasting*," ^{NSRV} and "*crown of honor*." ^{NJB} The Spirit speaks much to us about crowns. There is "*a crown of righteousness*" (2 Tim 4:8), "*a crown of life*" (James 1:12), and "*a crown of glory*" (1 Pet 5:4). There is also an "*incorruptible crown*" (1 Cor 9:25). All of these relate to the culmination of our race. They have to do with the conclusion of a race in which we have competed "*according to the rules*" (2 Tim 2:5). The crown is associated with a reward (Rev 22:12), the praise of God (1 Cor 4:5), and ultimate triumph (2 Cor 2:14). It is an "end-of-the-race" view, so necessary to completing our course with patience. Labor without a crown has no attraction. A race without a crown does not draw upon the hearts of the elect. A "*crown*," however, is an exceedingly strong incentive.

On the surface, it may appear as though Paul's expression contradicts his own exhortation: "*Therefore let no one boast in men*" (1 Cor 3:21). But this is not the case. The boasting, or glorying, that is forbidden is one that places confidence in the subject of boasting. This is not what Paul is doing in the case of the Thessalonians. Rather, he is perceiving the wonderful work of God in the Thessalonians, rejoicing in them as does the Lord (Zeph 3:17).

IN THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST AT HIS COMING

" ^{19b} . . . *Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?*" This is a revelation of the perspective of faith—a perspective that does not allow for judgment "*according to appearance*" (John 7:24). Faith stretches forward to the coming of Christ, and views the revelation that will attend His coming as preeminent. It is not enough to be found faithful today. The ultimate test is not the circumstances that attend life in the body. Rather, it is how men will appear "*in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming*." It is unfortunate that many believers rarely, if ever, hear of this perspective. The state of all men when Jesus comes will determine their eternal destiny. Then, there will be **no** rejoicing in those whose faith is flawed, who ceased to run the race set before them, or who were worn out by trials and difficulties. If those to whom we have ministered fail to pass the test of Jesus' judgment, we will "*suffer loss*" (1 Cor 3:15). In one sense, it is possible for our labors to be in vain. Thus it is written, "*Do all things without murmurings and disputings: that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither labored in vain*" (Phil 2:14-16). This was the very point that troubled Paul concerning the Galatians. "*I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain*" (Gal 4:11).

IN THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST. While there is a sense in which we are currently in Christ's presence (Psa 100:2), that is not the point of this text. We have, indeed, been called into His blessed fellowship (1 Cor 1:9), and enjoy His indwelling (Col 1:27). All of this, however, is by faith, and is only realized to the degree that we believe.

There is coming a time when "*we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ*" (Rom 14:10). That is the "*presence*" of which our text speaks. It is the ultimate confrontation, and no person is excluded from the appointment to be there. What is more, everyone will be there simultaneously, even though a personal accounting will take place. That is precisely why Paul says the Thessalonians will be his hope, joy, and crown of rejoicing at that time. Then, the fruits of his labors will be seen and known. The effectiveness of his work will be shown to the assembled universe. The truth of the Gospel that he preached will be confirmed in its effects among those who believed.

Any work that does not stand up "*in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ*" is unworthy of any recognition in this world! If the work is not ultimately honored by Jesus, it will count for nothing. No church roll, sectarian recognition, or identity with a supposedly exclusive group can compensate for Divine displeasure "*in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ*." In my judgment, the preponderance of Christianity in our day does not even take this into account. Too much of what takes place in Jesus' name does not promote sensitivity to His presence now, or preparation for His full and unquestionable presence at the end of time.

AT HIS COMING. The Thessalonians have already been reminded they had turned from idols to serve the living God and "*wait for His Son from heaven*" (1:9-10). Now they are again confronted with the coming of the Lord. This is no strange view. The Spirit consistently moved holy men of God to associate successful labors with the Lord's coming. "*To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (1 Thess 3:3). "*And the very God of peace sanctify*

you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto **the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ**" (1 Thess 5:23). "Therefore judge nothing before the time, **until the Lord come**, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God" (1 Cor 4:5). "Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in **the day of Christ**, that I have not run in vain, neither labored in vain" (Phil 2:16). "And now, little children, abide in Him; that, **when He shall appear**, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him **at His coming**" (1 John 2:28). If, indeed, we are "waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 1:7), it will impact on the way we live. That is the time when Divine approval will be made known.

I often wonder how such a central consideration can be nearly totally omitted from the pulpit! Purported laborers for Christ can neither honor the Lord nor benefit the saints if they do not have the Lord's coming in view. The work that survives that appearing is good. Everything else will be bad. As far as the Thessalonians were concerned, Paul anticipated having his joy and reward enhanced by their revealed faithfulness in the Lord's presence when He comes. Let us be sure our presence then will also bring joy and reward to someone.

OUR GLORY AND OUR JOY

"²⁰ ***For ye are our glory and joy.***" The strength of this expression reveals the extent to which the Thessalonians were faithful. Ponder what a marvelous confession is made here. The taught were the teacher's "*glory and joy.*" That tells us Paul's labors were not mechanical-like carrying out a professional responsibility. It also unveils why "*the care of the churches*" was a daily burden for the Apostle to the Gentiles (2 Cor 11:28). Because they were presently bringing joy to his heart, Paul anticipated the greatness of the joy the Thessalonians would bring to him in the Lord's presence--when He comes.

Those who embrace the Gospel are the seal and proof of the validity of the ministry of those declaring that Gospel. What Paul's message produced in the believing Thessalonians proved its truth and worth.

OUR GLORY. This is the only place in all of the Bible where believers are said to be the "*glory*" of those bringing the Gospel to them. That certainly does not diminish the power of the expression. Rather, it reveals the marvelous advancement of the Thessalonians. There were those who gloried in the flesh of professed believers--exploiting them as though the people belonged to them (Gal 6:13). For such teachers, the people were just numbers, and a means of satisfying their own quest for prominence. Those teachers use "*feigned words*" to "*make merchandise*" of people (2 Pet 2:3). They have no real heart for the saints, and are not personally gratified by their advancement in the faith.

By being Paul's "*glory*," the steadfastness of the Thessalonians proved he had been sent to them by God. It confirmed the Gospel that he preached was from heaven. It verified that his motives were pure, and that he was not promoting himself. We know this is the case because the Thessalonians were good fruit, and good fruit can only come from a good tree (Matt 7:17-18). Ordinarily, men apply "*by their fruits ye shall know them*" only to false teachers. However, Jesus applied it to good teachers as well (Matt 7:16-20).

Where you find stable, consistent, and thoughtful believers, you have evidence they were exposed to sound doctrine. Where there is consistent shallowness, a lack of commitment, and general disinterest in the things of God, either the truth has not been heard, or it has been denied. The validity of truth is not measured by the number of those embracing it, but by their quality. The "*glory*" of a servant of God is not determined by the number of those following his preaching and teaching, but by the quality of those who embrace it. Just as man is the glory of God (1 Cor 11:7), so those who live out the doctrine they embrace are the glory of those who have declared it.

The current trend of ministers becoming immersed in the daily problems of the people may appear to be virtuous. It has certainly contributed to the popularity of many ministers. No such entanglements are ever emphasized in God's Word, and no minister of Scriptural record ever made reference to such involvements. The real minister of God brings people into a lively fellowship with both the Father and the Son (1 John 1:3). In that marvelous relationship, "*every man*" becomes wonderfully capable of bearing "*his own burden*" (Gal 6:5). While believers do assist one another, bearing one another's burdens (Gal 6:2), it is on a level above the flesh. There is an aspect of spiritual life where each soul must shoulder life, going to the Lord for mercy, and grace to help in the time of need (Heb 4:15-16). Where this does not occur, grace will eventually be frustrated. Where personal faith is exhibited in bearing the burdens of life, God is honored and glory brought to His ministering servants.

The Thessalonians were exemplary models of this circumstance. They had been deprived of the bodily presence of Paul, Silas, and Timothy. Yet, they continued steadfast in the faith, serving God and waiting for His Son from heaven.

OUR JOY. Although removed from the presence of the Thessalonians, the recollection of their faith and commitment brought joy to the Apostle. To him, they were like a refreshing drink of cool water in the midst of an arid

desert. In this we see that Paul and his fellow laborers were not only "*helpers of their joy*" (2 Cor 1:24), but the Thessalonians helped theirs as well. On one occasion, Paul spoke of being made joyful when he heard Titus was made joyful at beholding the advancement of the Corinthians (2 Cor 7:13). This is a joy that comes from the like-mindedness of kindred spirits (Phil 2:2). It produces an earnest longing to be with the individuals bringing such joy. It was said of the Philippians, "*Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved*" (Phil 4:1). May you also be a source of refreshing joy to those who have nurtured your soul.

LESSON #14

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

^{3:1-3} *Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone,² and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith,³ that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this.* " NKJV (1

Thessalonians 3:1-3)

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter Paul confirms his profound love for the Thessalonian saints. He does not love in word only, but "*in deed and in truth*" (1 John 3:18). In expressing his concern for the saints he speaks from a heavenly perspective. In the context of brotherly associations he mentions Timothy being a "*brother,*" "*fellow laborer,*" and "*minister of God.*" He refers to "*the Gospel of Christ,*" and the establishment and comfort of the people of God. He speaks of Divine appointments (v 2), and the role of affliction in spiritual life (v 3-4). The Apostle mentions a driving compulsion to know of the faith of the Thessalonians, and of the activity of the "*Tempter*" (v 5). He refers to the gladness he experienced when he heard of the faith and love of the Thessalonian brethren, and their steadfastness of faith in the midst of difficulties (v 6-7). Rather than associating life with his own comforts, he connects it with knowing the people of God are standing firm in the faith (v 8). There is mention of his joy before God (v 9), his persistent prayers for God to direct him to the Thessalonians (v 10), that God would cause great spiritual increase among them, and that they would be firmly established when Jesus comes (v12-13). This is the kind of expression that is provoked by true spiritual life. Compare this manner of speaking with modern Christianity, where there appears to be little genuine interest in the progress of the saints of God.

WE COULD NOT STAND IT ANY LONGER

" ^{3:1-2a} *Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone,² and sent Timothy . . .* " Faith does not dehumanize us. There remain deep longings that cannot be suppressed—feelings that move us to action. While faith and love do not cause us to be impetuous, they do work within us, constraining us to action. Other versions reflect this nature of Kingdom life. "*So when we could stand it no longer,*" ^{NIV} "*Wherefore, being no longer able to refrain ourselves,*" ^{DARBYS} "*At last our desire to have news of you was so strong that . . .*" ^{BBE}

NO LONGER ENDURE IT. It may appear on the surface that Paul is "*anxious,*" something that is to be strictly avoided (Phil 4:6). But this is not the case, for being anxious is self-centered, with no regard for the glory of God. The Apostle has a burning desire to know of the spiritual welfare of the Thessalonians, in whom he had invested himself. He had the same kind of driving compulsion expressed by Jeremiah. "*But His word was in my heart like a burning fire Shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, And I could not*" (Jer 20:9). The prophet's compulsion related to speaking the Word of God. The Apostle's constraint had to do with knowing of the fruit of speaking that Word. Both were the result of identity with God and His work. Both faith and love are compelling, moving the child of God to know of, and bring advantages to, the people of God.

Having been forced to leave Thessalonica because of the aggression of his enemies, Paul had not been able to forget those believers with whom he resided only briefly. He could not purge them from his mind, and thus was constrained to find out how they were progressing. He is assuring them that although they have not heard from him for a while, they have been on his mind. His faith and love would not allow him to forget them.

WE THOUGHT IT GOOD. Note, he does not say "I thought it good," but "*WE thought it good.*" This decision was made by several of the faithful. The assumed record of this decision is recorded in the seventeenth chapter of Acts. The decision was made almost immediately after they were forced to leave Thessalonica. "*And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go as it were to the sea [coast]: but Silas and Timotheus abode there still. And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens: and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed*" (Acts 17:14-15). The point to be seen here is that personal comforts and advantages were willingly forfeited in the interest of the greater work of God. This came as a result of thinking on the circumstances within the light of God's great salvation. What might not seem "*good*" in the flesh, appeared quite clearly to be proper and beneficial in the Spirit.

ALONE IN ATHENS. This is particularly noteworthy when you consider the compelling desire faith brings for spiritual fellowship. Early believers "*continued steadfastly in . . . fellowship*" (Acts 2:42). There is a profound longing for those of like precious faith in the deep resources of fellowship with Christ (Phil 1:8). Yet, in this instance,

Paul forfeits profitable fellowship in order that the Thessalonians might be given a greater advantage in their trials. In this, he had "*the mind of Christ*" (1 Cor 2:16), which he urged others to have also (Phil 2:5). Having the proper mind involves more than embracing the correct teaching. It also includes having the right spirit, or attitude.

It is not that there were a lot of brethren in Athens—in fact, it was dominated by idolatry and ungodly philosophers—a citadel of human wisdom. The city, we are told, was "*wholly given to idolatry*" (Acts 17:16). Paul had been forced out of Thessalonica, so could surely use some comfort and godly fellowship. However, because love "*seeketh not her own*" (1 Cor 13:5), and in keeping with the nature of the New Covenant, Paul esteemed "*others better than himself*" (Phil 2:3). While he remained in Athens, he was "*stirred*" within, or "*greatly distressed*"^{NIV} at the level of idolatry found in that ancient city. Agitated with the whole situation, he daily disputed in the synagogue of the Jews and the public marketplace (Acts 17:16-17). Ordinarily, he had kindred brethren with him, but this time he was "*alone in Athens*." we see the greatness of this Apostle in this circumstance.

SENT TIMOTHY. Instead of having the Thessalonians send a helper to him, Paul sent one to them. He did not send just anyone, like a professional person, or one with academic credentials. In fact, all we know about Timothy is that he was expert in the Word of God. He would probably not even be recognized by modern churches. But he could be trusted to lift up the saints, bringing them strength and joy. All of this was because he had distinguished himself as being "*genuinely concerned*" for the welfare of saints (Phil 2:20).

DESCRIPTION OF A TRUE MINISTER OF GOD

"^{2b} . . . *our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith.*" Jesus once said, "*Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you!*" (Lk 6:26). He was speaking, of course, of unsaved men, natural men, or men of this world. Such people "*hate*" those who are of Christ because of the sharp contrast they confirm exists between them and God (John 15:19). But there is a group of people in whose eyes we all do well to find favor. Our text provides an excellent example of a proper view of the people of God. Here is how Paul viewed Timothy.

OUR BROTHER. Here is one of the most tender and insightful views of a saint of God. It is not an institutional view, as though Paul was saying "He belongs to our group." Timothy was his brother because he was a child of God and a brother to Jesus. As members of Christ, we are also "*members of one another*" (Eph 4:25). This has nothing whatsoever to do with blood lines, for God's children are not born "*of blood nor of the will of the flesh*" (John 1:13). "*Our brother*" acknowledges Timothy is born of God and joined to Christ. It declares he possessed the same life Paul did, and was part of the family of God.

MINISTER OF GOD. This means "*servant*"^{RSV} of God, for a "*minister*" is one who serves, or provides the needs of others. In this case, a "*minister*" is someone who is serving God, carrying out His will among the sons of men, and meeting the spiritual needs of His people. In his ministry to the people of God, Timothy was accomplishing what God desired. God's revealed cause was furthered by what this young man was doing. There are many who wear the title "*minister*," who are **not** ministers of God! **God's ministers are people through whom He effectively works to establish His children and bring them home to glory.**

FELLOW LABORER. There have never been a lot of people in this category. Often Paul confessed to the fewness of such people (2 Tim 1:5; 4:10,16; Phil 2:20). One of the great sorrows that attend labors for the Lord is the relative fewness of kindred workers. A fellow laborer is more than someone who is working. It is one who is heartily and diligently working for the same God and in the same purpose. It is a person whose labors complement or enhance the labors of another. Timothy's work tended to advance people in the faith.

IN THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. The circumference within which Timothy labored was "*the Gospel of Christ*." That was his reference point and the area of his expertise. His proclamation concerned that Gospel, clarifying the message itself, and bringing the power of it to bear upon the lives of people. His labors were not in the field of economics, problem resolution, or numeric growth. Neither, indeed, did he operate under the delusion that the Gospel was only for the lost. He knew the Gospel was primarily for the saints, who derive the most from it. He knew it was God's "*power unto salvation*" from the beginning to the end (Rom 1:16). He could effectively bring the Gospel to bear upon the hearts of believers.

ESTABLISH YOU. The modern church is very defective in this area: **establishment**. To "*establish*" a person means to make them solid and immovable in the faith. Paul is not suggesting the Thessalonians were weak and vacillating. However, by its very nature, spiritual life must advance and move forward. This is owing to at least two factors. **First**, believers are being prepared for eternity by being changed from one stage of glory to another (2 Cor 3:18). This requires a stability that does not allow for retrogression, or falling back. **Second**, as believers move

steadily toward the promised land, their adversary the devil intensifies his efforts to turn them aside (2 Cor 11:3; 1 Pet 5:8-9). Because he uses subtlety and craftiness, it is imperative that the saints be strong in the faith. Being "*established*" in the faith accomplishes these objectives.

ENCOURAGE YOU. The KJV reads, "*to comfort you.*" The RSV reads, "*to exhort you.*" Encouragement, or comfort, involves consolation and making strong. It includes teaching and powerful admonition to move forward in the faith. Those who are suffering for righteousness sake are inspired by encouragement to bear their cross and advance to glory. Those who have become weak or discouraged and thus made strong. Their spirits are lifted so they see "*if God is for us, who can be against us*" (Rom 8:31). What a marvelous advantage to have brethren among us who can accomplish these necessities! Timothy was such a man.

CONCERNING YOUR FAITH. Other versions read, "*as to your faith,*" ^{NASB} "*in your faith,*" ^{NIV} and "*for the sake of your faith.*" ^{NRSV} If our faith is not strong, we are not strong! Our ability to "*stand*" is directly proportionate to the stability of our faith. Timothy's reliability was found in his commitment to strengthening the faith of God's people. Paul could send him to the Thessalonians, fully confident their faith would be made more firm through him.

A GODLY VIEW OF AFFLICTIONS

"³ . . . *that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this.*" The Thessalonians were suffering, and it was important that they **endure** these afflictions. One of the strongest tests of faith is the trial through which it leads. Believers must be strong and encouraged to pass these tests. That is why Timothy was sent.

SHAKEN BY THESE AFFLICTIONS. It is possible for the believer to be jarred loose from spiritual moorings. In affliction, God's design is to prove the strength of our faith and develop godly character. In the very same affliction, Satan attempts to sift out of us the good things we have received from God. This third verse explains more fully why Paul was sending Timothy to them. **It was to establish and comfort them in their faith so they would not be moved backward by their afflictions.** Other versions read, "*so that no man may be disturbed by these afflictions,*" ^{NASB} "*so that no one would be unsettled by these trials,*" ^{NIV} and "*so that no one would be shaken by these persecutions.*" ^{NRSV} The words "*afflictions*" and "*trials*" are more appropriate than "*persecutions*." Even though the Thessalonians were experiencing persecution, this is not the only form of trial or affliction. Often there are tests that do not involve other people, and siftings that are endured alone. Yet, all such trials have the ability to move us away from the Lord and commitment to Him if we are weak and doubting.

Think of the strength of the words "*moved,*" "*shaken,*" "*unsettled,*" and "*disturbed.*" They speak of agitation, turmoil, and trouble. It is when life itself becomes like a troubled sea that thrashes us about. One of the root meanings of the word "*shaken,*" or "*moved*" is deceived or deluded. The idea is that trouble can deceive us into thinking things are not well with us, or that faith cannot sustain us. It can tempt us to compromise our faith in an attempt to lessen the pressure that it has caused. When that occurs, we have been "*shaken*" by our afflictions- moved into an area of unsound thought and degenerative contemplation.

We are living in a time when this type of backward movement is alarmingly present in the contemporary church. Much of the purported counseling that so dominates the religious scene is a feeble attempt to correct "*shaken*" and "*unsettled*" lives. While the motives for such involvement may appear noble, it is not wise. **Unstable souls cannot be strengthened by merely speaking of their problems!** Paul did not send Timothy to the Thessalonians to discuss their difficulties with them, or gain a better understanding of their circumstances. He sent him to "*strengthen and encourage*" them.

Whether men can receive it or not, a strong faith and encouraged spirit do enable the believer to withstand testings. Strengthened and inspired believers will be helped through their trials by their faith. God Himself, working through their faith, will be with them. It is sad to acknowledge that this kind of faith is rarely evident in our time.

YOU YOURSELVES KNOW. There is a common knowledge possessed by those of "*common faith*" (Tit 1:4). Sometimes that knowledge gets pushed to the background of our thinking during the stresses of life. It is then that our "*pure minds*" must be "*stirred up*" (2 Pet 3:1), so we can adjust both the compass and telescope of life-the direction we are going and the vision we sustain. What word, therefore, will Paul give them concerning their trials?

APPOINTED TO THIS. Here is something resident in true teaching. **Our trials do not come by happenstance!** We are "*appointed*" to them! Other versions read "*destined for this,*" ^{NASB} "*destined for them,*" ^{NIV} and "*this is to be our lot.*" ^{RSV} There are two ways in which this is true. **First**, we are appointed to a life in this world that is attended by trouble, testing, and difficulty. In the world, we **will** have tribulation (John 16:33).

Second, specific trials are appointed to us. These are tailored for us personally, to try our faith and keep us humble. An example of such a trial is the "*thorn*" received by Paul (2 Cor 12:7-9).

In both the general and specific views, we will not be tested above our ability (1 Cor 10:13). In both, we are being "*counted worthy of the kingdom for which ye suffer*" (2 Thess 1:5). In both, "*weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning*" (Psa 30:5). One of the most significant advances one makes in the faith, is when a proper view of suffering is realized. Few things serve to sweeten the cup of life as this. When trials are seen as Divine appointments, designed to ready us for the realm where there will be no trials, a holy determination will grip the heart. In the strength of that determination we will confidently "*fight the good fight of faith, and lay hold on eternal life*" (1 Tim 6:12).

May you be given the grace to see the difficulties of your life through the eyes of faith. And, may each of us be instrumental in strengthening and encouraging one another for life.

LESSON #15

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

^{3:4-5} *For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know.* ⁵ *For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labor be in vain.*"

NKJV (1 Thessalonians 3:4-5)

INTRODUCTION

There is a spirit associated with Kingdom labors as well as work and responsibility. What is done is important, but so is the **manner** in which it is done. A stewardship from the Lord is to be handled with wisdom, insight, and keen interest. All of these qualities are seen in the book of First Thessalonians. Faith came to the Thessalonians because of Paul's faithfulness to his stewardship. That stewardship involved a continued concern for the spiritual welfare of these believers. The spirit of Kingdom labors is revealed in Paul's expression of that concern. Because of the times in which we live, it is important that this be comprehended. What is presently called "ministry" is more professional than spiritual. It is more associated with career development, economic advantage, and self-satisfaction than the advancement of the saints. In the wake of these purported "ministries" there is a wave of spiritual ignorance and weakness that is unparalleled. A lack of genuine concern for the saints of God is revealed by spiritual froth and carnal lightheartedness. The seemingly prospering churches of our day are actually more involved in social issues and community concerns than the building up of the saints. But there is not a single syllable in Scripture that supports such a thrust among the servants of God. The ministry of Moses, the prophets, John the Baptist, the Lord Jesus, and the Apostles were exclusively in things pertaining to God.

WHAT WE SAID WHEN WE WERE WITH YOU

"⁴*For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know.*" The idea expressed is that of repeatedly mentioning something. Other versions confirm this perspective: "*we kept telling you.*" ^{NASB,NIV} There is also a sense of warning in the words, alerting the people to something for which they must be prepared. Thus some versions read, "*we warned you.*" ^{NLT} As with the Ephesians, Paul had withheld nothing from the Thessalonian believers: "*I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you.*" (Acts 20:20). And again, "*For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God*" (Acts 20:27). He did not portray life in Christ as though it was the resolution to all human difficulty. Rather, as the true servant of God, the nature of spiritual life was opened to the Thessalonians, lest they should become confused by the experiences of life. Thus Paul, Silas, and Timothy, were not among the Thessalonians merely as friends, but as true ministers of God. They proclaimed and clarified the nature of life in Christ.

CONFUSED BY LIFE. Many contemporary believers have been thrown into consternation by the experiences of life, simply because they do not understand the manner of spiritual life. When they are opposed by the world and suffer hardship, they are unable to make any association of those occurrences with their faith, or with life in Christ Jesus. They tend to view their problems in the flesh instead of in the Spirit. Further, there remains enough flesh in every believer to actually encourage these grossly deficient and debilitating views. It is the obligation of all who labor in the vineyard of the Lord to teach people what this text affirms: "*we should suffer tribulation.*" The idea of "*should*" is not that it is an obligation that we suffer, but that we are "*going to suffer affliction.*" ^{NASB} It WILL happen! It only remains for us to know what form it will take. This is part of being in Christ Jesus - suffering affliction, or tribulation. Paul said **they repeatedly told the people this.**

ALL BELIEVERS INCLUDED. When Paul says "*we*" (i.e., we should suffer), he does not mean himself, Silas, and Timothy alone. He is not saying, "We told you we were going to suffer because of our preaching, and, as you can see, that is precisely what happened." Rather, he is using the word "*we*" in a family sense: i.e., *we believers*. We know this is the case because of the very next verse. He sent to find out about their faith-how they were holding up under their suffering.

SUFFERING TRIBULATION. Faith puts us at variance with the world. It moves the believer to live for another world. A different mind and heart are received, so that one sees things differently, has a different set of values, and has a different focus in life. Because of this Jesus said, "*In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world*" (John 16:33). This is because the world actually hates believers (John 15:19). They do not always know precisely why they hate them, and thus are clumsy in stating their reasons. Their nature clashes with the disposition of those with faith. As a result, they lash out against them, oppose them, and speak evil of them. They will fulfill the word of Jesus, "*If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you*" (John 15:20).

It is elsewhere confirmed, "*Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution*" (2 Tim 3:12). The word "*will*" is a vital one. It reflects a desire rather than an accomplishment—for where the desire is found, the godly life will be lived. Thus the ^{NIV} reads, "*In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.*" **Let it be clear, those who do not live godly lives do not WANT to live godly.** But for those desiring to do so, their lives become a source of irritation to the godless. Sometimes that agitation can be a convicting one, as in Saul of Tarsus kicking against the goads (Acts 9:5). But whether a godly life provokes opposition or conviction, God is glorified in the matter. Thus it is written, "*For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life*" (2 Cor 2:15). The godly life actually brings out the status of those who are exposed to it.

As we advance toward glory, we must go through the maze of affliction. The intensity of the afflictions are measured by the Lord, and will not exceed our ability (1 Cor 10:13). It is the business of every faithful minister to make this known to the saints. Thus Paul and Barnabas elsewhere returned to those to whom they had ministered, "*confirming*" or strengthening them, and exhorting them to "*continue in the faith,*" and affirming "*We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God*" ^{NKJV} (Acts 14:22). May God raise up faithful laborers who will again proclaim this warning with conviction and power.

I SENT TO KNOW YOUR FAITH

" ^{5a} ***For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith . . .*** " Concerned for the spiritual welfare of those to whom he had ministered, Paul's spirit was agitated as he pondered their status. Although he was inspired, God did not reveal the status of the Thessalonians to Paul. As God had hidden the condition of the Shunammite woman from the prophet Elisha (2 Kgs 4:27), so God had hidden the situation of the Thessalonians from Paul. Elisha had to ask the Shunammite woman about her circumstances, and Paul had to inquire of the Thessalonians about theirs—even after he had long pondered them. He did not do this by simply asking about their faith, but by sending a discerning individual who would be able to perceive how they were doing in Christ.

THE NATURE OF MINISTRY. Something of the nature of spiritual ministry is seen in this text. Faith brings with it involvement with those to whom one ministers. It is not involvement on a fleshly level, but has to do with "*in Christ Jesus.*" This does not mean there is no care for the physical circumstances of the elect. Knowing of the poverty of early saints, Paul was zealous to gather collections for their sustenance (Acts 24:17; Rom 15:25-26; 1 Cor 16:1). Faith will not leave the minister satisfied in a state of ignorance concerning those to whom he has ministered. Thus Paul could not rest until he knew about the Thessalonians.

FINDING OUT ABOUT THEIR FAITH. What did Paul mean by saying "*I sent to know your faith?*" He was not inquiring if they had any faith at all, for he already knew them as believers (1:3,8; 2:10,13). Paul took some action to learn of the **status** of their faith. He wanted to know if their faith was strong (Rom 4:20) or weak (Rom 4:19); whether they were staggering through unbelief, or giving glory to God (Rom 4:20). This is the same spirit expressed by Paul to Barnabas when he sought to return to the places in which they had preached. "*Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do*" (Acts 15:36).

WHY INQUIRE ABOUT FAITH? Why did Paul send to learn about their faith? Why not their health or economic status? It is certainly not because he had no interest in those things, for he had a keen interest in relieving the oppressed (Acts 11:29; 1 Tim 5:16). There was, however, a higher motive here. People can go to heaven even though they are "*destitute*" (Heb 11:37), even though the saints are to relieve such (James 1:27; 2:16). However, a deficiency in faith brings eternal consequences. "*Without faith, it is impossible to please God*" (Heb 11:6). Those who are justified "*live by faith*" (Rom 1:17). That is the appointed means through which we receive the indispensable "*righteousness of God*" (Rom 3:22). Our access to the sorely required grace of God is "*by faith*" (Rom 5:2). Faith is what enables us to "*stand,*" unmoved by the assaults of the wicked one and the appointed tests of God (2 Cor 1:24). Christ dwells in our hearts "*by faith*" (Eph 3:17), and the promised Spirit is received "*through faith*" (Gal 3:14). The grace of God saves us, but it does so "*through faith*" (Eph 2:8). The Scriptures can only be comprehended through faith, so that one becomes "*wise in the matter of salvation*" (2 Tim 3:15). It is "*through faith and patience*" that we "*inherit the promises*" of God (Heb 6:12). God even keeps us by His power "*through faith*" (1 Pet 1:5).

If our faith is weak, all of these benefits are about to slip away from us. They can only be grasped by faith. That is why faith must be strong. **If people are not built up in the faith, they will be torn down by unbelief.** If their afflictions erode their faith, they are moving them closer to perdition. There simply is no way for us to be sustained

apart from faith. If we find it difficult to rely upon the Lord, we have need of a strong faith. If we cannot rely upon the Lord in the midst of trouble, we are weak in the faith and need strengthening.

All of the great exploits of men and woman of God were credited to their faith. Abel's superior offering was owing to his faith (Heb 11:4). Enoch was translated because of his faith (Heb 11:5). Noah built the ark because of faith (Heb 11:7). Abraham obeyed God, sojourned in the land of promise, and offered Isaac because of his faith (Heb 11:8,9,17). Isaac blessed Jacob, and Jacob blessed both of Joseph's sons, because of their faith (Heb 11:20-21). Joseph asked to have his bones removed from Egypt because he believed (Heb 11:22). Moses' parents hid him when he was born because of their faith (Heb 11:23). Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, and forsook Egypt, because of his faith (Heb 11:24,27).

It is no wonder that Paul had a driving compulsion to know about the Thessalonian's faith! He knew the manner of the Kingdom. He knew if their faith was well, so were they. He knew if their faith was weak, they were in jeopardy. I cannot help but marvel that a concern for the faith of saints is so exceedingly rare in our times. It is an omen of trouble.

TEMPTATION AND LABORING IN VAIN

"^{5b} . . . lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labor be in vain." The more familiar I become with the Word of God, the more I am convinced that there is a dominating ignorance of it in the professed church. The things that were of great concern to the Apostles are hardly known in our time. In fact, some of them are denied by erroneous and damaging theologies. Take the text before us as an example. Paul had a deep concern about Satan's attack of the Thessalonians. "*I was afraid that in some way the tempter might have tempted you and our efforts might have been useless.*"^{NIV} Some deny that such things are even possible. They have embraced a view of Scripture that repudiates the notion that Satan could put any child of God in jeopardy, or that any spiritual effort could be "*useless.*" It is the devil himself who has promoted such views!

THE TEMPTER. Satan is twice called "*the tempter*" in Scripture. One is related to the wilderness temptation of Jesus, when "*the tempter came to Him*" (Matt 4:3). The other is our text. The word "*tempter*" means one who tests or tries by enticement or allurements. Using subtlety, Satan attempts to move us away from believing. Remember, Paul sent Timothy to learn of the Thessalonian's faith. "*The tempter,*" therefore, had the destruction of their faith as his objective. Only faith can repel the attacks of "*the tempter.*" Thus it is written, "*your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist steadfast in the faith*" (1 Pet 5:8-9).

It is interesting to note that the words "*tempt*" and "*tempted*" are rarely used in the Old Covenant Scriptures in the sense of our text. In fact, I cannot find a single incident. Nearly every time they are used in Moses and the Prophets, they have to do with men tempting God, not the devil tempting them (Ex 17:2,7; Num 14:22; Deut 6:16; Psa 78:18,41,56; 95:8-9; 106:14; Isa 7:12; Mal 3:15). Once "*tempt*" is used in reference to God testing Abraham (Gen 22:1). "*Temptations*" are also used to describe Israel's trials (Deut 4:34; 7:19; 29:3).

Life in Christ Jesus bears very little resemblance to life under the Law. In Him, a very real change has been wrought in men. Now Satan's approach is more subtle, and his activity as a tempter is the means he uses to drag believers back to perdition. He is so active and so intense in this activity that a special Intercessor is provided to neutralize his advances. Therefore it is written, "*For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succor them that are tempted*" (Heb 2:18). That "*succor,*" or Divine help, is realized through our faith, which is the exclusive means of appropriating the grace of God (Eph 2:8). Thus, knowing the condition of their faith would confirm whether or not they had been able to resist Satan's advances. Among other things, this teaches us never to take temptation lightly, or put ourselves into a situation that gives the advantage to "*the tempter*" (Eph 4:27).

USELESS LABORS. How is it that Paul speaks of laboring in vain, or useless labors? Is it not written that "*labor is not in vain in the Lord*" (1 Cor 15:58)? That statement is made to believers to prompt them to intense spiritual activity, being "*steadfast and unmoveable.*" Our text speaks of another valid facet of the Kingdom. All of our labors for the souls of men will be tested in the day of judgment. This testing is vividly described in the third chapter of First Corinthians. There, converts are depicted as the "*works,*" or results, of Kingdom labors. These converts are likened to non-combustible and combustible materials: "*gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble.*" Should the converts prove to be "*wood, hay, and stubble,*" the man's "*work shall be burned,*" and "*he shall suffer loss.*" The laborer himself must also pass the test of Divine judgment, and thus be "*saved, but only as one escaping through the flames*"^{NIV} (1 Cor 3:12-15). The suffering of "*loss*" is the same as laboring in vain, or useless labors.

Paul had the same concern for the Galatians, although they had already given evidence of departing from the faith to a system of Law (Gal 4:11). He expressed the same concern for the Philippians, urging them work out their own salvation

with fear and trembling, continuing to hold out the word of life, so he could "*rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither labored in vain*" (Phil 2:16).

If those to whom we have ministered ultimately fall to the devices of the devil, all labor expended on them will have been useless. God's objective in salvation is not to bring temporary relief to humanity, or enable them to have a mere season of blessing. The aim is to conform them to the image of His Son (Rom 8:29), and bring them to glory (Heb 2:10). As our text indicates, if that does not occur, it is a most serious circumstance. There is no place for heartless and mechanical labors in the Kingdom of God.

LESSON #16

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

" ^{3:6-8} *But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also to see you;* ⁷ *therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith.* ⁸ *For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord.*" ^{NKJV} (1 Thessalonians 3:6-8)

INTRODUCTION

The relationship of spiritual life to the members of the Christ's body is a vital one. In fulfillment of the sixty-eighth Psalm, God "*sets the solitary in families*" (verse 6). No believer is an island to himself. It is quite true, God can sustain believers when circumstance finds them alone—men like Joseph in Egypt, Moses in the wilderness, and John on Patmos. But those are not the standard, and are not conditions to be sought. The normal mode of spiritual life is within the context of fellow believers and pilgrims. In Christ, believers are "*members one of another*" (Eph 4:25). That is, there are spiritual resources that, by Divine direction, are passed from one member to another. As each member is connected with "*the Head*," Jesus Christ, He uses them to minister to His people. When this process is needlessly aborted, or abandoned in preference of other things, there will be tragic results. The people of God are to gather around themselves kindred spirits that are in quest of glory, people who are strangers and pilgrims in the earth. Their status in this world demands that their faith be nourished and strengthened, and their hearts encouraged. This was the ministry Paul and the Thessalonians had with one another, and it is greatly to be coveted.

WHEN TIMOTHY CAME TO US FROM YOU

" ⁶ *But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also to see you.*" The words "*but now*" indicate that Timothy had just arrived from Thessalonica, and Paul was immediately responding to the good news brought by him. The NIV, supporting this view, reads, "*But Timothy has just now come to us from you.*" Both Paul's thanksgiving to God and encouragement of the saints were "*instant.*"

TIMOTHY HAS COME. When Paul sent Timothy, he was in Athens (3:1). Since then, he moved to Corinth where he was ministering. There Paul was abiding with Aquila and Priscilla, working with them as a tentmaker. Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, testifying to both Jews and Greeks. The coming of Timothy from Thessalonica had such an impact upon Paul that Acts 18:5 records, "*When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ.*" His testimony resulted in some of the distress mentioned in verse seven (Acts 18:6).

It is interesting to note how Paul maintained such a keen interest in the churches, also desiring to testify the Gospel of the grace of God to all men (Acts 20:24). This contrasts sharply with the mission-mentality that prevails in the Western church—a mentality that almost totally disregards the saints of God, caring little for their progress in the faith. We must remember that the one speaking these words was the premier proclaimer of the Gospel throughout the world. Yet, his fundamental interest remained in the progress of the saints.

GOOD NEWS OF YOUR FAITH AND LOVE. Ponder the peculiarity of Timothy's report. He brought good news of the "*faith and love*" of the Thessalonians. How is it that such things are reported? For many, it would be numeric growth, or the institution of some grand Kingdom enterprise. Certainly, neither of these are to be despised. The Thessalonians, however, were in a period of suffering and persecution, not a growth explosion and a building program (2:14; 3:3-4). Their faith and love, however, had not been moved or neutralized by adversity. They were keeping the faith under duress and loving one another while opposed by their enemies. Unlike the seed which had no root, when "*tribulation or persecution*" arose "*because of the Word*," they were NOT offended (Matt 13:21).

The holy duet of "*faith and love*" is frequently mentioned in Scripture. Later in Thessalonians, Paul will refer to "*the breastplate of faith and love*," confirming they are by their very nature protective (5:8). The grace of God is "*exceeding abundant*" with these two essentials (1 Tim 1:14), confirming the Thessalonians were, in fact, continuing in the grace of God. When challenging Timothy to maintain the "*pattern of sound words*," Paul exhorted him to do it with "*faith and love*" (2 Tim 1:13). Showing how faith and love interact, the Spirit declares faith expresses itself "*through love*" (Gal 5:6). The Ephesians and Colossians were also commended for possession of these graces: "*your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints*" (Eph 1:15; Col 1:4). Philemon

was also applauded for being known for his "*faith and love*" (Phile 5). Christ dwells in our hearts "*by faith*" in order that we might be "*rooted and grounded in love*" (Eph 3:17). Both faith and love come to believers "*from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*" (Eph 6:23).

It is no wonder, therefore, that Paul was gladdened by the report of the Thessalonians maintaining both faith and love. It is good for the saints to aspire for such reports to be made of them. Hearing of strong faith and love in the saints brings great joy and strength to those who are laboring in the vineyard of the Lord. Such reports are of inestimable value.

GOOD REMEMBRANCE. There are times when the love of the brethren is of especial value. The time when this Epistle was written was such an occasion. Concerning Timothy's report, the NIV reads, "*He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you.*" This was not a fleshly attachment or attraction, for faith makes no provision for such affiliation (2 Cor 5:16). The Thessalonian's "*good remembrance*" and strong desire to see Paul were related to the good Gospel brought to them by him. Paul's desire to see them also had to do with "*mutual faith*" (Rom 1:12) and "*things pertaining to life and godliness*" (2 Pet 1:3). Personal friendships in the flesh are strong, but "*love in the Spirit*" is stronger (Col 1:8). There are spiritual advantages to be gained and nurtured in effective spiritual relationships.

One searches in vain to find any hint of closeness to and affection for Christ or the Apostles apart from the proclamation of the Gospel, the strengthening of faith, and the encouragement of hope. The consistency of this observation staggers the human intellect.

WE WERE COMFORTED IN OUR DISTRESS

"⁷ . . . *therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith.*" The New Jerusalem Bible reflects the spirit of this text. "*And so, brothers, your faith has been a great encouragement to us in the middle of our own distress and hardship.*" Everything in Christ is profitable to those who are in Christ. Nothing from God is needless or useless. Our text is a case in point. The faith of the Thessalonians proved to be helpful to the Apostle Paul during times of difficulty.

IN ALL OUR AFFLICTION AND DISTRESS. These are not the words of a complainer, nor do they reflect a casual circumstance. Faith makes people sensitive to the Lord, not merely to earthly circumstances.

The word "**affliction**" means troubles, burdens, anguish, and persecution. It is suffering brought on by outward circumstances. Jesus said such things arise "*for the Word's sake*" (Mark 4:17). These "*afflictions*" come because God's people are "*hated*" (Matt 24:9), and are inevitable for all who are in Christ (John 16:33). They are an appointed means through which we "*enter into the Kingdom of God*" (Acts 14:22). They produce perseverance in those exercised by them (Rom 5:3), and cannot separate us from the love of God (Rom 8:35).

"**Distresses**" emphasizes necessities. They are difficulties that come upon the individual during which needed resources are depleted, and a certain poverty is endured. Paul referred to his kind of experience when he said he was approved as a minister of Christ by the way he conducted himself "*in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses*" (2 Cor 6:4). These were occasions when human weakness surfaced. Only strength from Christ can enable a soul to endure such times. "*Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong*" (2 Cor 12:10). In another place, Paul said he knew how to "*suffer need*" (Phil 4:12). Such a condition was endured by the saints of old who, by faith, "*wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented*" (Heb 11:37). It is possible to receive a distorted view of living by faith that moves one to imagine life is always lived amidst a bed of roses. If this were the case, there would be no need for comfort in the midst of affliction and distress.

WE WERE COMFORTED. Notwithstanding the normality of "*affliction*" and "*distress*," much encouragement is required during them. Most believers know by experience that difficulties depleting the soul cannot be addressed casually. "*Comfort*" is a large word including the concepts of encouragement and exhortation, both of which are essential to the life of faith. Believers are "*encouraged*" when the bright light of hope appears on the dark horizon of difficulty. They are thus made adequate for the trials through which they are passing. They are "*exhorted*" in the sense of having an even stronger determination to fight a "*good fight*" and "*lay hold on eternal life*" (1 Tim 6:12). Thus Satan's intentions are thwarted, and Divine objectives are realized. Satan intends to break us down through trouble, thereby causing us to drop out of the race. God's objective is to confirm to us that we are not home yet, but that, by His grace, we soon will be!

Behind this expression is the persuasion that progress must be made toward the prize that is set before us. Advancement is imperative, and growth is essential. Yet, trouble tends to retard these things and slow our pace. That is why encouragement in the faith is so essential. It seems to me that a persuasion of these things is not prevalent in the

nominal church. There is too much trivia and casualness to allow for such a conviction. That is why professed believers are often not persuaded of their need of one another.

CONCERNING YOUR FAITH. Here is a most wonderful circumstance! Paul and his fellow laborers were comforted in their trouble by the faith of someone else. To be more specific, they were comforted by HEARING about the faith of those among whom they had labored. The NLT adds a personal note by reading, "*because you have remained strong in your faith.*" That is the report that Timothy had brought. The Thessalonians had remained strong in their faith, even though it had brought them into the valley of suffering. In fact, Paul affirmed in his second letter to the Thessalonians, "*your faith grow exceedingly*" (2 Thess 1:3). I come from a background where it was dogmatically denied that faith grew, or that it could be increased. You either had it or you did not. But that is a total misrepresentation. Faith can make gigantic leaps forward, so that the believer can see more, appropriate more, and do more. How precious it is when faith grows exceedingly, abundantly, or "*more and more.*"^{NIV} And when did this growth occur for the Thessalonians? While they were themselves under stress! It is no wonder the report of such faith brought encouragement and stamina to Paul!

NOW WE LIVE

"⁸ ***For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord.***" This is a most thought-provoking statement! Other versions read, "*for now we really live, if you stand firm in the Lord,*"^{NASB} "*For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord,*"^{NIV} "*For it is life to us if you keep your faith in the Lord unchanged,*"^{BBE} "*It gives us new life, knowing you remain strong in the Lord,*"^{NLT} and "*Now we can breathe again, as you are holding firm in the Lord.*"^{NJB}

WE LIVE! There is such a thing as spiritual fatigue. This is not to be confused with the mythical "burn out" that is taunted by the worldly church. Rather, this is an experience in which spiritual (not merely fleshly) resources become depleted. There are some Apostolic expressions that confirm the nature of this experience. ". . . *we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life . . . we had the sentence of death in ourselves*" (2 Cor 1:8-9). "*For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men*" (2 Cor 1:9). "*We are troubled on every side*" (2 Cor 4:8). ". . . *our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears*" (2 Cor 7:5). "*In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness*" (2 Cor 11:27). Since leaving Thessalonica, Paul had been enduring fierce opposition—so much so that death seemed to be working more in him than life (2 Cor 4:12). Once, when David was being hounded by Saul, he said to Jonathan, "*but truly as the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, there is but a step between me and death*" (1 Sam 20:3).

But now, the whole circumstance has changed. Satan had managed to trouble the environment, so that no comfort was being received where Paul was located. Now the Lord, in a Sovereign exercise of His matchless grace, brings a word to Paul from another place. It is the word of the flourishing faith of the Thessalonians. It comes from a young brother whose word can be trusted, and it brings new life to the heart of the opposed Apostle. Not only had he been oppressed, but his great heart yearned to know of the Thessalonians, whether they were standing strong in the faith, though vigorously opposed by their enemies. Now his heart is refreshed by hearing they are doing fine, growing in the Lord.

All of this postulates a keen interest in the welfare of the saints. No one can be refreshed and encouraged by the report of someone else's faith unless they have an interest in it. In our text, Paul has more interest in the spiritual welfare of the Thessalonians than in his own life. He had such a zeal for the Lord that he burned within for the advancement of the saints. It should be obvious that such an attitude is exceedingly rare. O, that God would raise up more laborers of this caliber, and purge from His fields those who have no genuine regard for His people! Much of the deficiency that exists in the modern church is directly traceable to a lack of spiritual interest in those who are charged with its care.

IF YOU STAND FAST. Other versions read, "*standing firm*"^{NIV} and "*holding firm.*"^{NJB} The idea is that of maintaining an unwavering position, not being "*moved away from the hope of the gospel*" (Col 1:23). The stance is described in these words in Job, "*The righteous also shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger*" (Job 17:9). David said of this condition, "*They go from strength to strength*" (Psa 84:7). Solomon said, "*But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day*" (Prov 4:18). Viewing it from the heavenly perspective, Peter said believers are "*kept by the power of God through faith*" (1 Pet 1:5). Isaiah said, "*But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint*" (Isa 40:31). What crushes unstable souls only serves to make stable

persons more firm in the faith.

All of these marvelous expressions, and more, were confirmed by the steadfastness of the Thessalonians in the midst of trouble. Paul had such a heart for God's people that he was revived, coming alive, as it were, by the reports of them holding up under persecution and glorifying God by a strong and vibrant faith in the midst of tribulation.

IN THE LORD. Paul did not come alive merely because the Thessalonians had maintained a shell of religiosity during trouble. They had remained in the Lord, abiding in the Vine (John 15:4), and continuing "*in the Son, and in the Father*" (1 John 2:24). Their constancy contributed to the faithfulness and effectiveness of Paul's labors! That is a very wonderful picture of the church being "*fitly framed together*" (Eph 2:21). Wherever genuine faith is found, coupled with an unshakable constancy, grace will be ministered by the report of that condition to those who labor for the Lord.

LESSON #17

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“^{3:9-11}For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God,¹⁰ night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith?¹¹ Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you.”^{NKJV} (1 Thess 3:9-11)

INTRODUCTION

The closest of all fleshly relationships is that of husband and wife: they become “*one flesh*” (Eph 5:31). The closest of all spiritual relationships is that of the believer with the Lord: “*one spirit*” (1 Cor 6:17). The closest of all group relationships is that of believers with one another: “*one body*” (Rom 12:5). Their unity with the Lord is the sole reason for their unity with one another. It is the sanctifying, as well as the unifying, element. Few sections of Scripture reveal the personal aspects of this unity as effectively as the first three chapters of First Thessalonians. Although doctrine is presented, it is not impersonal, like the formal statement of a position. Here there is heart as well as mind, and spirit as well as doctrinal form. The relationship created by faith exists as long as there is faith. That is why Paul has such an intense interest in the growth and stability of the Thessalonians. This is particularly true because they were being subjected to affliction, which tends to deplete spiritual resources. Only faith can increase our hold upon the truth as well as the quantity of spiritual graces we enjoy. Thus Paul constantly thinks of the faith of the Thessalonians. He desires that no part of it be lacking, and that they might gain the advantages of an ever-increasing faith.

THANKS RENDERED TO GOD FOR BRETHREN

“⁹For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God.” This Epistle opened with a word of thanks for the Thessalonians: “*We give thanks to God always for you all*” (1:2). Again, in the second chapter, Paul gave thanks because they received the Word of God as from God, not men: “*For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God*” (2:13). Now, for the third time, thanksgiving for the Thessalonians is again mentioned.

THANKS RENDERED. Most versions use the word “*render*.” Some read “*return*”^{NIV,NRSV,NIB} and “*recompense*.”^{YLT} The idea is that the thanksgiving is given to God in return for something received from Him. It is the response of faith for something that has brought personal spiritual benefit—in this case, the Thessalonians saints themselves: i.e., “*for you*.” They had brought advantages to Paul. That is why he gave thanks for them.

This joy was prompted by the report of Timothy (3:6). Their faith and love had not only continued, but had grown under the stress of tribulation. This was the work of God, and therefore prompted thanksgiving to Him. It is not common in our day for thanksgiving to be “*rendered*,” or given to God in response for the faithfulness of fellow believers. However, if men were able to see behind the scenes, they would behold what a great work it is for the children of God to maintain both faith and love when they are buffeted by severe trials and oppositions. God and Jesus were active in the giving of faith and love (Eph 6:23). The Holy Spirit enabled them to abound in hope through their faith (Rom 15:13). Angelic hosts were prominent in their protection and succor (Heb 1:13-14). It is no mere coincidence that saints survive trials! The understanding of this circumstance is what produces thanksgiving. That thanksgiving is a return to God for benefits received.

REJOICING WITH JOY. The benefit for which thanks is “*rendered*” is joy: i.e., “*for all the joy . . .*” The report of the faith and love of the Thessalonians brought joy to the Apostle WHEN he himself was in trial (2:2,14-16). Here we behold the remarkable grace that had been given to the Apostle to the Gentiles. He did not rejoice because of relief brought to him in his affliction, but because of the stability of the Thessalonians in THEIR tribulation! The work of God in others remains a source of joy to suffering believers. The report of other saints holding on their way sends a beam of joyful hope into the heart of believers who hear it. The degree to which this joy is experienced reveals the degree of spiritual growth and insight that has been realized by the individual.

This is not carnal joy, but the “*joy of the Holy Spirit*” (1 Thess 1:6). It is the joy “*given by the Spirit*.”^{NIV} As well, it is the joy with which the Spirit Himself rejoices. Rejoicing is a Divine attribute: “*The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; He will save, He will rejoice over thee with joy*” (Zeph 3:17). He is said to have “*delight*” in His people (Num 14:8), and “*rejoice*” over them (Deut 30:9). He “*takes pleasure*” in those who fear Him (Psa 147:11), and “*joys*” in His people (Isa 65:19).

To “*rejoice with joy*” is to partake of the Lord’s own joy. It is to have His joyful perspective of growing and

surviving saints. This is nothing less than a form of “*fellowship*” with the Son (1 Cor 1:9), as well as the Father Himself (1 John 1:3). In my judgment, this is a dimension of spiritual life in which considerable growth remains to be realized.

REJOICING FOR THE SAKE OF OTHERS. The rejoicing was “*for your sake,*” or “*because of you.*”^{NIV} What a sweet and comforting sound that must have been for the suffering Thessalonians! The world had rejected them, even their own countrymen (2:14). Yet, their stability had caused rejoicing to Paul. Once God “*had mercy*” on Paul by healing Epaphroditus, lest he should have “*sorrow upon sorrow*” (Phil 2:27). Now, while being opposed in another place, the Thessalonian’s faith and love caused joy to erupt in the heart of this man of God. It is good to ask ourselves what kind of experience our conduct produces in others. How does the mentioning of our progress influence those who hear it?

REJOICING BEFORE GOD. No aspect of spiritual life is experienced apart from its Author. All benefits are from God, and faith gives thanks and rejoices in them “*before God.*” At least two things are involved here. **First**, Paul recognizes that the Thessalonians have been sustained by God Himself. Therefore, he gives thanks for the joy they brought to him. **Secondly**, he rejoiced in the presence of the Lord, with an acute awareness of His Person. It was a form of fellowship in which the Lord became more prominent and circumstances and personal hardships were diminished. This is nothing less than the “*joy of faith*” (Phil 1:25). It is certainly in order to seek much of this glorious benefit!

PRAYING TO SEE THE FACE OF THE BRETHREN

¹⁰ . . . *night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith?*” It is possible to live so close to the Lord that you long for His people even as He does. Once God said of straying Israel, “*I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the LORD*” (Jer 31:20). What are His feelings toward those who have embraced His Son and received His great salvation? Are not such individuals “*beloved of God*” (Rom 1:9), and “*precious*” in His sight (Isa 43:4). Jesus is presently “*expecting,*” looking forward to being joined with His people—His “*joint heirs.*” He has promised, “*I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also*” (John 14:3). It is not strange, therefore, that those in fellowship with Him have an intense longing to see those who are “*joined to the Lord.*”

PRAYING EXCEEDINGLY. The fervency of these prayers is arresting: “*night and day praying exceedingly.*” Another version reads, “*we night and day keep praying most earnestly.*”^{NASB} The idea is that the prayers increase in intensity as time progresses. Rather than diminishing in frequency and fervency, they are growing. There is no question that many of our prayers remain unanswered because they lack this quality. They are neither frequent nor fervent, and thus cannot be answered. Our Lord taught us, “*men ought always to pray, and not to faint*” (Lk 18:1). It is not so much that this is the law of the Kingdom as that it is its MANNER. The Lord works within the framework of incessant prayer. That is the environment in which answers are received, whether the removal of thorns is sought or the fellowship of brethren.

SEE YOUR FACE. The subjects of Paul’s prayers are instructive. When he prayed for others, he sought their stability, enlightenment, and growth (Eph 1:18-20; 3:15-20; Col 1:9-11). When he prayed for himself, he often asked that he be granted to be with certain of God’s people (Rom 1:10; 15:32; Phil 22). He has already told the Thessalonians he “*endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire*” (2:17). The fact that he mentions this again reveals what an advantage these brethren were to him. Their faith and love had endeared them to him, and He longed to be with them. I have mentioned before that this was not true of everyone to whom Paul ministered. However, those who extended themselves for Christ, availing themselves of the benefits proclaimed in the Gospel, gained a deeper respect and longing in the heart of the Apostle. This is in perfect keeping with the nature of the Lord Himself, who gives the greater benefits to those who press close to Him. As it is written, “*Draw near to God and He will draw near to you*” NKJV (James 4:8).

This is an aspect of spiritual life that is hardly known in our generation. We have been inundated with a theology that leaves people imagining that all professed believers are treated the same by the Lord. Those who are zealous for the Lord are thought to have access to no more than the lukewarm and indifferent. But this is not true, and must be zealously resisted. It is not possible to measure the benefits that are forfeited by walking at a distance from the Lord. In my judgment, many a congregation suffers under the weight of weak and thoughtless ministers and leaders because they have never developed an appetite for anything else. Their faith and love are too weak, and they appear unconcerned about the matter. That very spirit perpetuates spiritual mediocrity, lack of growth, and spiritual deterioration.

PERFECTING WHAT IS LACKING. Paul’s desire to be with the Thessalonians was not prompted by the flesh. It was not mere friendship and camaraderie that he sought. He wanted to bring them further advantages: “*supply what is*

lacking in your faith."^{NIV} It may appear on the surface that this is contradictory. First he congratulates them for their faith, giving thanks for it, then he desires to supply what it is lacking. He is not saying they have neglected their faith, denied it, or stunted its growth with carnality. Rather, this is an acknowledgment that as long as we are in this world, our faith needs strengthening and growth. We do not live in a vacuum, but in an intensely active war zone. The pressures of this present evil world demand that faith grow and increase, for Satan is increasing his assault of the saints, knowing the time is short (Rev 12:12).

Our faith is not yet complete, or fully grown. Nor, indeed, will it be as long as we are in this world. As long as there is a danger of being beguiled (2 Cor 11:3), drawn away (James 1:14), or losing our first love (Rev 2:4), faith must grow. Supplying what is lacking in faith is the same as being established (Rom 1:11). It is receiving *"a second benefit,"* or increased blessing (2 Cor 1:15). It is being made able to *"progress"* in the faith (Phil 1:25) and fulfilling *"the work of faith with power"* (2 Thess 1:11). The very nature of salvation demands growth, maturity, and fruitfulness. Paul fervently sought to contribute to that marvelous process. That is something of what is involved in laboring with God (1 Cor 3:9).

DIVINELY DIRECTED TO THE BRETHREN

"¹¹ Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you."

There is a personal aspect of salvation that is most delightful to consider. For several years I personally suffered from the effects of an impersonal religion. I did not think of myself as individually related to the Lord, or deriving benefits directly from Him. God be praised that this darkness was scattered by the bright light of Divine utterance!

THE FATHER HIMSELF. It is quite true that there is *"one Mediator between God and man"* (1 Tim 2:5). It is also true that we have access to the Father *"by the Spirit"* (Eph 2:18). It is also true that we are *"clean through the Word"* (John 15:3), and receive needed benefits by *"the Scriptures"* (Rom 15:4). We must never allow ourselves to reason as though these were not essential, or apart from a firm reliance on them. However, this does not mean we have no personal affiliation with the Father. We have a very real fellowship *"with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ"* (1 John 1:3). This is the relationship to which Paul is alluding.

Such personal involvement is seen in God's dealings with Israel. When considering their enemies, Moses declared *"God Himself fights for you"*^{NKJV} (Deut 3:22). When preparing to go into Canaan, he told the people, *"The LORD your God Himself crosses over before you"*^{NKJV} (Deut 31:3). Abijah reminded Jeroboam, *"God Himself is with us for our captain"* (2 Chron 13:12). The promise held out to the saints is, *"God Himself shall be with them, and be their God"* (Rev 21:3). In his second letter to the Thessalonians Paul referred to this intensely personal aspect of salvation. *"Now our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God, even our Father . . . comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work"* (2 Thess 2:16-17). Again he wrote, *"Now the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always by all means"* (2 Thess 3:16).

This is not, then, strange language. Eventually, our religion has to get to this point, where we consciously have to do with God Himself, for it is He *"with whom we have to do"* (Heb 4:13)!

AND OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST. The Father and the Son work together, not independently. Frequently this is accented in Apostolic writings. Grace and peace come from both the Father and the Son (Rom 1:7). Peace, love, and faith come from Them both (Eph 6:23), as well as grace, mercy, and peace (1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2; Tit 1:4). Since our Lord's exaltation to the right hand of God, He has joined the Father in the care and sustenance of His people. God has given all things into the hands of the Son, but has not withdrawn Himself from the great work of salvation. This is not a mere technicality, but is intended to convince our hearts that salvation is *"of the Lord,"* and that He is wholly devoted to it. Once this is grasped by faith, we learn to reason and to pray with both focus and confidence.

DIVINE DIRECTION. Paul's eagerness to be with the Thessalonians face to face is not to be accomplished in human wisdom. Even in this most practical matter, he depended upon the Lord. *"Now may our God and Father Himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you."*^{NIV} Flesh cannot think in this manner. Thus those who tended to make plans without God in the forefront of their thinking were reminded, *"If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that"* (James 4:13-14). If one is tempted to think all of this is inconsequential, James included the impudence of planning without God with *"boasting"* and *"evil"* (4:15).

From a fleshly standpoint, there appeared to be no justification for thinking Paul could get to the Thessalonians. Yet, he prayed God Himself would make a way for it to happen. Our Lord is fully capable of doing this! He that can make streams in the desert (Isa 35:6), can clear a way for us to do His will! If He can *"make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert,"* can He not *"direct thy paths"* (Prov 3:6)? Did He not promise concerning the person raised up by Him, *"I will direct all his ways"* (Isa 45:13).

The Lord Jesus Christ declares, *"These things saith He that is holy, He that is true, He that hath the key of David, He that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth"* (Rev 3:7). He can set an *"open door"* before His children that no man can shut (Rev 3:8). It can be *"a great and effective door"* ^{NKJV} in spite of *"many adversaries"* (1 Cor 16:9).

What noble work is there that you desire to do for the Lord? What godly people are there whom you long to see? Direct your prayer to God! The Father Himself and the Lord Jesus Christ are able to clear the way for you-to cause your desires to come to pass! Godly associations that are formed can be sustained to the mutual advantage of all.

Here is an aspect of spiritual life in which much blessing can be realized. To think in this manner assists us to hold up during the difficulties of life. The prospect of being with those of like precious faith brings joy and encouragement to the heart. Make it your aim to bring faith to bear upon this facet of life in Christ-being with those who strengthen you.

LESSON #18

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

"^{3:12} *And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you:* ¹³ *To the end He may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.*" ^{KJV} (1 Thessalonians 3:12-13)

INTRODUCTION

There are fundamental objectives accomplished in salvation-objectives that take the precedence in life. If these purposes are not fulfilled, everything else has been in vain. If they are realized, God is glorified, the Lord Jesus honored, the laborers rewarded, and the saints glorified. There is no question that Satan aggressively seeks to turn believers away from the real purpose of salvation. In summary, he seeks to anchor them in this world, and turn their eyes inward, to their own self-interests. In so doing, he is tempting them to exalt themselves above the Most High God, even as He himself aspired (Isa 14:14). Part of the "whole armor of God" is having our feet "shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace" (Eph 6:15). This is the embrace of the message of the Gospel which informs us of Divine intent-an eternal purpose for which Jesus is presently preparing us. The faith that comes from hearing this message (Rom 10:14) moves us away from purely self-interests and the affairs of this present evil world, preparing us for the ultimate confrontation of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the text before us, Paul expresses his deep desire for the establishment of the Thessalonians. He knows their effort is involved, but does not anchor their faith to self-effort. In words that are both a prayer and an exhortation, he informs them that the Lord can make things happen that eventuate in ultimate blessing. We do well to ponder these gracious words.

THE LORD MAKE YOU TO INCREASE AND ABOUND

"¹² *And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you.*" Other versions read "the Lord CAUSE you to increase," ^{NASB} "the Lord make your love increase and overflow," ^{NIV} "the Lord multiply you and make you abound," ^{DUOAY-RHEIMS} "the Lord make to exceed and abound," ^{DARBYS} and "the Lord make your love grow and overflow." ^{NLT} Some versions may appear to reflect a rather impersonal view ("make you, cause you"), while others accentuate personal involvement ("make **your** love"). What is here desired involves the personal growth of the Thessalonians in a specific and needful area. They themselves will be advanced by increase in the matter specified. It is similar to the body of a child maturing as his appetite matures.

MAKE YOU. There is an approach to spiritual life that denies God makes anything happen within us. Such a view unduly exalts the will and ability of men. There are no aspects of spiritual life that can be improved independently of the Lord Himself. At the precise point He is not involved, spiritual advancement becomes impossible. This kind of language should not be strange to us. Jesus spoke of Himself MAKING men free (John 8:36). God is declared to be able to MAKE us perfect in every good work, to do His will (Heb 13:21). He can MAKE us perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle us (1 Pet 5:10). When His graces abound in us, they MAKE us neither useless nor unfruitful (2 Pet 1:8). If ever the people of God are to advance to spiritual maturity, it will be through Divine power.

INCREASE AND ABOUND. The Spirit is ever seeking to move us forward, advancing us from one stage of glory to another (2 Cor 3:18). This is involved in increasing, or abounding. It is moving to new plateaus of conformity to Christ's image. God gives increase (1 Cor 3:6-7). He multiplies both the seed that is sown and the harvest that comes from it (2 Cor 9:10). Jesus ministers to His people in order that they might "increase with the increase of God" (Col 2:19). Further, there is no point in spiritual life when this increase ceases, or is out of order. Thus, the Scriptures speak of increasing "more and more" (1 Thess 4:10).

"Abound" is a similar word, speaking of exponential multiplication, or rapid growth that can only be accounted for by Divine activity. Consolation can "abound" (2 Cor 1:5). God's people can "abound in everything," even the giving of their resources (2 Cor 8:7). There can be remarkable and rapid advance in "knowledge and judgment" (Phil 1:9). Increasing and abounding are Kingdom traits that must be eagerly sought by, and found in, the saints.

LOVE TOWARD ONE ANOTHER. The desired area of increase and abounding is that of love. This makes perfect sense, for we ourselves "are taught of God to love one another" (1 Thess 4:9). **The idea is that what God gives and teaches must grow and abound.** We receive nothing from God that is in a fixed condition. It always comes in seed form, and advances to maturity through the power of the Lord. In this case, the desire is for the Lord to cause our love for one another to flourish, overflowing toward each other. Here is a perfect example of the very nature of the Kingdom. Love does not think of itself, or "does not seek its own" (1 Cor 13:5). At personal expense, it aggressively seeks the welfare of brothers and sisters in Christ. Paul expressed a similar desire for the

Philippians: "*And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment*" (Phil 1:9). It is not that the Thessalonians were deficient in this grace. This is not a rebuke. Rather, it is a prayer for continued growth in "*ferveat charity among yourselves*" (1 Pet 4:8). After all, we have been separated from the world, and daily live with its hatred toward us. What makes more sense than the people of God being tightly "*knit together in love*" (Col 2:2). This was particularly true for the Thessalonians, who were experiencing tribulation and distress.

LOVE TOWARD ALL MEN. Fervent love toward one another is special- "*brotherly love*" (Rom 12:10; Heb 13:1). However, our love is not confined to the household of faith, although it is "*especially*" toward them (Gal 6:10). It is also to be directed toward "*all men.*" These are people who are not members of the body of Christ. In fact, they are enemies of God, Christ, and ourselves as well. Many of them treat us with no kindness or consideration, but rather cause heaviness of heart to us. Yet, Jesus commanded us, "*Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust*" (Matt 5:44-45). Here is an area where God can cause our love to "*increase and abound.*" We must take care not to allow the conduct of our enemies to stop the increase of our love toward them. We have Paul's love for the Jews who persecuted him, as an example (Rom 9:1-3).

TO THE END THAT HE MAY ESTABLISH YOUR HEART

" 12ba-13a . . . *as we toward you. To the end He may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father . . .* " Other versions read, "*so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father,*"^{NKJV} "*So that your hearts may be strong and free from all sin before our God and Father,*"^{BBE} and "*As a result, Christ will make your hearts strong, blameless, and holy when you stand before God our Father.*"^{NLT}

AS WE TOWARD YOU. In coming to the Thessalonians, writing to them, and desiring to see them again, Paul is exhibiting the kind of love he desires for them to have. His love for them did not wane when he had to leave them. Rather, it increased and grew like a roaring fire. His love did not move him to go back to Thessalonica and confront their persecutors, reasoning with them that they should ease up on his brethren. If that was the manner in which the Lord worked, he would surely have taken the role of a mediator between the saints and their foes. Instead, he sought their spiritual stability-that they might be more than equal to the challenges their faith had brought to them. Rather than seeking more love of all men toward the Thessalonian saints, he prayed God would cause their love to increase toward one another, and "*toward all men.*" This is not the manner of the flesh.

TO THE END. The overflowing of Paul's love was not merely sentimental or emotional. There was a Kingdom objective that compelled him. Both his love and the increase and abounding of the Thessalonian's love was to an appointed end. Their increasing love was the means God would use to make them firm and unmoveable in the faith. There was an unavoidable result that would be realized when their love grew.

This was a work that Jesus Himself would do: i.e., "*to the end HE may . . .*" This is one of the ways He shepherds His flock (John 10:11; Isa 40:11). His mediatorship is also involved in this ministry (Heb 12:24), as well as His indispensable intercession (Heb 7:25). Something more is involved in our salvation than getting us out of darkness and free from sin. Those are the prelude to the fulfillment of a purpose that will fit us for eternity.

HEARTS ESTABLISHED. An established heart is essential to withstand the assaults of the wicked one, and appropriate our appointed inheritance. Only an abounding love can lead to this appointed objective. Erratic and unstable hearts are not loving hearts. The love of God has not been shed abroad in such hearts by the Holy Spirit, a fervent love for the brethren is not growing, and a love "*toward all men*" is deficient. A heart that is "*established*" is not afraid of ones enemies (Psa 112:8). Such a heart has been "*established with grace,*" made firm by the discerned experience of Divine favor (Heb 13:9). An established heart is one in which the "*Day Star*" has risen (2 Pet 1:19). It is one in which God has been "*sanctified*" in both fellowship and favor (1 Pet 3:15). It is a heart that has not been "*hardened*" (Heb 4:7), and in which the peace of God rules (Col 3:15). Such a heart can only be produced by the Lord Jesus Christ, and He will perform that work as love increases and abounds.

UNBLAMEABLE IN HOLINESS. This is an arresting expression that can provoke an aggressive quest for the blessing of God. Think of it: "*unblameable in holiness,*"^{NASB} "*holiness that you may be blameless,*"^{NRSV} and "*strong and free from all sin.*"^{BBE} The idea is that holiness consists of being "*blameless*"- a state to be sought for all believers (1 Cor 1:8; Phil 2:15; Thess 5:23; 2 Pet 3:14). It is marvelous to hear that provision has been

made for such a condition through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. "*But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin*" (1 John 1:7). When sin occurs in us, it puts blame upon us, rendering us unholy. It is then that we must flee to the fountain that has been opened "*for sin and uncleanness*" (Zech 13:1). As it is written, "*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*" (1 John 1:9). If this is the objective toward which Jesus is working, then it must also be ours.

BEFORE GOD OUR FATHER. The aim is to be blameless before God the Father. It is He that has been offended by our sin, and it is He that has provided both a covering for our sin, and power to obtain the victory over it. The Lord is able to "*keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy*" (Jude 1:24). However, He will not do it by simply speaking a word and instantly transporting us to a state of blamelessness. Instead, this will be accomplished through the mediatorial work of the Lord Jesus Christ. He will accomplish the objective by increasing our love toward one another and toward all men, in order that we may be more supple in His powerful hand. He aims to present us without any flaw to the Father. That is Paul seeks for the Thessalonians.

AT THE COMING OF JESUS CHRIST WITH ALL HIS SAINTS

"^{13b} . . . *at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.*" There is an appointed time when the necessity of holiness will be fully known. The aim of the Apostle is to prepare the saints for that predetermined day. There is a sense in which nothing else matters but this. To be unprepared to stand before the Father on this appointed day is to be condemned. Here is the reason for our lives and our labors in Christ Jesus.

AT THE COMING. There are few doctrines so marred with the opinions of men as that of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. As if that were not bad enough, there are also few doctrines that are as rarely proclaimed with power as this one. Yet, this is one of the most pivotal teachings of the Scriptures. Upon it, the hope of the saints is suspended. There are at least 250 references to Christ's return in the New Testament Scriptures. Every Gospel contains numerous references to Christ's coming. The Epistles contain nearly sixty references to Jesus' return, and all of them are foundational and central.

Before He was betrayed, Jesus declared to His disciples, "*I will come again*" (John 14:3). Following His ascension into heaven, two heavenly messengers arrayed in white said to His disciples, "*Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven*" (Acts 1:11). The resurrection of the dead will occur "*at His coming*" (1 Cor 15:23). That is when believers will be a crown of rejoicing to those who ministered to them (1 Thess 2:19). The great despot who will work in the power of Satan will be destroyed at that coming (2 Thess 2:8). This is the "*coming*" for which the saints are waiting (1 Cor 1:7). The keeping and perfecting power of God is to be performed until "*the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (1 Thess 5:23). Powerful pleadings and beseechments are made on the basis of this coming (2 Thess 2:1). Perseverance and endurance are maintained in view of this coming (James 5:7).

This is the day to which faith looks, and toward which it hastens, speeding its coming (2 Pet 3:12). This is "*the day of the Lord*" (1 Thess 5:2), "*the day of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (1 Cor 1:8), and "*the day of redemption*" (Eph 4:30). The Divine agenda is progressing toward this day. Everything about salvation is readying believers for this day. A people that do not speak often of this day are a weak people. Preachers who do not proclaim this day are guilty preachers. Hearts that do not yearn for it are faulty hearts. Those who have no interest in this day have only confirmed the Lord is not perfecting them. They stand on the precipice of eternal disaster, regardless of their profession. If our religion does not focus on the return of Jesus and make us ready for that glorious event, it is vain and useless. As it is written, "*If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable*" (1 Cor 15:19).

The aim is to be "*blameless in holiness before God . . . at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" The only place in which such preparations can be made is this world, and the only time they can be made is now. Salvation is the environment in which the objective will be realized, and faith and love are the experiences through which it will be accomplished.

It is not possible to overemphasize the coming of the Lord. Of this day it is written, "*He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed*" (Acts 17:31). Nothing can thwart or delay the coming of that day. It is drawing closer, being "*nearer than when we believed*" (Rom 13:11).

WITH ALL HIS SAINTS. When our Lord returns, He will bring all of the faithful who have departed this life. Later, in an extended proclamation of this fact, Paul writes, "*For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him*" (1 Thess 4:14). These are the ones who

are "*absent from the body*" and "*present with the Lord*" (2 Cor 5:6,8). They will be presented blameless in holiness before the Father. It only needs to be established whether those who "*are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord*" will be included in the spotless number (1 Thess 4:15).

The desire Paul is expressing in this passage is that the Thessalonians will be among those who will be gathered by the reaping angels (Matt 13:39). That is the ultimate test of whether we are the Lord's or not. Faith unites us now with this vast body of redeemed souls, "*the spirits of just men made perfect*" (Heb 12:23). That unity is not to be taken for granted, as though everything from that point on is automatic. There remains much work to be done in the strongest believer, and only the Lord can perform it. He will not do it without the prayers of discerning ones. Nor, indeed, will it be accomplished apart from an increasing and abounding love. The objective of the work is to be blameless in holiness when He returns. We should expect, therefore, a marked increase in holiness here and now.

LESSON #19

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

"^{4:1} *Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God; ²for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus.*" ^{NKJV} (1 Thessalonians 4:1-2)

INTRODUCTION

There is a spirit to the text of Scripture that becomes more and more apparent to us as we "*grow up into Christ in all things*" (Eph 4:15). Jesus referred to this spirit, or nature, of the Word when He said, "*the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life*" (John 6:63). By this He meant His words were not mere academic information. Nor, indeed, are the Scriptures a lifeless set of rules and ordinances, although such are contained there. If men are to "*live by every word of God*" (Lk 4:4), something more than directions for daily living must be found there. Our text provides an example of this circumstance. It reasons with us concerning the manner of the Kingdom. In salvation, men and women are brought into accord with the Living God. They are not simply brought into a place of safety where they remain fundamentally the same, except with their sins forgiven. I am afraid this idea has been embraced by more people than we dare to estimate. Believers are all too often addressed as though they were not really reconciled to God, and were not actually participating in the Divine nature (2 Pet 1:4). You will notice a total absence of this kind of procedure in the Apostolic writings. Even if people were in a state of spiritual retrogression, they were addressed as saints of God with access to all that was required for their recovery. The Thessalonians were in a state of growth. They had maintained both faith and love while pressed on every side. Our text will urge them to extended effort in spiritual life.

EXHORTING TO ABOUND MORE AND MORE

"^{4:1a} *Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more . . .*" This is a continuation of the thought concluding the third chapter. In it, the Spirit reasons more extensively with the Thessalonians concerning the reasonableness of being ready for the coming of the Lord Jesus with all His saints. Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, knows that all of life has been lived in futility if we are not prepared to meet the Lord. Consequently, he reasons with the brethren concerning that readiness- something that is rarely heard in our time.

FINALLY. The KJV reads "*Furthermore,*" showing Paul is elaborating on being ready to stand before the glorified Christ. The idea is this: "*it only remains for me to say this,*" or "*in view of the imminent coming of Jesus, here is what must be said.*" It is as though the Spirit had moved them into a special room of thought. Now that they are there, what is said will make a lot of sense to them. It will appear to be as reasonable as it really is. Test for yourself and see if this is not the truth. While you are pondering the return of Jesus with all of His saints, the words that follow carry much weight, and their truth becomes more evident.

URGE AND EXHORT. Other versions read "*beseech . . . and exhort,*" ^{KJV} "*we request and exhort you,*" ^{NASB} "*ask you and urge you,*" ^{NIV} "*beg and exhort you,*" ^{DARBYS} "*request you and call upon you,*" ^{YLT} and "*earnestly ask and exhort you.*" ^{NAB} Here again the nature of the heavenly kingdom is revealed. Although the highest and most authoritative office in the church is that of Apostle (1 Cor 12:28), yet that office is not executed in the spirit of a boss, like the lords of the Gentiles. There is a spirit of loving service that must pervade all that is done in the name of the Lord. Jesus Himself set the tone: "*Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many*" (Matt 20:25-28). Within the framework of genuine ministry, urging and exhorting (as compared with demanding) make perfect sense. To "**urge**" means to entreat, beg, and make a strong appeal to. The word has a sense of interrogation in it, as though he said, "*Will you not give heed to what I say?*" The word "**exhort**" means to plead, implore, and to call for action. It is the same as saying, "*Be zealous and do what I am pleading for you to do.*"

IN THE LORD JESUS. The admonition set before them only makes sense "*in the Lord Jesus.*" Further, it is Jesus that is prompting Paul to give the exhortation. Additionally, life in Christ demands that this be said. To say something "*in the Lord Jesus*" is to speak while in fellowship with Him, and in harmony with the purpose He is fulfilling. It is the opposite of speaking "*in the flesh,*" or according to the "*wisdom of this world.*"

ABOUND MORE AND MORE. Other versions read, "excel still more," ^{NASB} "do this more and more," ^{NIV} "abound still more," ^{DARBYS} and "but make more progress still." ^{NJB} The very nature and demands of spiritual life are captured in these words. Stagnation and retrogression have no place in salvation. The very nature of salvation excludes them. If you have been in Christ for any length of time, you know this is virtually unknown to professed believers. Growth, particularly aggressive and consistent growth, can hardly be found at all. Satan has foisted off on the contemporary church the notion that holding to a position, or embracing a set of rules, or a lifeless creed, is sufficient. But it is not. A believer who is not growing cannot hope to survive in a society that is waxing "worse and worse" (2 Tim 3:13). If there are influences among us that "increase unto more ungodliness" (2 Tim 2:16), there must be a corresponding increase of godliness among believers to effectively resist those influences.

The word "abound" refers to unending increase. There is no roof on the house of abounding, and no ultimate end to it. It is a trait that matches the nature of Christ's Kingdom: "Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be **no end**" (Isa 9:7). That is why the Spirit employs the phrase "more and more." The saints are to abound "more and more in knowledge and all judgment" (Phil 1:9). In brotherly love, they are to "increase more and more" (1 Thess 4:10). Through the power of the Holy spirit, we can "abound in hope" (Rom 15:13). Consolations "abound by Christ" (2 Cor 1:5). There is even provision to "abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love" (2 Cor 8:7). The third chapter of First Thessalonians included a prayer that God would make us "to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men" (1 Thess 3:12). Peter admonished us to add to our faith virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity. He affirmed those graces were to "abound" in us (2 Pet 1:5-8). Believers are admonished to be "always abounding in the work of the Lord" (1 Cor 15:58). They are reminded to "abound" in thanksgiving (Col 2:7). The absence of this quality among the churches is cause for great concern. Nothing about God's great salvation encourages a stay-as-you-are manner of life, or degree of perception. We must "go on" (Heb 6:1).

THE OBLIGATION TO WALK AND PLEASE GOD

"^{4:1b} . . . just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God." Other versions read, "we instructed you how to live in order to please God," ^{NIV} "you learned from us how you ought to live and to please God," ^{NRSV} "we made clear to you what sort of behavior is pleasing to God," ^{BBE} and "live in a way that pleases God, as we have taught you." ^{NLT} This is an essential view of abounding "more and more."

WALK. Here is an aspect of "teaching them to observe all things" (Matt 28:19) that is rarely heard in our time. There is a vast difference between saying, "Have I done what I should do?" and "Have I pleased my Lord?" Our "walk" involves at least three things. **First**, it refers to the **manner** in which we live. What motivates us, and what are we trying to accomplish? What **kind** of life do we live? Does it reflect a godly persuasion, or one that is of the world? **Second**, it has to do with the **direction** of our lives. Where are we headed in what we do? Are we looking toward self-satisfaction or dwelling forever in the house of the Lord? **Third**, walking implies movement-advancing toward an ultimate end. All men are either advancing to heaven or hell, salvation or condemnation. Everyone is moving forward or backward, growing in Christ or retrogressing in the flesh.

When we "walk," we are moving about in the realm in which we have chosen to live. We can "walk in the light" (1 John 1:7), "walk in the Spirit" (Gal 5:16,25), "walk in the steps of" faith (Rom 4:12), or "walk in the night" or "darkness" (John 8:12; 11:10). Our "walk" involves our thoughts, purposes, words, and deeds. It includes our perceived reason for living, and determining what is to be accomplished by our lives. Some are noted for "walking after their own lusts" (2 Pet 3:3; Jude 16), while others are "walking in the truth" (2 John 4). How are men to "walk," or live? What is it that should characterize their lives?

PLEASE GOD. The immediate aim of our lives is to "please God." I will tell you that countless church members never have a single thought like this. They do not even know that God can be "pleased" by the conduct of His people. To them, life is simply keeping a set of rules and trying to avoid being condemned or going to hell. Anyone with even a modicum of tenderheartedness will be jolted by the question, "Are you pleasing God?" Or, "Is God pleased with the way in which you are living?"

This is an elaboration of abounding "more and more." God is not pleased by a "less-and-less" life. Faith will confirm that to your heart. No believer can afford to go backward. God has spoken to this issue, and we do well to hear what He says. "But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him" ^{NIV} (Heb 10:38). We are further reminded, "they that are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom

8:8).

One of notables of our race was Enoch, the "*seventh generation from Adam*." As you know, he was translated, or taken up from this world, not experiencing death. Before he was taken, the Word tells us "*he had this testimony, that he pleased God*" (Heb 11:5). He walked in a godly manner during a time when it was not popular to be godly. In fact, in Enoch's day, the world was drawing close to a time when God was going to destroy it with the Noachic flood, which Enoch prophesied (Jude 15). Pleasing God, therefore, does not require a favorable earthly environment. A person can please God in the middle of a cursed generation.

Children are reminded they can be "*well pleasing unto the Lord*" (Col 3:20). Those who do good, using their resources for the glory of God, are told "*with such sacrifices God is well pleased*" (Heb 13:16). There is even such a thing as walking "*worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing*" (Col 1:10). The sensitive soul, we are apprized, will pursue "*how he may please the Lord*" (1 Cor 7:32). One of the marks of the ungodly is that they "*please not God*" (1 Thess 2:15). The person, however, who has been called into the good fight of faith, refuses to entangle himself with "*the affairs of this life*," in order that he may "*please Him who has chosen him to be a good soldier*" (2 Tim 2:4).

At the root of our lives, faith is the appointed means of walking "*to please God*." We are solemnly told, "*for without faith, it is impossible to please God, for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him*" (Heb 11:6). A life that is pleasing to God, therefore, is lived in faith. It is a life of trust in the Lord, persuaded of His presence and power. A life that is lived in a diligent quest for God, and in anxious anticipation of receiving a reward from Him, is a life that pleases Him. The ultimate approval for such a person is hearing the Lord Himself say, "*Well done, good and faithful servant*" (Matt 25:21). Receiving "*praise from Him*" becomes ones driving compulsion (1 Cor 3:5).

Faithful preachers and teachers are to impress this upon the hearts of their hearers: **to walk and to please God!** All of the spiritual resources provided to us are in order to the accomplishment of this objective. The flesh, the world, and the devil, seek to turn us from this.

THERE ARE COMMANDMENTS TO BE GIVEN

"² . . . *for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus*." Other versions read, "*For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus*,"^{NASB} "*For ye know what charge we gave you through the Lord Jesus*,"^{ASV} and "*For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus*."^{NIV} This verse provides a further reason to abound more and more, and to please God in our manner of life. The "*commandments*" given to the Thessalonians were in perfect agreement with this exhortation. In other words, from the very beginning of their life in Christ, they were taught things that urged a growing and abounding life that brought good pleasure to God Himself.

NOT A LIST OF RULES. The "*commandments*" to which the Spirit refers are not like those which were uttered from Sinai (Ex 24:12; 34:28). To be sure, they are no less commandments than those which thundered upon the ears of wayward Israel. However, they are commandments of another order. Israel heard commands that revealed their alienation from God. They chaffed against their spirits, for their hearts were corrupt, and the laws they heard had not been written upon them.

It is quite different for those who are in Christ Jesus. The laws of God have been written upon their hearts and put into their minds (Heb 10:16). There is an accord between the people of God and the commands of God. When early Gentiles turned to the Lord, the Apostles and elders were directed to send them letters concerning their conduct. They listed only four commandments to be kept: "*abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood*." They added, "*if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well*" (Acts 15:20,29). You can only imagine what kind of list would be developed by the zealots of our time!

Why didn't they provide more commandments? Why not tell them how and when to worship, how to select elders, and what type of customs they should observe in their gatherings? It is not that these things were never addressed in the Apostolic writings, but they were never at the core of their teaching. **New spiritual life cannot be furthered by extensive rules.** That is simply not the manner of the Kingdom. Mind you, the government of Jesus is not one without laws or rules. God forbid that anyone should arrive at such a notion! We have not been freed from sin to do as the ancient Israelites, everyone doing "*what was right in his own eyes*" (Judges 17:6; 21:25). In fact, some specific moral direction follows (vs 3-7).

The "*commandments*" to which Paul refers relate to walking and pleasing God. Some examples of such

commandments will suffice to clarify this marvelous truth. It will be very apparent how these instructions differ from those issued at Sinai. "*Present your bodies a living sacrifice*" (Rom 12:1). "*Let love be without dissimulation*" (Rom 12:9). "*Put on the armor of light*" (Rom 13:12). "*Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh*" (Rom 13:14). "*Let no one seek his own, but each other's welfare*" (1 Cor 10:24). "*Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free*" (Gal 5:1). "*Walk in the Spirit*" (Gal 5:16). "*Walk worthy of the calling with which you have been called*" (Eph 4:1). "*Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth*" (Eph 4:29). "*Therefore, be imitators of God as dear children*" (Eph 5:1). "*Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*" (Phil 2:12). "*Let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus*" (Phil 2:5). "*Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth*" (Col 3:2). "*Go on to perfection*" (Heb 6:1). To be sure, there are commandments against stealing (Eph 4:28), lying (Col 3:9), immorality (1 Thess 4:3), and conduct in the assembly (1 Cor 14:40). But these do not represent the thrust of God's word to believers.

What is the difference in the general tone of the commandments to saints? **They all are areas in which progress can be made**-where they can "*abound more and more*." Men do not grow in **abstaining** from fornication. Advancement is not made in **not** stealing or lying. None of these things are allowed in any measure. The commandments concerning them are not an admonition to steal less, lie less, or be less immoral. They are a call to stop such involvements altogether. But the primary commandments deal with areas of spiritual life where progress and increase are unending. They deal with a level of life where there is no pinnacle or terminal point. Commandments to "*watch*," "*stand firm*," and "*be strong*" cannot be fulfilled at a given point in time. "*Believing*" and "*rejoicing in hope*" do not refer to accomplishments reached and put to the side (1 Pet 1:8). These are all areas where growth continues as long as we are in this world. True preaching and teaching will leave people with a sense of the necessity of abounding more and more, moving closer, and being more well pleasing to the Lord. Where these impressions are not found, either the Gospel has not been heard, or hearts have been made hard through the deceitfulness of sin. Purported spiritual life that does not grow and advance is really no life at all!

LESSON #20

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

"^{4:3} *For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication:*
⁴ *That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor;* ⁵ *Not
in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God.*" ^{KJV} (1

Thessalonians 4:1-2)

INTRODUCTION

The passage before us is a particularly relevant one for our time. It deals with the heavenly view of morality, and it is essential that the body of Christ be well acquainted with it. Our society has returned to the view of morality held by the ancient Greeks, who deified their lusts, exalting self-gratification and pleasure. Immorality is by no means confined to the non-Christian world. It has entered into the church, and is now a major problem. Often, it is treated as though it was a mere weakness. There are even recovery ministries that major on restoring "fallen leaders," who have not heeded our text. One of the primary problem areas among young people is immorality - even in many churches. None of these situations are innocent, and they are not to be treated as though they were in any way tolerable. When immorality breaks out among those wearing the name of Jesus, decisive action is to be taken. In Scripture, such outward sins rank second only to idolatry. In a society that is driven by fleshly lusts, this text becomes as critical today as it was to the Thessalonians. It provides us with the only proper view of our bodies, and urges us to learn how to possess them in such a manner as will bring glory to God and purity to our own lives.

THE WILL OF GOD SUCCINCTLY STATED

"^{4:3} *For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication.*"
The "*will of God*" is never regarded lightly or as optional in Scripture. Jesus said "*whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother*" (Mk 3:35). The Holy Spirit makes intercession for the saints "*according to the will of God*" (Rom 8:27). Through His death, Jesus delivered us "*from this present evil world, according to the will of God*" (Gal 1:4). The "*will of God*" is something believers are to do "*from the heart*" (Eph 6:6; Col 4:12). The promise of God is said to be only for those who have "*done the will of God*" (Heb 10:36). When it comes to practicality, Peter contrasts the will of God with "*the lusts of men*" (1 Pet 4:2). John affirms, "*he who does the will of God abides forever*" (1 John 2:17). The "*will of God*" is His desire and purpose. His power and grace are devoted to the execution of His will. It is the only thing that is acceptable to Him, for only those who do His will shall "*enter into the Kingdom of heaven*" (Matt 7:21). When, Therefore, we speak of "*the will of God*," we are on holy ground. It is not to be considered some secret Divine determination that has no relevance for us.

SANCTIFICATION. Here is a word that is common in Scripture, yet uncommon in the professed church. Wherever it is mentioned in God's Word, it is always pivotal, central, and given great emphasis. There are three ways in which it is used. The first applies to a once-for-all transaction accomplished by Christ's death (1 Cor 1:30; 6:11; Heb 2:11; 10:10,14, 29; 13:12). The second refers to the work of the Holy Spirit, who through conviction and leading sets the believer apart from this world to be blessed by God (2 Thess 2:13; 1 Pet 1:2). Our text deals with the third use of the word, which focuses on the believer's personal and perceptive involvement in the "*good and acceptable and perfect will of God*" (Rom 12:2). It is in perfect harmony with the other meanings of the word. Practical sanctification is bound upon those who have been sanctified by Christ's death, and the work of the Holy Spirit.

The word "*sanctification*" means holiness, or purity. It involves pure and upright behavior in those who have been set apart for God. The concept of sanctification was introduced on the night of Israel's exodus from Egypt: "*Sanctify unto me all the firstborn, whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and of beast: it is mine*" (Ex 13:2). In the Levitical, or ceremonial, law this was expanded. The altar, the laver, and all of the vessels associated with them were "*sanctified*," or set apart to God (Lev 8:11). The high priest was sanctified (Lev 8:12). The people were also required to sanctify themselves and be holy: "*Sanctify yourselves therefore, and be ye holy: for I am the LORD your God*" (Lev 20:7). Something sanctified is given to the Lord, and is not to be defiled with purely self interests. The altar could not be used for family cookouts. The laver could not be used for ordinary cleansing. The vessels used with these could not be utilized for personal purposes. They belonged to the Lord. The people were to keep themselves holy-separate from false gods and defiling influences. They belonged to the Lord. He had chosen them, delivered them, and provided for them. They were exclusively His.

FORNICATION. Thus, in our text, the will of God is related to moral purity-to not prostituting our body for fleshly gratification. God has provided marriage as a lawful means for such satisfaction. Outside of the bounds of

marriage, all bodily intimacy is "*fornication*." The solemn edict is, "***abstain from fornication***." This is to be done aggressively, as Paul exhorted the Corinthians: "***Flee fornication***"-run away from it! (1 Cor 6:18). To fail to do so is to allow the body to control us, failing to bring it into subjection (1 Cor 9:27).

The Spirit makes this quite clear. Fornication excludes one from the fellowship of believers. Saints are solemnly told to "*withdraw*" from anyone claiming identity with Jesus who is "*a fornicator*." In fact, they are not even to eat with such a person (1 Cor 5:9-11). The saints are to see to it that no fornicator rises among them (Heb 12:15-16). Such people will NOT inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:11). This is classed among the things of which it is said, "*they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God*" (Gal 5:19-21). It is "*not once*" to be named among the people of God (Eph 5:3).

There is, in my judgment, altogether too much laxness on this matter in the nominal church. While I know of no one who encourages such immoral involvements, it is countenanced under the guise of professed concern. Our concern must be found in turning people away from such transgression. To be sure, there is forgiveness for those who foolishly have stumbled past the light in order to gratify their lusts. When forgiven, Jesus will say to them what He said to the woman taken in the act of adultery: "*Neither do I condemn thee: go, and **sin no more***" (John 8:11). There is absolutely no room for laxness in this area. This is the "*will of God*," and our holiness and acceptance depends upon our abstinence.

EVERYONE SHOULD KNOW HOW

"^{4:4} ***That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor.***"

Here is something for every member of the body of Christ. None are excluded, old or young, male or female, bond or free. Further, this is not something to be accomplished by rote, or lifeless routine. Rules, no matter how masterfully they are constructed, will not be able to accomplish this Divine mandate. If the Ten Commandments, written by the finger of God Himself, could not keep people from fornication (Num 25:1-9; 1 Cor 10:8, how much less will rules concocted by fallen men do so! That, of course, is one of the primary points of Colossians 2:20-23): **law-any law--cannot diminish the power of lust.**

SHOULD KNOW. The word "*know*" does not refer to an intellectual recollection of a requirement. The word, taken from **eivde.na**, means to understand, perceive, and be very sure of. It is something that is recognized, and about which there is no doubt whatsoever. Each believer is responsible for seeing the sense of this, and going about to accomplish it. God has made every provision for such understanding. The Law provides the Divine mandate against immorality. Grace will teach us to deny such lusts (Tit 2:11-12). The Holy Spirit will lead us in putting to death such sinful inclinations (Rom 8:13). The Apostles' doctrine provides extensive reasoning on the matter. **(1)** The body is not for fornication, but for the Lord. **(2)** Our bodies are the members of Christ. **(3)** To commit fornication is prostitution, an act whereby a person becomes one with another. **(4)** A fornicator has sinned against his/her own body. **(5)** Our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. **(6)** We have been bought with a price. **(7)** We are to glorify God in our bodies (1 Cor 6:13-19). There is no room for ignorance on this matter. Professed Christians who commit fornication have quenched and grieved the Spirit, hardened their hearts, stopped their ears to the teaching of grace, made a place for the devil, and removed the armor of God. They are not innocent.

POSSESSING OUR VESSEL. Our bodies are vessels - "*earthen vessels*" (2 Cor 4:7). David knew this of old time when he and a band of men were in flight from Saul. Coming in to Ahimelech the priest, David sought bread for his band. When told only the holy bread was available, David answered, "*Of a truth women have been kept from us about these three days, since I came out, and **the vessels of the young men are holy***" (1 Sam 21:5). The NIV, in reference to the word "*vessels*," or "things," adds the footnote, "*bodies*."

A "*vessel*" is an apparatus or implement to be used, in this case, for honorable purposes. While there are certain lusts and desires inherent in the body, its chief purpose is not to carry out those wayward appetites. Rather, we are admonished, "*glorify God in your body*" (1 Cor 6:19). Although they are the weakest and most vulnerable part of our constitution, the Spirit admonishes us, "*present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship*"^{NASB} (Rom 12:1). He goes on to say this is involved in NOT being conformed to this world, in order that we might "*be able to test and approve what God's will is--His good, pleasing and perfect will*"^{NIV} (Rom 12:2).

Make no mistake about this, if we do not "*possess*" our vessels, or "*keep under*" our bodies, bringing them into subjection (1 Cor 9:27), they will manage us, eventually leading us into the lake of fire. No person who has failed to possess his vessel had advanced in the Kingdom. In fact, such people are actually closer to the devil and the world than they are to God and to heaven. This is something we are to "**LEARN**,"^{NIV} acquiring spiritual expertise in this intensely personal part of our makeup.

SANCTIFICATION AND HONOR. Other translations say "*holy and honorable*," ^{NIV} "*holiness and honor*," ^{NRSV} While **holiness** is essentially a spiritual trait, it does not exclude our bodies. It is a contradiction to imagine that our spirits can reflect the glory of God while our bodies reflect the nature of the world. **Our bodies should not detract from our profession!** A vessel that is sanctified, or holy, will be "*useful for the Master, prepared for every good work*" (2 Tim 2:20-21). Many people are not used by God simply because they have not learned to possess their body in holiness and purity. Knowing our body is the "*temple of the Holy Spirit*" (1 Cor 6:19) is reason enough to keep it from being defiled by sin. In addition to fornication, James reminds us that the tongue can defile "*the whole body*" (James 3:6).

Possessing our bodies in "**honor**" is using them for the highest and most noble purposes. If God has purchased our bodies (1 Cor 6:19), and they are "*members of Christ*" (1 Cor 6:15), the honorable use for them is employment by the King of kings. This involves God being glorified by what we do with our bodies. Jesus put it this way, "*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven*" (Matt 5:16). And how is it that men can "*see your good works?*" It is by beholding the activities of your body, for they have no other means of beholding your real person.

LESSON #21

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

^{4:6} *That no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified.* ⁷ *For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness.* ⁸ *Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit.* ^{NKJV} (1 Thessalonians 4:6-8)

INTRODUCTION

The thrust of the passage before us is the sanctification of the believer. This is personal sanctification, or holiness, whereby the individual becomes "an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work" ^{NIV} (2 Tim 2:21). God is working in the whole world, which is "full of His glory" (Isa 6:3). The question is not whether or not God WILL work, but through whom He CAN work. From this point of view, the body of Christ is the vehicle through whom the Savior works. That is why it is called "the fulness of Him that filleth all in all" (Eph 1:23). Here is where He pours forth His Spirit, His nature, and His power. Things related to God's "eternal purpose" are accomplished by Jesus working through his people. However, this working is not accomplished independently of their involvement, or through a mere process of spiritual automation. It is not achieved by sudden and irrational compulsions that are mysterious and overpowering. Rather, it takes place within the framework of the fellowship of Christ, into which we have been called (1 Cor 1:9). This "fellowship" involves cleansing ourselves of all filthiness and flesh and spirit, and perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord (2 Cor 7:1).

GOING BEYOND AND DEFRAUDING YOUR BROTHER

^{4:6} *That no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified.* Holiness involves selflessness, and a refusal to exploit the people of God. This text has particularly to do with the matter under discussion: abstaining from fornication, and learning how to possess our vessel in sanctification and honor. It is not, however, confined to acts of immorality that flow from "concupiscence," or base and aggressive lusts.

TAKING ADVANTAGE. Other versions read "go beyond," ^{KJV} "transgress," ^{NASB} "overreach," ^{DUOAY-RHEIMS} and "overstepping the rights." ^{DARBY} Taking advantage is going beyond what is proper, and crossing over a line God has drawn. It is being so zealous to satisfy self that the rights of another are trampled under foot. The picture is of one person who is stronger than another overriding them, and taking advantage of them. In the matter of "concupiscence" (verse 5), it is like David taking Uriah's wife to himself. Having lusted after her, when he had inquired about Bathsheba, David was told she was "the wife of Uriah the Hittite." This was like a moral wall that stood between David and his desire. Yet, he went "beyond," going over that wall, using his authority as king to advantage himself without regard to Uriah. That is why this sin is called "the matter of Uriah the Hittite" (1 Kgs 15:5). By this, the Spirit means this was a situation in which the rights of Uriah were violated, and he was taken advantage of.

In a day when adultery is altogether too common in the professed church, it is good to get our bearings about such sin. When, for example, a man is drawn to the wife of another, particularly a brother, and becomes involved with her, he has taken advantage of his brother. As our text will affirm, this is not a light matter.

DEFRAUD HIS BROTHER. To "defraud" a brother is to exploit, cheat, and increase material possessions at the expense of a child of God. The law spoke of defrauding in this way, "You shall not cheat your neighbor, nor rob him. The wages of him who is hired shall not remain with you all night until morning" (Lev 19:13). When replying to the young man who inquired about eternal life, Jesus referred to "the commandments." Among them He sited "Defraud not" (Mk 10:19). I understand this to refer to the text above (Leviticus 19:13).

There is a twofold meaning to "defraud." The first is to cheat or rob, unlawfully and selfishly, taking something from another. The second is withholding the rights of another. An example of this is a husband or wife withholding marital rights from the other (1 Cor 7:5).

A self-centered society thinks nothing of going beyond and defrauding others. Many a person has gained advantages at the expense of others. It is as though they robbed and cheated others in order gain and prosper. This kind of conduct is never in order, but it is particularly wrong among those who wear the name of Jesus. The flesh is bent on pleasing self,

without regard to others. However, it must not be given any place among the saints.

One way to ensure transgressing against and defrauding brethren does **not** take place, is to "*know no man after the flesh*" (2 Cor 5:16), particularly the people of God. To the best of our ability, we must seek to know one another **in Christ**, nurturing and caring for the "*new man*." If we fail to do this, we are giving the advantage to the flesh, which loves to exploit and take advantage of others. Our aim is to keep the "*old man*" upon the cross!

THE LORD IS THE AVENGER. Exploitation of the people of God is strictly forbidden. But it is more than a mere law. When one takes undue advantage of the saints, the Lord God will take up their case. Such incidents will not be forgotten. The saints themselves may be treated like lambs for the slaughter. They will hold their peace like Jesus, and may even knowingly allow themselves to be defrauded (1 Cor 6:7). Yet, "*the Lord is the avenger of all such*" as exploit His people. The consideration of this will keep us from seeking purely selfish interests. Remember how the Lord took up the cause of Abel, whose blood cried out **to Him** from the ground (Gen 4:10-12). He also took up the cause of Uriah against David (2 Sam 12:9-12). God has declared, "*To me belongeth vengeance, and recompense*" (Deut 32:35). Confirming this is not a trait confined to the period of the Old Covenant, the Apostles affirm it is still in place (Rom 12:19; Heb 10:30).

You may recall the souls who were "*under the altar*," who cried out for their blood to be avenged (Rev 6:10). They were told to "*rest for a little season*" until other of their brethren would be martyred (Rev 6:11). However, and make no mistake about this, their blood will be avenged! God is ever mindful of His people, and will correct all injustices against them.

Let the knowledge of this be a deterrent against any temptation to exploit the people of God. Also, it will remove any thought of avenging ourselves, or coming to our own defense. God will correct all injustices. He does not need our assistance in the matter.

CALLED TO HOLINESS

"^{4:7} ***For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness.***" Not only are we to refrain from exploiting the brethren because God will avenge them, the life to which God has called us forbids such activity. The statement before us confirms the Spirit is elaborating on the grievous sin of concupiscence, or base moral lusts. It is as though this was the depth of corrupting self interests. However, as this verse affirms, our calling extends further than mere external piety, although that is an absolute essentiality.

UNCLEANNES. Other versions read "*to impurity*," ^{NASB}, "*to be impure*," ^{NIV} and "*to be immoral*." ^{NJB} The concept "*uncleanness*," or "*impurity*," is foreign to our culture. Countless people do not consider that sin makes a person unclean in God's sight. The word "*unclean*" is found 194 times in Scripture, and "*uncleanness*" 40 times. The word "*unclean*" means worthless, something that is waste, and indecent for men and women. The particular emphasis in our text is that "*uncleanness*" is something God will NOT accept, and to which He never draws a person. It is a work of the flesh, which excludes men from the kingdom of God (Gal 5:19-21). It is "*not once*" to be named among the saints (Eph 5:3). "*Uncleanness*" is also a part of our natural makeup, which is to be "*put to death*" (Col 3:5).

The concept of uncleanness was developed under the Law, and that with considerable emphasis. Something that was itself "*unclean*" made the person who touched or consumed it "*unclean*." Under the Law, if a person touched anything "*unclean*," he himself became "*unclean*." The first articulation of this is in Leviticus 5:2. "*If a person touches any unclean thing, whether it is the carcass of an unclean beast, or the carcass of unclean livestock, or the carcass of unclean creeping things, and he is unaware of it, he also shall be unclean and guilty.*" An unclean person was to be "*cut off from his people*" (Lev 7:21). The eleventh chapter of Leviticus mentions "*unclean*" no less than thirty-two times. First, the Lord identified what was "*unclean*," then the admonition was made to abstain from it. The reason for abstinence was that the individual became unacceptable to God and man when touching the unclean. The prophet Haggai revealed that uncleanness is transmitted to the individual when something unclean is touched, while holiness cannot be transmitted in that manner (Hag 2:13-14).

Men may be tempted to think that being sorry for transgression and uncleanness is sufficient, but it is not. There must be a washing, or a cleansing, from sin. That is the glorious provision of the New Covenant. Initially, we are "*washed*" (Acts 22:16; 1 Cor 6:11). But it does not and cannot stop there. Continual cleansing must take place, and is thereby provided in Christ Jesus. As it is written, "*But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin . . . If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*" (1 John 1:7,9). It is imperative that every believer quickly avail themselves of this cleansing

whenever it is needed. To be "*unclean*" has eternal ramifications.

Sin, which is essentially being self-centered, contaminates the individuals, rendering them unacceptable to God and unsuitable for Divine service. That is why God has not called us to be unclean, or defiled. He never leads a person into defilement. He does not call anyone into a self-indulgent life. Solemnly we are told, "*Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you*" (2 Cor 6:17).

HOLINESS. Other versions read "*sanctification*," ^{NASB} and "*a holy life*." ^{NIV} **Holiness involves two things: consecration and purity.** It is more than being without visible or outward sin. It is being completely devoted to God. Conversely, being wholly devoted to God necessarily results in being without moral taint—living a pure life. The call of God is, "*But as He which hath called you is holy, so **be ye holy** in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, **Be ye holy; for I am holy***" (1 Pet 1:15-16). The taint of earth is not to be upon the children of God! Those who labor for Him to retrieve the lost and perishing are admonished to do so "*hating even the garment spotted by the flesh*," or "*the clothing stained by corrupted flesh*" ^{NIV} (Jude 23). In this text, "*holiness*" particularly emphasizes moral chastity, though it is not confined to it. There is an internal aspect to holiness as well as an external one.

In its broadest sense, holiness is the fruit, or result, of being made "*free from sin, and become servants to God*" (Rom 6:22). It is a state to be perfected "*out of reverence for God*," and is accomplished by "*cleansing*" ourselves of "*all filthiness of flesh and spirit*" (2 Cor 7:1). From another view, "*holiness*" is a part of the "*new man*" which we are to "*put on*," making him the dominant part of our persons (Eph 4:24). "*Without holiness*," we are apprized, "*no man shall see the Lord*" (Heb 12:14). The reason for this is quite simple: God has called us to holiness. That was the objective of His summons. Therefore, to allow uncleanness into our lives is the result of resisting that call, quenching the Spirit, and refusing to hear Him.

WHEN MEN DESPISE GOD

"⁸ *Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit.*" Other versions read, "*He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit*," ^{KJV} "*he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you*," ^{NASB} "*he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit*," ^{NIV} and "*Anyone who refuses to live by these rules is not disobeying human rules but is rejecting God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.*" ^{NLT} The weight of these words is obvious. This is not a mere philosophizing, or holding out a goal that is a mere ideal, and does not have to be met.

HE WHO REJECTS. The person who "*rejects this*" is the one who refuses to live a holy life. This is the one who obstinately and determinedly lives according to the flesh. Such perceive this world to be the primary one, and their desires as preeminent. The word translated "*despise*" ^{KJV} or "*reject*," means to cast something from us as contemptible and unworthy of our attention. It is illustrated in the word of Paul to the rejecting Jews in Antioch of Pisidia: "*seeing ye **put it from you**, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life*" (Acts 13:46). The idea is that of thrusting it away in disgust and utter disregard of its value. Rejecting, in our text, is viewing what as been said as though it were, at the very best, optional. It is ignored as though it was the private opinion of a mere man. The danger of rejecting is seen in profane Esau. It is said of him, "*For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected*" (Heb 12:17). Those who reject the Word of the Lord will be themselves rejected by God (Heb 6:8).

DOES NOT REJECT MAN. The Word of the Lord may be spoken by men, but it is not to be regarded or originating with them. Earlier, the Thessalonians had been commended for the manner in which they received the Gospel: "*when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it **not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God**, which also effectively works in you who believe*" (1 Thess 2:13). God takes the rejection of His Word personally. It is important to note that the Word of God effectively works only in those who receive it. Rejecting it is always serious. There is no guarantee in Scripture that those who reject His Word can recover from that rejection. That does not mean such are hopeless. It does mean care must be taken not to be in that category.

This statement relieves proclaimers of responsibility for the reaction of people to the preached Word. If we deliver the truth, and men spurn it, we must not take the matter personally, allowing the entrance of fleshly thoughts. Such have not rejected man, but God. That is the way it is. They are guilty of pushing God's message from them, choosing to live in an unclean rather than a holy manner. Just as surely as holiness involves choice and deliberation, so uncleanness and

unholiness is preceded by choosing. No person falls into holiness inadvertently, and no person becomes immoral or unclean accidentally.

THE HOLY SPIRIT. The KJV and NKJV reads, "*also given us His Holy Spirit.*" Later versions read "*who gives His Holy Spirit to you.*" In the case of the first reading, some have surmised that Paul is referring to his own inspiration, as though he said, "God has inspired me to say this, and if you reject what I say, you have really rejected the One who inspired me." The "*us*," in this case, would be inspired writers. This is certainly true. However, I do not believe it is the intent of the passage.

Here, the "*us*" refers to those who are in Christ Jesus, all of whom have been given the Holy Spirit. This precise language is used elsewhere in reference to the Holy Spirit: namely that He has been given to all believers (Rom 5:5; 2 Tim 1:14; Tit 3:5-6; 1 John 3:24; 4:13). In this case, the meaning of the text is this. God has given you the Holy Spirit to teach and lead you. Through Him, you can be taught of all things, particularly regarding the matter of holiness. Because of Him, you are able to distinguish what is clean and what is unclean. Through Him you are also led to mortify the deeds of the body. To refuse to be holy, therefore, involves a quenching and grieving of the Holy Spirit (Eph 4:30; 1 Thess 5:19). The Holy Spirit is thus resisted (Acts 7:51).

Refusing to give heed to the admonition to be holy involves more than rejecting the person who spoke the word. It involves more than repudiating the Scripture. It is a rejection of God Himself who sent His word to us, and has given us His Holy Spirit to enable it to be fulfilled in us. You see then what a serious matter it is to refuse to be holy, and insist upon being unclean. God has thereby been rejected. His Word has been despised. His messengers have been held in disdain, and the Holy Spirit resisted, quenched, and grieved. May there be a renewal of moral and spiritual purity among those who wear the name of Jesus.

LESSON #22

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

^{4:9} ***But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.*** KJV (1 Thessalonians 4:9)

INTRODUCTION

Life in Christ Jesus involves intensely personal identity with God. It is not, as some have suggested, a mere "way of life," or living according to a different set of rules. While this is a common perception, it is thoroughly false. The Old Covenant was one of rules and procedures. It was designed for a people who did not think the thoughts of God, and in whose hearts His law was not written. God's thoughts were not precious to them (Psa 139:17) because their hearts were stony. The situation in Christ, however, is quite different. In Him we receive a *"new heart and a new spirit"* (Ezek 18:31). His laws are written upon our hearts and put into our minds (Heb 8:10; 10:16). There is an accord with God that cannot be explained in the flesh. We have been *"joined to the Lord,"* and are *"one spirit"* with Him (1 Cor 6:17). That circumstance has made us teachable to God. He Himself can now instruct us from within. In fact, that is the way in which He leads us. The prophet Isaiah spoke of this when he wrote, *"Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, 'This is the way, walk in it,' whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left"* ^{NKJV} (Isa 30:21). Our text provides an excellent example of the fulfillment of this promise. It opens the door of hope to every tender heart who desires to do the will of God.

CONCERNING BROTHERLY LOVE

^{4:9a} ***But as touching brotherly love . . .*** "Brotherly love is a branch on the tree of sanctification. Holiness, or learning how to possess our vessels in sanctification and honor, has already been mentioned (4:3-4). In that matter we learn to avoid contamination and keep ourselves pure. However, it is not enough to avoid moral and spiritual defilement. Our lives in Christ includes participation in holy activity as well as evading corruption.

A SPECIAL LOVE. Here is a love that is distinct from our love for God, although it is of the same order or kind. It is also superior to all human passion or attraction. *"Brotherly love"* is one of the primary evidences of spiritual life. It includes kindness, affection, and a preference for one another (Rom 12:10). It is also a virtue that has its beginning when we are born again, and is to *"continue"* (Heb 13:1). It is never viewed as an option or luxury.

Brotherly love accents our relationship to Christ even more than our relationship to one another. Believers are not brethren because they are merely associated with one another, but because they have the same Father and the same elder Brother. That is why Jesus is not ashamed to call us *"brethren,"* *"For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father"* ^{NASB} (Heb 2:11). A preference for the people of God flows from faith's awareness that they are the *"sons"* and *"daughters"* of the *"Lord Almighty"* (2 Cor 6:18). As soon as that perception leaves men, they will view the saints from the standpoint of the flesh, regarding carnal, or outward, involvements as the primary ones.

NOT IN THE FLESH. It is not possible for true *"brotherly love"* to be expressed by the flesh, or through natural abilities. It is ever true, *"Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh"* (2 Cor 5:16). *"Brotherly love"* flows from possessing a *"common salvation"* (Jude 3) and a *"common faith"* (Tit 1:4). Common earthly interests are not the basis for *"brotherly love."* This is one reason for the use of the word *"charity"* in the KJV. It helps to distinguish this love from all others.

IS JOINED TO FAITH. *"Brotherly love"* is joined to faith, and is only as strong and consistent as that faith. Frequently the Holy Spirit joins faith and love. Earlier Paul said in this letter, *"Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings of your faith and charity"* (3:6). Later, he will make mention of the protective *"breastplate of faith and love"* (5:8). The Holy Spirit also affirms that the grace of God is *"exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus"* (1 Tim 1:14). Young Timothy was even told that the form, or standard, of *"sound words"* was to be held firmly *"in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus"* (2 Tim 1:13). One of the highest commendations that can be given to believers is that they possess both faith and love. *"Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you"* (Eph 1:15). And again, *"We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints"* (Col 1:4). What is more, the presence of faith and love confirms the blessing of God, for they both come from Him. As it is written, *"Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"* (Eph 6:23). In fact, *"brotherly love"* is accomplished

through faith. As it is written, "*Greet those who love us in the faith*" (Tit 3:15).

CONFIRMS WE ARE OF GOD. It should not surprise us that the love of the brethren is an evidence that we are accepted by God in Christ Jesus and through our faith. Jesus said, "*By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another*" (John 13:35). It reveals that we are "*of one heart and of one soul*" (Acts 4:32). Our primary motivations and spiritual interests are the same. The person who loves his brethren, by that very condition, proves he is abiding "*in the light*" (1 John 2:8). The Holy Spirit goes so far as to say that the absence of the love of the brethren confirms one is classed among "*the children of the devil*" (1 John 4:10-12). **There is no provision in Christ for the absence of this love.**

The reasoning of the Spirit is unusually strong on this matter. "*If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also*" (1 John 4:20-21). A love for God and a lack of love for His people cannot exist simultaneously. When a person loves the brethren, it is because he loves God. If he does not love the brethren, it is because he does **not** love God. You can see why the absence of the love of the brethren in our day is a matter of great concern.

WHEN THERE IS NO NEED TO WRITE

" 4:9b . . . *ye need not that I write unto you . . .* " Here is a marvelous commentary on the spiritual stature of the Thessalonian saints. It was not necessary for Paul to exhort or correct them in this area. He had to write to them about adversity and suffering (3:3-4). It was also necessary to write to them about purity and holiness (4:4-5). He even reminded them of the commandments he had given them on abstaining from fornication (4:2). But he did NOT have to write in this manner about their love for one another.

OTHERS HAD TO BE TOLD. When the love of the brethren was lacking, the Spirit never overlooked the matter. This is a critical area, and the Lord will not allow His children to remain uncertain about it. **The Romans** were told, "*Let love be without dissimulation [hypocrisy]*", and "*Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another*" (Rom 12:9-10). In extended reasoning the Spirit told them, "*Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law*" (13:10).

The Corinthians had to be told "*Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth*" (1 Cor 8:1). Because of their deficiencies in this area, an extensive explanation of love was required: "*Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things*" (13:4-7).

The Colossians were told, "*And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness*" (Col 3:14). This did not mean the Colossians were woefully deficient in love, for they were commended for the love they had "*to all saints*" (Col 1:4). Their circumstances, however, required some extra effort in this area.

Peter wrote to **dispersed believers** in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia; "*And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins*" (1 Pet 4:8). Their dispersion had apparently proved an occasion for the devil to inject a critical and intolerant spirit among them. They were to be on guard for his intrusions.

In his old age, **John wrote** extensively about love to his readers. "*We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death*" (1 John 3:14). And again, "*But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth*" (1 John 3:17-18). See how gentleness and urgency are combined in wisdom.

NO SUCH DETAILS REQUIRED FOR THE THESSALONIANS. However, no such details were required for the Thessalonians. Whatever deficiencies they may have had, they were not in the area of their regard for one another. Here was an area where they were especially strong—a realm where corrective and more extensive teaching was not required.

We learn from this that the people of God can excel in certain areas, and that they are commended for their achievements in those matters. There are many examples of this in the Scriptures. Jesus, for example, commended **the church at Ephesus** in certain things. They could not "*bear those who are evil.*" They also had "*tested those*

who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars." They persevered, endured, labored for His name, and did not become weary (Rev 2:2-3). On these matters, He did not give extensive teaching. They did not need to be taught further in those areas. However, they were lacking in a very critical field. They had "left" their "first love," pushing Jesus into the background, even though they were intensely busy in good things (2:4).

The church at Thyatira was also challenged by Jesus. He recognized their comely spiritual qualities, commending them for their "charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience," and their works, which, at the last, were "more than the first." He did not admonish them to work more, and endure more. However, He did have something against them, and on that He made extensive comments. "You allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols" (Rev 2:19-20). There are other examples, but this will suffice to make the point.

Sound teaching seeks to fortify the saints in their weak areas, as well as establish their faith by powerful proclamations and expositions of the Gospel itself. Teaching the saints is not training them to spout the party line, or espouse some favored theological view. Neither, indeed, is it to bring a mere external familiarity with the text of Scripture. The godly teacher must be alert to commend the saints where the working of God is perceived in them. He must also supply what may be lacking in their perception. This is what Paul called perfecting "that which is lacking in your faith" (1 Thess 3:10).

THE PRIVILEGE OF BEING TAUGHT BY GOD

"^{9c} . . . for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another." Some versions accent the fact that the Thessalonians **were being** taught by God to love one another: i.e., "**are taught by God.**" ^{KJV,NASB} Others emphasize that their progress **was owing** to Divine tutelage: i.e., "**have been taught by God.**" ^{NIV,NRSV} In both cases, the progress of the Thessalonians in the matter of loving the brethren REVEALED they had been taught by God.

DECLARED BY THE PROPHETS. The prophets declared a day when men would be "taught by God." "**He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths . . . And all thy children shall be taught of the LORD**" (Isa 2:3; 54:13; Micah 4:2). Jesus referred to this, affirming it was the reason why men came to Him. "It is written in the prophets, **And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me**" (John 6:45). David declared, "**Good and upright is the LORD: therefore will He teach sinners in the way. The meek will He guide in judgment: and the meek will He teach His way**" (Psa 25:8-9). This is the "knowledge of the Lord" which the prophets said would eventually cover the earth "as the waters cover the sea" (Isa 11:9; Hab 2:14).

A DISTINCTLY NEW COVENANT EXPERIENCE. Being taught by God is also involved in the writing of His laws upon our hearts and the putting of them into our minds (Heb 8:10; 10:16). This is, as affirmed in the eighth and tenth chapters of Hebrews, a uniquely New Covenant experience. The Lord's description of those under Law illustrates this point. Their fear of God was taught to them by men, not by God. "**Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near Me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor Me, but have removed their heart far from Me, and their fear toward Me is taught by the precept of men**" (Isa 29:13). In view of this, the Lord dried up the wells of human wisdom, dictating that they would not be sufficient to bring men to Himself. "**Therefore, behold, I will again do a marvelous work Among this people, A marvelous work and a wonder; For the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, And the understanding of their prudent men shall be hidden**" NKJV (Isa 29:14). The Spirit confirms this circumstance in First Corinthians (1:19-24; 3:19).

TAUGHT TO LOVE THE BRETHREN. Our text reveals the Thessalonians had been taught by God Himself to love one another. The teaching was so thorough and effective that no further word was required by this prince among the Apostles. Here was a case where an express command from God was not necessary to provoke the love of the brethren. This circumstance belies the postulate that saints can only do what they are commanded to do. **Here is a case where men did not love one another because God commanded them to do so, but because He TAUGHT them to do so!**

The people did not need some man to teach them HOW this was to be accomplished. This is the kind of teaching to which the Spirit referred in First John 2:20. "**But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things . . . But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him**" (1 John 2:20,27). Some have

imagined that "*the anointing*" is a mere feeling, or that it refers only to a supernatural empowerment to do something. Here, however, it refers to being taught something. It involves the ability to perceive, understand, and comprehend. This is something no man can do for another. Only God can do this!

And what is it that God taught these good brethren? It was **not** how to build a church, solve the problems of society, or gain the domestic advantage. God taught them **HOW** to love one another - how to **EFFECTIVELY** love one another. The fact that men have found this to be exceedingly difficult, confirms the necessity of Divine tutelage. The remarkable division that exists within the religious community declares the need for Divine instruction!

This is part of putting on the new man, something that Jesus teaches us to do. "*If indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him . . . that you put off . . . the old man . . . be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man*" ^{NKJV} (Eph 4:20-24). Let no person doubt the fact or effectiveness of God teaching men! The instruction is personal, and it alone yields what God requires. While **we** teach men "*to observe*" all that has been commanded (Matt 28:20), the **Living God** effectively teaches them **HOW** to do it.

Let it be clear that this teaching occurs within the confines of Divine fellowship (1 Cor 1:30; 1 John 1:3). As we live by faith and walk in the Spirit, we **WILL** be taught by God, and His teaching **WILL** be made known in our conduct - particularly in the matter of loving those He has put into Jesus, washing, sanctifying, and justifying them (1 Cor 6:11).

LESSON #23

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

" ^{4:10} . . . *and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more;* ¹¹ *that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you,* ¹² *that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing.*" ^{NKJV} (1 Thessalonians 4:10-12)

INTRODUCTION

In this text we are provided insight into the practicality of spiritual life. It is both public and private. Those in Christ are knit with one another, yet lead intensely personal lives in which they learn to trust in the Lord—a seeming contradiction. It is an indication of considerable advancement in the faith when this can be seen. Much of the religion of our time and place has been so institutionalized that it is no longer personal. Further, the affiliation with the group is largely formal, and is not driven by a love that is taught by God. We will learn from our text that those in Christ Jesus are extremely versatile, and capable of much more than they imagine. They can increase "*more and more*" in their strong points—areas where they have been personally taught by God. They can abound toward brethren in a large area—believers with whom they do not have regular contact. In a noisy and distracting world they can learn to be quiet. In covetous surroundings, they can work with their own hands to appropriate what is needful. In the midst of enemies, they can conduct themselves properly toward those on the outside. With the devil aligned against them, and enemies pressing hard upon them, they can "*lack nothing*." In all of this, the believer is granted a level of satisfaction and peace of which the world knows nothing.

LOVING AND INCREASING MORE AND MORE

" ^{4:10} *And indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more.*" This is an extension of the previous verse, in which it was declared that the Thessalonians were taught by God to love one another. This will declare the outcome of that instruction. It will also affirm that even when we are taught by God, we must be stirred up by exhortations to burst through the barrier of mediocrity, and move beyond the normal. The Kingdom of God is "*forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it*" by aggressively moving forward in the Spirit (Matt 11:12).

ALL THE BRETHREN. Other versions read, "*indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia,*" ^{NASB} and "*in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia.*" ^{NIV} Thessalonica was a city, Macedonia was a region. This was a large area to which the Lord had called Paul and those with him, to "*preach the Gospel unto them*" (Acts 16:9-10). Other cities in Macedonia included Philippi and Berea, and Thessalonica was its capital. Macedonia was one of the four vast kingdoms into which Alexander's empire was divided. It was a fairly large region—nearly 200 miles square. So when Paul said the Thessalonians practiced love toward all the brethren throughout Macedonia, he said quite a lot. That would be equivalent to saying we practiced the love of the brethren throughout a region extending North to Butler, MO, South to Fayetteville, AR, East to Springfield, MO, and West to Tulsa, OK. Even in a day of advanced technology, Internet, telephone, and rapid transportation, this is a staggering consideration. The very idea does not blend at all with the average concept of loving the people of God.

Among other things, this reveals the preference of the saints for kindred spirits, as well as an acquaintance with them. It did not mean they met regularly with these people, although I do not doubt they would have taken advantage of any opportunity to do so. They were aware, however, of any occasions to do good to the saints. Paul reminded the Corinthians that the "churches in Macedonia, "*in a great trial of affliction,*" welled up in deep generosity toward needy saints. Of them Paul wrote, "*For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints*" ^{NIV} (2 Cor 8:1-4). It is my understanding that the Thessalonians were among those liberal souls.

The "*all the brethren*" mentality is not at all common in our time. Sectarianism has robbed the body of Christ of much of this. That has introduced all manner of weaknesses and deficiencies within the church. There is no substitute for a fervent love for God's people.

WE URGE YOU. Mind you, the Apostle is speaking to a people who were already doing well—far above what one might consider "*normal*." Yet, because we are not living in a vacuum, and because Satan tempts the saints to relax their efforts, urging and exhortation are constantly required. Showing the strength of this word, other versions read "*we*

beseech you, "KJV *"we exhort you,"* RSV *"we entreat you,"* Duoay-Rheims *"we call upon you,"* YLT and *"we beg you."* NLT Here is an activity (beseeking, urging, exhorting) that has all but been removed by stilted religion. I feel myself to be deficient in this area, and am quite discontent with that circumstance. Urging is a sanctified activity in which the saints of God are pushed, so to speak, to higher levels. It is not an abusive activity, but is accompanied with a tender heart and a profound interest in the welfare of God's people. It is the kind of spirit evinced by Paul and Barnabas when they *"persuaded them to continue in the grace of God"* (Acts 13:43). Urging involves strong appeals to the hearts of men to be *"steadfast and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord"* (1 Cor 15:58). It is used of God to break through the crust of indifference that is caused by exposure to *"this present evil world"* (Gal 1:4).

INCREASE MORE AND MORE. There is no point in spiritual life where we "peak-out." In this world, as well as throughout eternity, we will never reach a point where the freshness of life, growth, and advancement, become obsolete. The *"more and more"* mentality can be experienced by believers today. It is the kind of growth involved in being changed *"from glory unto glory,"* going *"from strength unto strength,"* and moving *"from faith unto faith"* (2 Cor 3:18; Psa 84:7; Rom 1:17). Our love for the brethren is to be characterized by this trait: *"increase more and more."* While that involves deeds, it is not the point of the admonition. This is speaking of our heart's preference for the saints, desire for their welfare, and profound appreciation for them. Those who have such qualities will surely be the first to minister in the times of need. Such love will result in an abundant harvest for those increasing more and more. It is ever true, *"he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully"* (2 Cor 9:6). There are few areas where this is as evident than in the matter of loving the people of God.

A QUIET AND INDUSTRIOUS LIFE

"¹¹ *That you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you.*" Other versions read, *"to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business,"* NASB and *"aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs."* NRSV At first, this may appear to contradict the exhortation to increase more and more in the love of the brethren. In view of current "Christian" emphases, it also has a rather strange sound - at least to those who are not accustomed to living by faith.

ASPIRE. The KJV uses the word *"study,"* which emphasizes being eager, or earnest, to do something. Here is a commendable kingdom trait: **aspiring.** The word *"aspire"* means to strive earnestly, to be ambitious about something, and make it our aim, or goal. It infers there is progress that can be realized, and that we want to make it. The strength of aspiration, or ambition, is seen elsewhere in Scripture. *"Therefore also we have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him"* NASB (2 Cor 5:9). It is noble for believers to have spiritual ambitions, or godly aims. It involves applying ourselves to the specified area, and being eager to make some advancement in it. It will be interesting to behold the areas in which the Spirit urges us to have aspirations and strong ambitions.

A QUIET LIFE. This is a life characterized by peace. The individual is not running here and there, becoming involved in the matters of others. This is a life that does not cause disturbance for others. It is a life that is not disruptive, intrusive, or unsettling. Quietness involves being silent, living peaceably with our own families. It is the opposite of *"talebearing,"* *"whispering,"* and *"backbiting"* (Lev 19:6; Rom 1:29-30). This involves behaving ourselves so as not to cause disruption in our neighborhood or city. It is to *"lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty"* (1 Tim 2:2).

A *"quiet life"* is the result of having personal *"quietness."* Isaiah affirmed that *"quietness and assurance"* are the *"effect of righteousness"* (Isa 32:17). This is *"being still,"* and knowing that God IS God (Psa 46:10). In this condition, we realize the effects of receiving wisdom *"from above,"* which is *"first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated"* (James 3:17). Such individuals do not agitate those about them, but are *"peacemakers."*

At its root, quietness is an aspect of faith. In it, we trust in the Lord, and, as a result, the believer *"shall be in rest, and be quiet, and none shall make him afraid"* (Jer 30:10). It is still true, *"in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength"* (Isa 30:15). It is not enough to simply know these texts. It must be our **aspiration** for them to be fulfilled in us.

MINDING YOUR OWN BUSINESS. Each believer has a full plate with which to be occupied, without intruding into the affairs of others. While it is not popular to speak in this manner, the Spirit often makes a point of this. The second letter to the Thessalonians confirms the need for this exhortation. *"For we hear that there are some*

which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies" (2 Thess 3:11). The Spirit speaks of young widows who *"learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house"* (1 Tim 5:13). Solemnly we are admonished to not be *"a busybody in other men's matters"* (1 Pet 4:15). Minding our own business is bearing our own burden. As it is written, *"for each one should carry his own load"*^{NIV} (Gal 6:5). That statement follows a seemingly contradictory one: *"Carry each other's burdens"* (Gal 6:2). There is a facet of our lives that can only be maintained by ourselves. There is grace and personal fellowship with Christ to be proficient in these areas.

In its broadest sense, minding your own business is *"working out your own salvation with fear and trembling"* (Phil 2:12). In its most detailed sense, it is devoting ourselves to the area in which God has placed us. Servants, for example, are to *"be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ"* (Eph 6:5). Wives are *"to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed"* (Tit 2:5). Husbands are to *"provide for their own"* (1 Tim 5:8), love their wives (Eph 5:28), and bring up their children *"in the nurture and admonition of the Lord"* (Eph 6:4). Each person is to take their own life seriously, doing all within their power to avoid deficiencies and disruptions in the lives of others. In minding your own business, be *"fervent in Spirit, serving the Lord"* (Rom 12:11).

WORKING WITH YOUR OWN HANDS. Working with our own hands is the opposite of idleness, a curse to be avoided. When God consigned Adam to a life of toil by the sweat of his face (Gen 3:19), it was more than a curse. It was also therapeutic, assisting men to avoid sinful lusts. In such work, there will be provision for supporting the weak (Acts 20:35), and providing for the needy (Eph 4:28). In times of need, Paul himself, though an Apostle worked with his hands (1 Cor 4:12). The rule of God is, *"If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat"* (2 Thess 3:10).

WALKING PROPERLY AND LACKING NOTHING

¹² ***"That you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing."*** Other versions read *"walk honestly toward them that are without,"*^{KJV} *"behave properly toward outsiders,"*^{NASB} and *"your daily life may win the respect of outsiders."*^{NIV}

WALKING PROPERLY. To walk properly, or honestly, is to *"Provide things honest in the sight of all men"* (Rom 12:17). It is to live so our *"good"* is not *"evil spoken of"* (Rom 14:16). An excellent example of this kind of living is seen in the way early believers had a rather large offering delivered to the needy brethren. Titus accompanied the offering, coming of his own free will. Another brother, who was praised by all the churches because of his labors, was sent along with him. He was chosen by the churches to accompany Titus, and actually carry the offering. All of this was done *"in order to honor the Lord."* In addition, this explanation was given for their deliberate and careful action. *"We want to avoid any criticism of the way we administer this liberal gift. For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men"*^{NIV} (2 Cor 8:20-21).

Walking *"properly,"* or honestly, involves allowing our moderation, or gentle spirit, to become evident to everyone. As it is written, *"Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand"* (Phil 4:5). This is our outward lives-what men see of us. A self-seeking society scoffs at such a notion, caring nothing for what others think of their conduct.

When we walk *"honestly,"* we are living with God in our view, and with a conscience that does not condemn us. Such a life is like a bright and shining light. As Jesus admonished, *"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven"* (Matt 5:16). It involves paying our debts and respecting those in high places. As it is written, *"Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor. Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law"*^{NIV} (Rom 13:7-8). Although not often mentioned, these things are important. It is good to remember the kind of society and government prevalent at the time they were written.

THOSE WHO ARE OUTSIDE. This is a description of all who are not in Christ Jesus. They are *"outside"* of the love, blessing, and salvation of God. All of the benefits procured by Christ's death, resurrection, and enthronement in glory, are inaccessible to these people. They are *"outside"* the household of Christ (Heb 3:6). Jesus referred to such people as *"those who are outside,"* declaring it was not given to them to know the mysteries of the Kingdom (Mark 4:11). Paul referred to them as *"them also that are without"* (1 Cor 5:12). These are the *"others which have no*

hope," mentioned in the twelfth verse of this chapter. They are the ones referred to in the qualifications of an elder: "Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil" (1 Tim 3:7). These are the people who are "without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world" (Eph 2:12). They are people with whom we have to do, and before whom we live.

One might imagine it is of no consequence what these people think of us. From one point of view, that is true. We are not to allow their unbelief to modify our faith, diminish our zeal, or lessen our quest for glory. We are not to fear what they will do to us, or so shape our lives to avoid their persecution. However, believers are not to live in a sloppy manner before them. We are to live "that the name of God and His doctrine be not blasphemed" among these people (1 Tim 6:1). Our lives are **not** to be in conflict with our doctrine, "that the word of God be not blasphemed" (Tit 2:5). Inconsiderate Jews were sharply rebuked because "the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you" (Rom 2:24).

When mighty David sinned with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, God judged the matter, not allowing the child born out of that occasion to live. The explanation for that judgment shows the importance of our text: "However, because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also who is born to you shall surely die" ^{NKJV} (2 Sam 12:14). Let every believer take this admonition, and work it out in their life.

LACKING NOTHING. This is a most wonderful expression, though slightly obscured by the language. Another version reads, "and you will not need to depend on others to meet your financial needs." ^{NLT} Unless surrounded by unusual circumstances like poor Lazarus, believers are to live without being dependent upon others. Such a life comes by devoting ourselves to living quietly and in a non-disruptive manner, being industrious in our work, and conducting ourselves properly before unbelievers. The person who takes these admonitions seriously will be honored by the Lord, and will "lack nothing." Let every person say with Paul, "I have kept myself from being burdensome unto you, and so will I keep myself" (2 Cor 11:9).

LESSON #24

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

" ^{4:13} ***But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.*** ¹⁴ ***For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.***" ^{NKJV} (1 Thess 4:13-14)

INTRODUCTION

It is important that believers have their feet on solid ground concerning the normalities of life: for example, suffering, temptation, and death. If we are confused in these areas, life can become unbearable, and will nearly always move us to speak and act foolishly. We now enter into a brief section of this book that deals with an enormous body of truth—the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Spirit's intention is not to provide a thorough analysis of Christ's return. Rather, He will touch upon one aspect of it—an area in which the Thessalonians lacked understanding. It is the manner of the Spirit to approach truth in this way. While it is important for believers to have a good grasp of doctrine, it is especially vital that they be able to see human experience through true doctrine. God spoke of "*My doctrine*" (Deut 32:2), and Jesus did as well (John 7:16). That Divine doctrine is like a pane of glass through which both God and Christ are perceived. We are also to look at the world, ourselves, and our circumstances through the pane of God and Christ's doctrine. This doctrine is associated with the Scriptures, which have been inspired by God and are thus "*profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work*" (2 Tim 3:16-17). Our text provides a most excellent example of both "*doctrine*" and "*instruction in righteousness*." It further deals with an area of life that is common to all believers.

I WOULD NOT HAVE YOU TO BE IGNORANT

" ^{4:13a} ***But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren . . .***" The world says "*ignorance is bliss*," but it is lethal in spiritual life. It is true, there are secret things that belong to God, concerning which we are kept in the dark. But the things that have been revealed must be approached as necessities—things to be known and understood. Scripture states it this way, "*The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law*" ^{NKJV} (Deut 29:29). Those sitting at the feet of Jesus are particularly blessed in this regard. Jesus once said to His disciples, "*Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God*" (Mark 4:11). **The things that have been revealed by God, and the gift of knowing the mystery of Divine purpose and rule, are the areas in which ignorance is out of order.** Unless the individual is a little child, or has been deprived of the powers of reason, such things are to be known.

Ignorance involves a lack of both knowledge and understanding. Either the facts are not known, or their significance has eluded the individual. Both conditions can exist at the same time, and the latter can be found even when the facts are known. It is further possible to be ignorant from the human point of view, yet wise in the eyes of the Lord (Acts 4:13). Our text speaks of being uninformed of, and unfamiliar with, things pertaining to life and godliness. This kind of ignorance is not necessary, and always handicaps those having it.

When the Jews were "*ignorant of God's righteousness*," they did not seek it. Rather, they sought to establish their own (Rom 10:3). The Spirit does not want us to be "*ignorant of the mystery . . . that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in*" (Rom 11:25). The example of the Israelites, who were delivered from bondage, yet did not enter into the promised land, is something about which we are not to be ignorant (1 Cor 10:1-7). In the midst of their spiritual juvenility, and even carnality, Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "*Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant*" (1 Cor 12:1). We are further told that Satan can gain the advantage over us if we are "*ignorant of his devices*" (2 Cor 2:11). Peter pleads with us, "*But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day*" (2 Pet 3:8).

There is a thread of reasoning found in the Apostolic writings that reveals a discontent with ignorance in God's people. It was always seen as a detriment, threatening their well being. Ignorance is one of the things that contributed to our lostness outside of the Son. A certain futility resulted from this lack of knowledge and understanding, even estranging us from God. As it is written, "*the Gentiles walk, in the **futility of their mind**, having their **understanding darkened**, being alienated from the life of God, because of **the ignorance that is in them**, because of the **blindness of their heart***" ^{NKJV} (Eph 4:18). The rapid spread and dominance of sin is traced to foolish hearts being "*darkened*," or deprived of understanding (Rom 1:21-22). The very way that Satan

captures and rules over people is by blinding their minds, so the glorious light of the Gospel cannot shine on them (2 Cor 4:4).

Now that Christ has put away the sin of the world in His death, and been exalted to the right hand of God, **ignorance is no longer tolerable**. Too much has been revealed, and the issues are too critical for believers to remain in a state of ignorance. Perhaps the words spoken to the Athenians would be in order in many churches of our land: "*Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead*" (Acts 17:30-31).

In my judgment, the dominance of spiritual ignorance within the professed body of Christ is a most serious situation. Even among religious leaders, an astounding level of ignorance prevails—a fundamental lack of understanding concerning the nature and content of the Gospel of Christ. Fervent prayers must be raised for the church, that God would give her "*the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him*" (Eph 1:17). There is a crying need to "*be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding*" (Col 1:9). Solemnly we are admonished, "*do **not** be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is*" (Eph 5:17). Among other things, that means God has put understanding within our reach through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

Any person who preaches or teaches in the name of Jesus is to have an intense interest in the understanding of the people. While pressure is often put upon spiritual leaders to know the people, their real commission is to bring the people to know God, and to have an understanding of His truth. While that does not exclude personal acquaintance with the people, it does place such knowledge in a strictly secondary position. Eternal advantages are realized when our understanding of the purpose of God is brought to maturity.

"^{13b} . . . **concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.**"

The point now addressed is not the cornerstone of the Gospel. Rather, this is an area where the Thessalonians lacked understanding. That lack of understanding was the direct result of a deficient view of the Gospel of Christ. With the Thessalonians, that deficiency was largely due to their spiritual infancy. Yet, because of the debilitating effects of this kind of ignorance, the Spirit leads the Apostle to clarify the issue.

FALLEN SLEEP. This is faith's view of death, and pertains to the body. When Lazarus "*died*," Jesus said, "*Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up*" NKJV (John 11:11). Unacquainted with the kingdom manner, the disciples reasoned, "*Lord, if he sleeps he will get well.*" However, the Spirit informs us, "*Jesus spoke of his death.*" When the time came for Moses to die, the Lord said to him, "*Behold, thou shalt sleep with thy fathers*" (Deut 31:16). Believing he was near death, Job reasoned, "*for now shall I sleep in the dust*" (Job 7:21). Daniel spoke of those who "*sleep in the dust of the earth*" (Dan 12:2). When Stephen was stoned to death, the Spirit says, "*And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep*" (Acts 7:60). Paul refers to David's death as when he "*fell asleep*" (Acts 13:36). Some of a group of five hundred brethren who saw the resurrected Lord simultaneously were said to have "*fallen asleep*" when Paul wrote to the Corinthians (1 Cor 15:6).

There is a complete generation that will not experience death in the ordinary manner. It is the generation that "*are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord*" (1 Thess 4:15). Of that number it is said, "*We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed*" (1 Cor 15:51).

SOUL SLEEPING. Some have taken these texts and constructed a "soul sleeping" theology. They teach there is no consciousness after death until the resurrection of the dead. This teaching is more prominent than one might think. It is buttressed with references taken largely from the Old Covenant Scriptures. "*For in death there is no remembrance, of thee: in the grave who shall give thee thanks?*" (Psa 6:5). "*The dead praise not the LORD, neither any that go down into silence*" (Psa 115:17). "*For the grave cannot praise thee, death can not celebrate thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth*" (Isa 38:18). "*There is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest*" (Eccl 9:10).

These, and other such, texts are not intended to define death. They rather discourage the notion that men can waste their lives in hopes of recovering themselves after they die. Jesus would put it this way: "*I must work the works of Him that sent Me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work*" (John 9:4). The idea is that we

have a work to do while we are in the body, and are to apply ourselves to that work while we have any breath.

REFERS TO THE BODY. The sleeping in question does not refer to man's unseen part, but to his body. That is the part that is put into the grave, or into the earth. We know the human spirit is neither in the grave nor unconscious. Jesus spoke of a rich man, Lazarus, and Abraham - all alive and sensitive after they died (Lk 16:19-31). Moses, who had died, was seen on the mount of transfiguration talking with Jesus (Matt 17:3). John was given to see *"the souls of them that were slain for the word of God."* They cried out with a loud voice, were answered, given provision, and told to rest (Rev 6:9-11).

Death remained largely a mystery until Jesus came. Some few saints like David and Job had hope in death, but that was not the norm. Only after Jesus was raised from the dead was the veil lifted that shrouded the experience of death. Thus it is written that Jesus *"abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel"* (2 Tim 1:10).

ANTICIPATING RESURRECTION. The body is said to *"sleep"* because it will be raised from the dead. Its inactivity is only temporal. Even Job, in spiritually primitive times, sensed this. *"So man lieth down, and riseth not: till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep"* (Job 14:12). Just as surely as Lazarus' body *"slept"* until Jesus raised him, so the bodies of those who have died will sleep until they are raised.

THAT YOU SORROW NOT. Death-particularly that of the people of God-is attended by sorrow. Israel wept for thirty days when Moses died (Deut 34:8). Devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and *"made great lamentation over him"* (Acts 8:2). Those in Christ, however, do not sorrow *"as others which have no hope"* in death. Our separation is temporary. Those who only hope *"in this life"* sorrow in a special way - a way that has no sun of righteousness. Paul is now writing to move the saints away from the world's view of death. He will provide some insights that will cause us to see death more clearly.

WALKING PROPERLY AND LACKING NOTHING

"¹⁴ For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus." How frequently believing the Gospel is the real issue! Here is a matter some may imagine is unrelated to the good news and salvation. The Gospel, however, affirms the resurrection of Jesus, and our own as well. As it is written, *"And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power"* (1 Cor 6:14). *"Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you"* (2 Cor 4:14). It is tragic that contemporary believers hear very little about the resurrection!

IF WE BELIEVE. Here are the pivotal realities faith grasps: **Jesus died and rose again.** This is not something we do once for all, but is the continual activity of faith. Thus believers are told, *"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation"* (Rom 10:9-10). The belief of the Gospel of Christ is not a simplistic matter. As we will find, there are many implications in the Gospel, one of which is our own resurrection. Believing that Jesus was raised from the dead has a direct bearing on our view of death.

The Thessalonians had believed the Gospel, turning from idols to *"serve the living and true God; and to wait for His Son from heaven"* (1 Thess 1:9). Earnestly longing for Christ's return, they had surmised that those who had died would not participate in that grand event. Apparently, they felt only those who were *"alive and remain"* would see the Lord return and be gathered to Him. Thus, when some of their number died, they lamented not only because they were no longer among them, but because they thought they were going to miss out on the coming of the Lord. Their hearty embrace of the truth of Christ's return clashes sharply with the lethargic church of our day, who speaks and knows little of His return.

The promise attached to this verse relates to the joyous participation of the whole church in the return of Christ. It does not speak of a secret rapture, as some teach, as though only believers will be aware of His return. That is even more foolish than the notion that those who had died would themselves miss the consummation of the ages.

GOD WILL BRING THEM WITH JESUS. Notice, the text does not say Jesus will bring those who have departed with Him, but that *"GOD"* will bring them. God is the One who will send Jesus back, unveiling Him in all of His glory before an assembled universe. It is the Father's work to *"show"* His glorified Son publicly. As it is written, *"Which in His times He shall show, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and*

Lord of lords" (1 Tim 6:15). It is in this sense that the Father "*will send Jesus*," (Acts 3:20), who will take us unto Himself, that where He is, there we may be also (John 14:3).

There is a twofold sense in which God "*will bring*" with Jesus those believers who have died. Our focus is upon those who are in Christ Jesus: "*fallen asleep in Jesus*." Being "*absent from the body*," they are "*present with the Lord*" (2 Cor 5:8). The precise nature of that presence is not known. It is vastly superior to the fellowship they had with Jesus while yet in the body, but inferior to what they will enjoy in "*the ages to come*."

God will bring back their spirits with Jesus, just as surely as He brought back Moses and Elijah to talk with Jesus when He was transfigured. His return will be accompanied by the glory of the Father (Matt 16:27), all of His own glory (Matt 25:31), the glory of the holy angels (Lk 9:26), the vast multitude of the angels themselves (Matt 25:31), and the "*spirits of just men made perfect*" (Heb 12:23). Presently, these spirits are alive, for God is "*not the God of the dead, but of the living*" (Matt 22:32). The world of the ungodly will face the very people they opposed and maligned when God brings them back with Jesus!

God will raise their bodies from the dead. While the saved are in this world, they are not, in a sense, whole persons. They have a regenerated spirit and an unregenerate body. Those who have died are with the Lord, yet do not yet inhabit their resurrection bodies. But the hour is coming when the spirits of the redeemed will join with their redeemed bodies in glorious public identity with the Lord Jesus. The voice of the Son of man will shout all bodies out of the graves, and those with Jesus will come forth "*unto the resurrection of life*" (John 5:28-29). What a rich consolation to ponder this grand event!

For now, those who have died are themselves "*with the Lord*" while their bodies are decaying. However, because they embraced the Gospel of Christ, they died, or "*fell asleep*," in Jesus. I can think of no more noble ambition than to die in Christ. It is no wonder a voice from heaven told John, "*Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on*" (Rev 14:13).

LESSON #25

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

" ^{4:15} *For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep.* ¹⁶ *For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God.*

And the dead in Christ will rise first." ^{NKJV} (1 Thess 4:15-16)

INTRODUCTION

The coming of the Lord, or the "*second*" appearance of Jesus to humanity (Heb 9:28), is a pivotal aspect of Apostolic doctrine. It is not a doctrine to itself, but is an facet of the body of doctrine delivered by the Apostles (Acts 2:42). The word "*doctrines*" is never used in regard to the truth of God-only respecting the spurious views of men (Matt 15:9; Mk 7:7; Col 2:22; 1 Tim 4:1; Heb 13:9). When speaking of the communication of the truth of God, "*doctrine*," like "*truth*," is always used in the singular, never in the plural. This is not a mere academic observation, but helps us to gain a proper perspective of kingdom matters. The body of teaching referred to as "*the Apostles doctrine*," "*the Gospel of Christ*" (Rom 15:19), or "*the Word*" (Acts 16:6; 2 Tim 4:2) does not consist of a series of independent doctrines. Rather, it is a body of teaching with a single thrust and purpose, and containing vital aspects that contribute to the salvation of the soul. One of these aspects is the coming of Christ. The Gospel has not been truly preached where this is omitted. Nor, indeed, can a proper view of this great salvation be obtained where a fundamental ignorance of Christ's coming exists. That is the reason for the presence of our text. It is not a novelty, but is a clarification of this essential aspect of the Gospel which was not clear to the Thessalonians. It was essential that they have a proper view of Christ's return, for it is a cardinal point of the Gospel.

THE FACT OF THE MATTER

" ^{4:15} *For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep.*" ^{NKJV} Before expounding this text, there is a practical observation that may be of value to you. This passage underscores the sensitivity of the Apostle to those with deficient spiritual understanding. He did not approach such deficiencies with threatening authority, but as a tender father. There are untold numbers of believers who are confused on the very matter explained in this text, yet their condition often is not viewed as important. Issues relating to the coming of the Lord are frequently approached as though they were optional, and even unimportant. The tone of our text confirms the seriousness of neglecting this subject.

BY THE WORD OF THE LORD. Not only are the words themselves from the Lord, the spirit in which they are delivered is from Him. This answer reflects how the Lord Jesus considers flawed views of His return. The Lord Jesus had personally taught Paul on this matter, opening it up to him. The text means it was "*by the word of the Lord*" to Paul himself. That word, however, was in strict concert with the words Jesus spoke while among us. The Gospels present Jesus referring to "*the Son of man coming*" nine times (Matt 16:28; 24:27,30,37,39; 26:64; Mk 13:26; 14:62; Lk 21:27). They record Jesus saying the Son of man will "*come*" four times (Matt 10:23; 16:27; 25:31; Lk 9:26). With finality Jesus declared, "*I will come again*" (John 14:3). "*The coming of the Son of man*" was a matter expounded by Christ (Matt 24:27,37,39). Thus, when Paul speaks on this subject, he is not giving a private opinion, but speaking in strict harmony with Christ's words and heart.

ALIVE AND REMAIN UNTIL. The time men have spent *speculating* about **when** Christ will return is staggering. While some attention is given to this subject in Scripture, it is always a matter of revelation, never speculation (Matt 24:30; 1 Thess 5:3; 2 Thess 2:3). The Spirit approaches this subject in such a way as to gender hope in the believer and fear in the unbeliever. In our text, great comfort is brought to the believer. Not only will there be some believers "*alive*" and "*remaining*" when Jesus returns, it may very well be the very ones to whom Paul writes. **By saying "*alive*,"** he means alive "*in the body*" (Heb 13:3). **By "*remain*,"** he means remaining "*in the world*" (1 Pet 5:9).

This is the language of hope, not of time and circumstance. It does not mean that Paul was convinced Jesus would return at the time of his writing. In fact, he suggested such a persuasion was not appropriate for their time (2 Thess 2:3). However, because he did not approach this subject as an earthly scholar, his hope did not exclude such a thought. Notice, the text does NOT say, "**those** who are alive and remain," but "**WE** who are alive and remain." In this way, no generation is excluded from the hope of being alive when Jesus returns.

Faith has no difficulty with this kind of language, even though the intellect wrestles with it. The thrust of the Gospel is not WHEN Jesus will return, but that He WILL. It is not whether or not we are alive when He returns, but that we will

be included in the event.

THE COMING OF THE LORD. It is true that Jesus is said to have "*come*" in differing senses. When He entered into the world as a man, He is said to have "*come*" (1 John 4:2,3; 2 John 7). When He sent the Holy Spirit to His disciples, He referred to it as Himself coming (John 14:17-18). Jesus Himself appeared to Saul of Tarsus while he was en route to persecute the saints (Acts 22:8). However, there is a coming event that is specifically called "*the coming of the Lord*" (James 5:7-8). It will be a visible and public appearance in which "*every eye shall see Him*" (Rev 1:7). This is when the Lord will "*appear the second time*" (Heb 9:28). It is the climax of the ages, the end of time, and the conclusion of flesh and blood and temporal things.

A Polestar. "*The coming of the Lord*" is the polestar of the saints. A polestar is a guiding star, the center of attraction by which men assessed where they were, and could navigate to where they were going. The star that appeared to the wise men from the East was a "polestar" that eventually showed them the location of the newborn King (Matt 2:9). The coming of the Lord is a directing principle for the believer. When it shines brightly in our hearts and understanding, it helps to illuminate where we are in the walk of faith. It alerts us to where we are going, enabling us to "*look up*" in the persuasion that our redemption is drawing near. Hide this truth from the saints, and they will become sloppy in their lives. Sin will more easily penetrate their ranks, together with weakness and discouragement. It is not possible to "*wait for His Son from heaven*" (1:10) when that return is a subject of ignorance and confusion. But let Christ's return shine brightly in the understanding, and all is well!

BY NO MEANS PRECEDE. This is in reference to the resurrection, and means the "*change*" of the living to immortality will not take place before the bodily resurrection (1 Cor 15:52). This will be developed more fully in the next verse.

THE CLIMACTIC RETURN OF JESUS

"^{16a} *For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God . . .*" ^{NKJV} As we begin this marvelous section, note the certainty that attends the declaration. The Spirit is speaking to our hearts, addressing our faith. This is something that **WILL** take place, and there is no chance that it will not. It may even take place in our lifetime! The certitude of Christ's return demands that we be ready and looking forward to the event. We must not allow the corrupt teachings of men to cause us to draw back from anticipating and understanding the return of our Lord. As a matter of practical observation, it appears to me that the current penchant for [what is called] "worship" rarely evinces an earnest longing for the return of the Lord Jesus. If this assessment true, that is a most serious condition that requires immediate correction.

THE LORD HIMSELF. By saying "*the Lord Himself*," the text means this return will not be a spiritual one, like Jesus coming in the Person of the Holy Spirit (John 14:17-18). It will not be like Jesus coming to dwell in our hearts by faith (John 14:23; Eph 3:17). "*The Lord Himself*" is the Lord **without any veil or covering**. It is another way of saying He will return "*in His glory*" (Matt 25:31). It will be a visible appearance in which He will be seen "*in power and great glory*" (Matt 24:30). Then He will be seen "***as He is***," without any part of His person hidden, and without any deficiency in our perception (1 John 3:2; Rev 1:7).

This will not be a vision, like John had on the Isle of Patmos (Rev 1:12-17). "*The Lord Himself*" is the Lord shown openly in all of His glory and Person. This is the Lord's "*appearing*" (1 Tim 6:14; 2 Tim 1:10; 4:1). It is "*the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ*" (Tit 2:13), attended by "*His own glory*," the glory of the Father, and the glory of the holy angels (Luke 9:26). This is when the Father will display "*He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords*" (1 Tim 6:15). There will be no question about who He is or why He has come!

WILL DESCEND FROM HEAVEN. This is according to the word of the holy angels who were there when He ascended into heaven. They told His disciples, "*this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven*" (Acts 1:11). A select number of men saw Him go into heaven, but "*every eye*" will see Him "*descend from heaven*." Heaven is presently retaining Christ until the "*restoration of all things*," spoken by the holy prophets. This is "*the regeneration*" of which Jesus spoke (Matt 19:28), when everything will be "*made new*" (Rev 21:5). However, when that appointed time comes, He will "*descend from heaven*," fulfilling the word of Acts 3:20-21, when God will "*send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive **until the times of restoration of all things**, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.*" The first time Jesus entered the world, it was largely a secret. The second time, it will be a public glorified appearance "*from*

heaven." No one will miss it!

WITH A SHOUT. While the temporal order remains, the Lord often speaks in a "*still small voice*" (1 Kgs 19:12). Now, men must learn to "*keep silence*," in order that they may hear the voice of the Lord (Isa 41:1; Hab 2:20). But this will not be the case when Jesus "*descends from heaven*." His voice will reverberate throughout every domain, piercing to the lowest grave, and echoing in every quadrant of "*this present evil world*." It will not only be a shout "*with the voice of triumph*" (Psa 47:1), but one that will summon the dead from their graves. As Jesus Himself declared, "*the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation*" (John 5:28-29). He will shout out all of the dead as surely as He did Lazarus from the sepulcher (John 11:43).

THE VOICE OF THE ARCHANGEL. Only Michael is called "*the archangel*" (Jude 9), which is the only other mentioning of this word. Perhaps this is the voice alluded to in Revelation 14:15. "*Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe*." It doubtless has regard to the sending of "*the reapers*" to bring the elect together and gather the tares together (Matt 13:39-43; 24:31). The holy angels, led, as it were, by "*the archangel*," will accompany the Lord's return. But their accompaniment is not a mere formality, it is to accomplish the "*harvest of the world*." The book of the Revelation associates the voice of an angel with something being accomplished (7:2; 8:13; 9:13; 10:7; 19:17). When our Lord returns, the greatest of all accomplishments will take place.

THE TRUMPET OF GOD. This "*trumpet*" is "*the last trumpet*," also associated with the resurrection of the dead: "*for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed*" (1 Cor 15:52). As under the Law, the trumpet will be sounded to gather the assembly (Num 10:2-3)-this time, before the Throne of God.

THE DEAD IN CHRIST WILL RISE FIRST

"^{16b} . . . *and the dead in Christ shall rise first*." ^{NKJV} Here is a statement that has been greatly corrupted by distorted views of the return of the Lord. Some posit that there are two separate bodily resurrections, occurring at different times. This is based on one of the most ambiguous texts of all Scripture: Revelation 20:4-5. The latter part of the passage reads, "*and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection*." Men take this passage and correlate it with our text, affirming the righteous dead will be raised, with an interim of 1,000 years before the wicked dead are raised. Such a view, however, is attended by great difficulties. First, the Revelation text does not say the godly were raised from the dead. John saw "*souls*," not bodies. Second, our text has Jesus Himself returning "*with a shout*," together with "*the voice of the archangel*." These are matters associated with absolute finality, and under no circumstances can be viewed as secret, as in an undetected "rapture."

The reference to "*the dead in Christ*" rising "*first*" is in regard to the saints who are "*alive and remain*." It has no reference whatsoever to the wicked dead. Such a view is a carnal imposition upon the word of the Lord. The expression "*the dead in Christ shall rise first*" is to be associated with those who are "*alive and remain until the coming of the Lord*" NOT **preceding** "*those who are asleep*." The word "*precede*" refers to a twofold reality. **First**, the change of the living from mortality to immortality will not occur before the resurrection of those who died in the Lord. **Second**, the living will not be joined to the Lord before those who "*are asleep*" are raised.

TWO DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES. Immortality is declared from two perspectives in both First Corinthians and First Thessalonians: **resurrection and change**. The first refers to those who have died, the second to those who remain. In both cases, only believers are being considered. This is not because they will be raised or changed separately. Rather, it is because only they will be advantaged by resurrection and change, or, as Paul put it, "*attain to the resurrection from the dead*" (Phil 3:11). That simply means the resurrection becomes the ultimate change for the better, and not the worst. Those who have died will be "*raised*." Those who are alive and remain will be "*changed*."

Not everyone will be raised from the grave, but everyone will undergo a change from mortality to immortality. This is precisely the point of the First Corinthian passage, as well as our text. "*Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed; in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed*" (1 Cor 15:51-52). That such a climactic event could occur undetected is utterly absurd. A shout from Jesus,

the voice of the archangel, the piercing blast of the trumpet of God, the dead raised, and the living changed! It takes an extraordinary imagination to consider that being done in secret and under cover!

FIRST. "*The dead in Christ will rise first,*" before those living and remaining are "*changed.*" In this way, a significant reversal will take place. The momentary advantage will be given to those who have already departed the war zone. I say "*momentary*" because all of this will occur "*in an instant, in the blink of an eye.*"^{NAB} Thus "*the first*" to have the seeming advantage will be the "*last*" to participate in the change; while "*the last*" to have that advantage will be "*the first*" to "*put on immortality.*" Here, then, is another fulfillment of the saying, "*But many that are first shall be last; and the last first*" (Mark 10:31). Here we also behold compensating rewards. Those who "*are alive and remain*" are spared the difficulties associated with death. Those who did experience such things will be granted the honor of rising "*first.*" Thus everyone in Christ will be granted unique privileges, yet they will cause no division.

In all of this there is a Divine precision and consideration that is most remarkable. It is a great source of comfort to the saints to know that not a single aspect of life is overlooked in salvation. All of the injustices of life will fade into the background at the "*resurrection of the just.*" Too, all of the seeming advantages of remaining alive will give way to the blessing of immortality when the living are "*changed.*"

The subject of the resurrection of the dead is a critical one. Not a single time is the word "*resurrection*" used in the plural. A "*first resurrection*" is mentioned (Rev 20:5-6), but never a second. A "*second death*" is mentioned (Rev 2:11; 20:6,14; 21:8), but never a first. The reason is that "*first*" and "*second*" are not chronological words, but words depicting kind, type, or order. There will be "A *resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust*" (Acts 24:15). Jesus will call forth "**ALL** *that are in the graves*" at the same "*hour*" (John 5:29). Our text has revealed to us what will occur to believers at that time. None, whether dead or alive, will miss the appearance of Christ, the change that will occur, or our gathering to Him.

LESSON #26

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

" 4:17 *Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.* ¹⁸ *Therefore comfort one another with these words.*" ^{NKJV} (1 Thessalonians 4:17-18)

INTRODUCTION

There is a revealed perspective to life in Christ Jesus. If this perspective is lost, life cannot be lived in a truly profitable manner. This is the outlook that makes life worth living. It casts the mantle of hope over the entirety of life, lightening the weight of care, and brightening the horizon of the future. This is a viewpoint held by faith, and will sustain the soul in the midst of the most grievous trials. Even harsh persecution cannot diminish the power of this outlook. What is even more, it is intended for every person who is in Christ Jesus. I am speaking of the "*one hope*" (Eph 4:4), by which we are saved (Rom 8:24). This the "*living hope*" to which we are "*begotten again*" through the "*abundant mercy*" of our God (1 Pet 1:3). It is the anchor that keeps the soul (Heb 6:19). It is the reason why we have fled to the Lord for refuge- "*to lay hold upon the hope set before us*" (Heb 6:18). Our text focuses on one aspect of that hope, affirming it is of sufficient strength to "*comfort*" the people of God, even under the stress of opposition and hardship. Those who put the people of God in remembrance of what awaits them, are faithful ministers, indeed. They assist believers in removing the emphasis from life in this world, confirming it is only temporary, and will soon conclude for them in a burst of unparalleled glory.

CAUGHT UP TOGETHER WITH THEM

" 4:17a *Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds . . .*" ^{NKJV} The teaching of this verse has a two-fold purpose. First, it corrects some misapprehensions among the Thessalonians concerning those who had died. Second, it became a source of comfort and encouragement to the saints. Both of these are essential aspects of "*sound doctrine*." When possible, the people of God must be left with correct views and encouraged hearts. Where these are not joined, true help has not been given.

THEN. The word "*then*" means AFTER the "*dead in Christ*" have been raised. Thus, the NIV reads, "*After that . . .*" Among other things, this confirms the priority of the resurrection. This is a pivotal aspect of Apostolic doctrine, and must not be neglected. It may appear as though it has no immediate relevance, but nothing could be further from the truth. One of the heresies held by the Sadducees was that "*there is no resurrection*" (Matt 22:23). Jesus taught of the difference the resurrection will make (Matt 22:30), and of certain recompense at "*the resurrection of the just*" (Lk 14:14). He referred to the resurrection of believers as "*the resurrection of life*" (John 5:29). Paul even preached "*the resurrection*" to the Athenian philosophers, and they stumbled at his word (Acts 17:18,32). Paul referred to his hope as "*the hope and resurrection of the dead*" (Acts 23:6), affirming his aim was to "*attain to the resurrection from the dead*" (Phil 3:11). Hymenaeus and Philetus, false teachers of the first century, are said to have "*overthrown the faith of some*" by teaching that "*the resurrection is already past*" (2 Tim 2:17-18). Suffice it to say, it is a most critical omission when the resurrection of the dead is not taught. In the case of the Thessalonians, their change from corruption to incorruption required the resurrection of the dead. Only "*then*" would they be forever joined to the Lord.

ALIVE AND REMAIN. This is the second time this precise phrase has been used: "*we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord*" (vs 15 and 17). The expression emphasizes the centrality of the "*second*" coming of the Lord. Our aim is to be "*found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless*" in that day (2 Pet 3:10-14). Who is able to measure the "*exceeding joy*" that will be experienced by the saints "*when His glory shall be revealed*" (1 Pet 4:13). Believers should make much of the possibility of being alive and remaining when the Lord is revealed in all of His glory.

CAUGHT UP TOGETHER. The living and remaining believers will be "*caught up together*" with the "*dead in Christ*" who are raised. This is one of the primary texts used to teach a secret "*rapture*" of the saints. Nothing in this text remotely suggests secrecy. The words "*caught up*" are unusually strong. They speak of being snatched away from the domain of trouble, and the wrath of God. More specifically, they depict the Lord receiving us to Himself, as He promised He would (John 14:3). This is "*our gathering together unto Him*" (2 Thess 2:1). From the viewpoint of the angels, it is when "*they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other*" (Matt 14:31). It is when they "*shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven*" (Mark 13:27).

Then all saints will "*appear with Him in glory*" (Col 3:4). They will be stripped of every vestige of the curse, and clothed with immortality. Although it will all happen "*in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye,*" this will be on such a large and unprecedented scale our minds are not able to take it in. It will include "*a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues*" (Rev 7:9). Every child of God from the dawn of history to its consummation will suddenly be glorified, and together, in one grand and rejoicing company, they will all be "*caught up*" by Divine power to be eternally joined to the Lord, in whom they trusted, and for whom they lived. This is when the Lord will "*come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe*" (2 Thess 1:10).

IN THE CLOUDS. I gather these are the "*clouds*" in which the glorified Christ will be seen, when "*every eye*" will "*see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory*" (Matt 24:30). Jesus affirmed men would see Him "*on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven*" (Matt 26:64). What an extraordinary circumstance! **The clouds ordinarily obscure, but in this case they reveal!** When the pillar of cloud stood between Israel and the Egyptians, it was a "*cloud of darkness*" to the Egyptians, but a source of light to the Israelites (Ex 14:20). But when Jesus comes "*in the clouds,*" He will be seen by "*every eye.*" In fact, the ONLY time in the entire Bible where the phrase "*every eye*" is used, is in reference to the coming of the Lord with the clouds. "*Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen.*" (Rev 1:7). This, then, declares the public nature of His glorious return.

WE WILL BE ALWAYS WITH THE LORD

"^{17b} . . . *to meet the Lord in the air: And thus we shall always be with the Lord.*"^{NKJV} Notice how the emphasis is not placed on leaving, but on meeting the Lord! Almost without exception, the emphasis of the secret rapture theory is the leaving of the saints. But our text puts the emphasis on meeting the Lord, and that is where our emphasis should be placed. After all, the "*rich man*" left the earth when he died, but it was certainly not an advantage for him. It is written, "*the rich man also died, and was buried; and in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments*" (Lk 16:23). It is good to learn how to **stress** the right thing. Most of the division among professed believers on the coming of the Lord is over where the stress is placed. It might surprise many to see what marvelous effects are found in our teaching simply by emphasizing the right thing.

MEET THE LORD. The Lord will "*descend from heaven,*" and the saints will rise from their former battleground to meet Him. What a meeting that is going to be! It will be "*face to face,*" a phrase denoting the absence of all confusion and mystery concerning Christ (1 Cor 13:12). It will be a productive meeting, not one of mere gazing. When God was with Moses "*face to face,*" the circumstance was described "*as a man speaks to his friend*" (Ex 33:11). That was only a faint glimmer of the joyous revelation that will attend us meeting the Lord.

Without laboring the point, note that we are "*caught up to meet the Lord,*" not to disappear. The mythical rapture doctrine almost always emphasizes the disappearance of the saints. Our text places the stress on meeting the Lord.

We will not meet Him for the first time, but in the fullest sense. Now, salvation is preparing us for that meeting. By faith, we confront the Lord now, and are actually joined to Him (1 Cor 6:17). Now, in a very definite sense, Jesus meets with us. He proclaimed, "*For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them*" (Matt 18:20). Such meetings are undetected apart from faith. But when we meet the Lord, it will be a public and undeniable affair. All of the saved will be instantly made known by their meeting with the Lord. Immediately, their real status will be revealed.

IN THE AIR. In this world, "*the air*" is associated with Satan, who is called "*the prince of the power of the air*" (Eph 2:2). In this world, the air is "*darkened*" by the smoke that ascends from the "*bottomless pit*" (Rev 9:2). It is, in some sense, an area where we encounter opposition, and in which we must do battle (Eph 6:12). But when Jesus comes, Satan will no longer be prominent in the domain of the air. The "*last enemy,*" death, shall then be destroyed (1 Cor 15:26). Consequently, because the last bastion of his power shall have been decimated, we will have no more trouble with our present "*adversary*" (1 Pet 5:8).

The air will be filled with the glory of Jesus, the glory of the Father, and the glory of the angels. Teeming multitudes of angels from heaven will descend with Jesus. The "*spirits of just men made perfect*" will be brought back by Jesus. The earth will "*cast out her dead*" (Isa 26:19), the living and remaining will be "*changed,*" and the whole body of the redeemed will rise to meet the Lord in the very realm once dominated by Satan. A day of victory, indeed!

ALWAYS. This will commence a period **without interruption** - "*always,*" or "*ever.*"^{KJV} There will be no

more seasons of hunger and thirst (Psa 63:1; Matt 5:6). Never again will our souls be "cast down" (Psa 42:6). We will never confront fear (2 Cor 7:5) or despair (2 Cor 1:8). There will never again be a single occurrence where we are troubled on every side, perplexed, persecuted, or cast down (2 Cor 4:8-9).

WITH THE LORD. This is being "with Christ, which is far better" than remaining in the body in this world (2 Cor 5:8). This is the consummate experience! Salvation prepares us for being "with the Lord." We are "buried with Him" (Rom 6:4), "crucified with Him" (Rom 6:6), and "suffer with Him" (Rom 6:17). We are "workers together with Him" (2 Cor 6:1), have been made "alive together with Him" (Col 2:13), and are "dead with Him" (2 Tim 2:11). No small wonder, therefore, that the promise of being "with the Lord" is so precious to us! We will "appear with Him in glory," never again to be separated from Him in any sense (Col 3:4). Whether we have died prior to His coming, or are alive and remain, we will "live together with Him" (1 Thess 5:10). We will "reign with Him" (2 Tim 2:12) without any competing or threatening influences.

A word should be said about the absurdity of the doctrine that teaches we will reign with Jesus for one thousand years, after which a period of confusion and anarchy will break out. Whatever one may think about that doctrine, it is firmly said of Christ's kingdom, "Of the **increase** of His government and peace there will be **no end**, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice **from that time forward, even forever**. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this" (Isa 9:7). Our text establishes the true view.

COMFORT ONE ANOTHER WITH THESE WORDS

"¹⁸ **Therefore comfort one another with these words.**" ^{NKJV} The concept of "comfort" is essential to a proper understanding of the great salvation of God. Some contemporary versions use the word "encourage." ^{NIV,NRSV} The word means to console, or to encourage and strengthen by consolation. It often involves exhortation and entreating. It is an aggressive activity, in which the difficulties of life are effectively addressed. The world chooses to "counsel" people encountering difficulty. The Scriptures speak of comforting them. Along these lines, God's desire was announced by Isaiah the Prophet: "Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God" (Isa 40:1). Such comforting is aptly described by this exhortation: "Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him" (Isa 3:10).

ASSOCIATED WITH STRENGTH. This comfort is associated with strength, wherein the saints experience a renewal of spiritual energy, and are able to stand against the wiles of the devil. Again, Isaiah expresses the thought well: "Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are fearful-hearted, 'Be strong, do not fear! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God; He will come and save you'" (Isa 35:3-4). One of the primary ministries of Paul was "strengthening all the disciples" (Acts 18:23). He desired to know their condition and comfort their hearts (Col 4:8). Comfort plays a vital role in this process. It assists the believer to see the issues of life more clearly, and not be deceived by circumstance.

The very need for comfort accentuates the fierceness of the "good fight of faith" (1 Tim 6:12). It presumes "trouble," agitation, and aggressive opposition. Confirming this, Jeremiah once said, "They have heard that I sigh: there is none to **comfort** me: all mine enemies have heard of my **trouble**" (Lam 1:21). Elsewhere the Spirit speaks of the God of all comfort "who **comforts** us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to **comfort** those who are in any **trouble**, with the **comfort** with which we ourselves are comforted by God" (2 Cor 1:4). Comfort is one of the appointed means by which believers in trouble regain their strength and spiritual perspective. The focus of the individual is adjusted, and renewal is experienced.

ONE ANOTHER. Here is an activity in which every member of the body takes place. While some may be especially gifted in the area of comfort, all can participate in the encouragement of God's people. It is tragic that many believer's are rarely exposed to any form of inspiration and stimulation. The religious offerings to which they are exposed are generally addressed to someone else, or deal with matters that are not common to all of the children of God. Those who are in such a situation must be willing to take up the cause for the saints, and be a minister of comfort to others. This is not an activity for specialists.

THESE WORDS. Here is a work that can be done without guesswork. Words have been supplied that can be spoken in the power of the Spirit: "**THESE** words." And what are "**these WORDS**?" These are the words that pertain to those who have died in the Lord. They are also the words about those "who **alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord**." When we pass from this life, we do not go into oblivion, nor do we pass into a realm of inactivity and hopelessness. Our hopes do not lie in this world, but with the coming of the Lord. When He comes, those who have lived by faith will never again experience restriction in any sense. Those who have died will be raised. Those

who remain will be changed. The beneficial unity believers have always sought with one another will be experienced as we are all caught up to meet the Lord in the air. It will not be a brief respite from the toils of life, but a glorious conclusion to them all! It will not be a brief exposure to glory, but the beginning of an unending presence with the glorified Lord. We will meet the Lord "*in the air*," and it will not be troublesome. There will be no principalities and powers with which to wrestle. The devil will not be stalking about, seeking whom, he may devour. Death will be behind us. Trouble will be behind us. Nothing but glory and unfettered dominion will be before us. And, we will be with Jesus in the fullest sense of the word. There will be no veil between us, and a sense of solitude or aloneness will never again be experienced.

Let us speak of such times to one another. Let us remind one another that we are going to reign with Jesus. That is something that has been appointed, and it is only a matter of time until it is realized. The more we shine the light on "*the day of the Lord*," the lighter our troubles will become (2 Cor 4:17). When we consider our gathering together with Christ, the persecutions we endure for His name will become insignificant. When we comfort one another "*with these words*," we stir another on to "*perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord*," preparing for His return (2 Cor 7:1-2). That is a ministry that is most vital to all of the people of God!

LESSON #27

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

" ^{5:1} *But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you.* ² *For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.* ³ *For when they say, 'Peace and safety!' then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.*" ^{NKJV} (1 Thess 5:1-3)

INTRODUCTION

Because of the centrality of the second coming of Christ, the Spirit will now develop the subject more fully. This will not be an academic approach, designed to appeal to the carnal mind, or offering curious novelties to those who are at home in this world. Nor, indeed, will it be an elaborate outline of the sequence of events that are associated with Christ's coming. Rather, He will address the subject so that faith can rise to dominance, for *"the just shall live by faith."* Carefully, He will turn the people to a spiritually profitable consideration of the coming of the Lord—one that will enable hope to flourish, thereby stimulating joy. It is vital that the heart be satisfied, and peace be given a door of entrance into the whole of our lives. The coming of the Lord must be addressed in a manner that will clarify life in this world. The burden of suffering must be reduced, and an intense longing for the Lord awakened. Much of what is being said about Christ's return these days is not conducive to these things. Too often it is presented as though it was not true. In fact, some have even found it easy to fictionalize the subject, so that even the ungodly become interested in the academic subject of the return of Jesus. No such interest among the ungodly will be generated by this text.

THE TIMES AND THE SEASONS

" ^{5:1} *But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you.*" ^{NKJV} When dealing with the return of Jesus, it is imperative that we be drawn away from curious and unprofitable inquiry. While this subject deals with the future, it has immediate relevance. It impacts upon the way we live. It determines how we view persecution, trouble, and difficulty. It will direct how intense and consistent we are in purifying ourselves of moral and spiritual defilement (1 John 3:1-3). The degree of our rejoicing will be determined by our understanding of the Lord's return (Rom 5:2; 12:12). We even partake of the Lord's table with His coming in mind (1 Cor 11:25-26). Rewards are associated with the return of Christ (2 Tim 4:8; Rev 22:12). Faithfully keeping the commandment is related to *"the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (1 Tim 6:14). Our faith is being tried in order that it *"might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ"* (1 Pet 1:7). The judgment of the living and the dead will take place *"at His appearing"* (2 Tim 4:1). The destruction of the heavens and the earth will take place in the day Jesus comes *"as a thief in the night"* (2 Pet 3:10).

This subject, therefore, is so integrally related to the life of faith that we cannot afford to be ignorant of it. This is why the Spirit will not leave the people of God confused on the matter of Christ's return. Ignorance in this area is like a weighty stone that casts troubling ripples on the sea of life, from one end to the other. It causes hope to become emaciated, and weakens faith. If salvation finds men turning from idols to serve the living God and wait for His Son from heaven (1 Thess 1:9-10), we do well to have as good a grasp on this subject as is possible. That grasp involves knowing how NOT to ponder the matter.

TIMES AND SEASONS. Just before Jesus ascended from Olivet to glory, with the clouds as His chariots and the winds as His steeds, His disciples asked Him, *"Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?"* With care, Jesus did not rebuke them, saying that such a restoration would never occur. Rather, His answer confirmed it would, indeed, occur, but they were not to occupy themselves with the thought of WHEN that would take place. *"It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power"* (Acts 1:6-7). Obadiah had prophesied *"But on Mount Zion there shall be deliverance, And there shall be holiness; The house of Jacob shall possess their possessions"* (Obad 1:17). Amos declared the same thing (Amos 9:11-12), as well as Hosea (Hos 3:4). The disciples were asking if that time, when they were standing with the risen Christ, was the time it would take place. Christ's answer to them affirmed that WHEN it would take place was not something given to them to know. Those were things in the Father's power. That is, He would bring it to pass in strict accordance with His determined purpose. It was enough for them to know He would fulfill His promise.

The Spirit will develop the same sort of thought here - namely that the precise time of Christ's return is not to be the focus of our attention. The words *"times and seasons"* speak of precision, not generality. Other versions read *"times and epochs,"* ^{NASB} *"times and dates,"* ^{NIV} *"times and moments,"* ^{Duoay-Rheims} *"the times and their order"* (sequence), ^{BEBE} and *"when all of this will happen."* ^{NJB} Jesus referred to His coming in this way, *"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father"* (Matt 24:36). By this, Jesus means His coming is not to be addressed in this manner - i.e., spelling out precisely when it

will occur. That is not profitable for faith, and has more of an appeal to the flesh than to the spirit. First, the precise time **cannot** be known. Not even angels, who are wiser than men, know the day and hour. Even the Lord Jesus Himself does not know. I gather He has volunteered to lay that knowledge aside in order to fellowship with the redeemed in expectation (Heb 10:13).

CERTAINTY AND KNOWLEDGE. When men do not know WHEN something will happen, they imagine that the matter cannot be certain. Thus they attach dates to their promises and commitments. In the flesh, life is this way. The certainty of a thing is determined by the times and seasons attached to it. The whole of earthly life is organized around this principle. But it does not hold true in the Kingdom of God. Spiritual certainty is not driven by knowledge, but by faith, which is the "*substance*" and the "*evidence*" (Heb 11:1). Christ's return is a matter of Divine commitment. We do not need to know if He will return in the winter or summer, the spring or the fall. We do not need to know the date or the year, the day or the hour. In fact, such knowledge would detract from the ministry of hope, promoting spiritual laxity and disinterest.

NO NEED FOR WRITING. The Thessalonians had been taught so effectively, they did not require an elaboration of this matter. That means the coming of the Lord was a vital aspect of the teaching they had received. They had not been asking about dates.

AS A THIEF IN THE NIGHT

"² ***For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.***"
NKJV Other versions read, "you yourselves know full well,"^{NASB} "you know very well,"^{NIV} "yourselves have known thoroughly,"^{YLT} and "you are well aware."^{NJB} Here was something the Thessalonians had fully grasped. It appears there are very few things that are fully grasped by the contemporary church-particularly in the area of Christ's return.

KNOWING PERFECTLY. Knowing perfectly well is to be contrasted with something requiring extensive "*study*" and research. The Bereans, for example, "*searched the Scriptures daily to find out*" whether the things Paul and Silas said were true or not (Acts 17:11). That was a mark of nobility - but not the greatest nobility. **Knowing perfectly** is being confident of the certainty of a matter. It is being well aware of something, and requiring no further proof of its reality. Certain knowledge is far better than unending investigation! At some point, honest research must yield the fruit of knowing "*full well,*" or "*perfectly.*"

THE DAY OF THE LORD. "*The day of the Lord*" is here equated with the return of Christ from heaven, with the angels and the trumpet of God. This is the time when the "*dead in Christ*" shall rise from their graves, and "*we which are alive and remain*" shall be changed. The last of the fourth chapter speaks of that day with the saints in mind (4:14-17). This passage sets it before us with the ungodly in mind. "*The day of the Lord*" is the day of His revealing. It is the time when all men will confront Him with a full awareness of who He is and why He has come. Joel prophesied, and Peter confirmed, that the door of salvation would be thrown open before "*that great and notable day of the Lord come*" (Joel 2:1; Acts 2:20). We are living in that time. The "*day of the Lord*" is when salvation is most critical (1 Cor 5:5). It is HIS DAY because, at that time, all other glories will be swallowed up by His glory. That is, He will be the dominating One at that time, with no competitors whatsoever. This is the "*day*" God has "*appointed,*" and it is certain (Acts 17:31).

A THIEF IN THE NIGHT. Some have taken these words to mean "secret." But that is not at all their meaning. This speaks of suddenness-something that is not expected. Christ's coming will catch the wicked by surprise, when they are sleeping "*the sleep of death*" (Psa 13:3). Nothing about it remotely suggests the Lord will come without the ungodly knowing what has happened. In fact, the text will develop this with staggering clarity.

Peter referred to the Lord coming as a thief in the night, declaring it would chronicle the end of the entire natural order. "*But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up*" (2 Pet 3:10). When Jesus returns in all of His glory the temporal order will flee from His face. As it is written, "*from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them*" (Rev 20:11). It is difficult to even imagine that such a thing could occur without being detected!

Later, the text will affirm that Jesus is coming to the wicked as a thief, not to the saints who are waiting for Him to return from heaven (5:4; 1:10). He will come in the night of human ignorance, when men are oblivious to His return, having no interest whatsoever in it. He will come to rob the wicked of all their preferences and joys. He will plunder their house and leave them standing naked before Him. It is true, when Jesus returns He is going to take all temporal things away. All holds upon them will be violently and suddenly broken!

WATCH! Professing believers are not to imagine this has no application to them. If they allow unbelief to enter their hearts, or a root of bitterness to spring up in them, that day will also catch them unawares. God's people do well to fear being caught off guard by the return of Jesus. Jesus said to lethargic Sardius, "*Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you*" (Rev 3:3).

Jesus likened His return to a thief coming in the night. He spoke of preparing for it, and not being caught unawares by it. "*But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also **be ready**, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect*" (Luke 12:39-40). The very return that will break up the house of the ungodly will bring blessings unimaginable to those who are waiting and watching. In the very passage just quoted, Jesus said of such, "*Blessed are those servants whom the Master, when He comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that He will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them*" (v 37). The word to every child of God is "**WATCH!**" As Jesus Himself said, "*And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!*" (Mk 13:37). The purity maintained by the Thessalonians in the midst of persecution is, in part, accounted for by their watching!

PEACE AND SAFETY, BUT DESTRUCTION

"³ *For when they say, 'Peace and safety!' then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.*" ^{NKJV} The sudden appearing of the Lord will occur "*While people are saying, 'Peace and safety.'*" ^{NIV} Among the ungodly, there will be no feeling of eminent destruction. A sense of well being will upon them, and they will imagine that all is well. Jesus painted a remarkable picture of this. It will be as it was when the flood came. "*For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.*" People will be living as usual, working in the field and grinding at the mill (Matt 24:38-41). He also likened His return to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. "*Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed*" (Luke 17:28-30).

AT HIS APPEARING. Notice, this will occur at "*the coming of the Son of man,*" when He "*is revealed*" or "*will appear.*" This is categorically said to be the time when we also we be glorified. "*Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is*" (1 John 3:1). And again, "*When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory*" (Col 3:4). The same appearing will bring blessing to the righteous and cursing to the wicked. There is not the remotest hint in this text of a secret rapture. That is a myth concocted by men, and it has cast a mantle of ignorance and lethargy upon the church.

SUDDEN DESTRUCTION. Notice, it is not tribulation that comes upon them, but "*destruction.*" The word "*destruction*" does not mean annihilation, but utter ruin and devastation. All usefulness and productivity is suddenly terminated. Every purpose of the wicked will be violently dashed to the ground, never to be realized. Every ungodly desire will be utterly incapable of being fulfilled. They will remain with no possibility of gratification or fulfillment. While in this world the wicked are within the range of Divine influence. The sun shines upon them, and the rain falls upon them. The door of salvation is open to them, and they enjoy the daily graces of food, shelter, employment, and commerce. All of those things are the result of being in God's world.

But when Jesus comes, the wicked will be destroyed-removed from every aspect of God's presence. Here is how the Scriptures states the case. "*These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.*" Not a shred of goodness will be available to them. Not a single benefit of His power will ever again be realized. They will be cast from the presence of the Lord forever, and it will be a irremediable judgment from which no recovery will be possible.

LABOR PAINS. Just as an expectant mother cannot predict her labor pains, so the coming of the Lord cannot be precisely predicted. In the case of a woman with child, she is aware a birth is eminent. She senses the time is drawing near, and makes the necessary preparations. However, it is not so with the wicked. The coming of the Lord is drawing near, but they are blissfully unaware of it. They live as though the Lord was not coming at all. That is as foolish as a woman nearing the end of her term conducting herself as though she was carrying no child at all. We would think such a person to have been deprived of the most rudimentary knowledge. The case is even worse with the wicked.

THEY SHALL NOT ESCAPE. Jesus declared "*Heaven and earth will pass away.*" He then warned, "*But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly*" (Lk 21:33-34). Why did He give such a solemn warning? Because those who are not ready "*shall not escape.*" There will be no place to hide. The unrighteous are represented as crying out to the rocks and mountain in that day, "*Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?*" (Rev 6:16-17). It is no wonder Jesus calls upon us to "*watch*" and "*be ready.*"

One of the great tragedies of our time is that much religion leaves people unprepared and not watching for the return of Jesus. Today, there is little reference to this climactic event, and even less pleading for men to prepare for it. There is no way to calculate the unimaginable damage that is being done to the souls of men because of this circumstance. Truly, "*it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed*" (Rom 13:11).

LESSON #28

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

" ^{5:4} ***But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief.*** ⁵ ***You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness.*** ⁶ ***Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober.*** ⁷ ***For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night.*** " ^{NKJV} (1 Thessalonians 5:4-7)

INTRODUCTION

When it comes to the consideration of "*the day of the Lord*," or Christ's return "*the second time*," the necessity of readiness is accentuated. "*Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.*" ^{MATT 24:44} Our text will confirm that everything about salvation is conducive to this readiness. When we were born again, we were placed in the light, where we can progress toward "*the day of the Lord*." Outside of Christ, however, there is only spiritual night and darkness. The Christ-less realm promotes sin and discourages righteousness. It causes one to fall into sleep, so that the day of Christ will catch him by surprise and mandate ones destruction. To be unprepared for the return of Christ contradicts everything about salvation. It requires the quenching of the Spirit and the spurning of Him who speaks from heaven. The word of God must be rejected, and the world must become primary. In view of these things, it is imperative that we walk in the light, living out our lives in the awareness of the Lord, His will, and His return. At the moment Christ's return becomes meaningless to us, our souls begin to grow dull and our hearts begin to harden. It is not possible to avoid these lethal processes unless we choose to live in the day, in the bright light of the glory of God, and with His Word lighting our path.

YOU ARE NOT IN THE DARKNESS

" ^{5:4} ***But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief.*** " The declaration is that the day of the Lord will come "*as a thief in the night*." ^{5:2} It will come suddenly, unexpectedly, and while people have been lulled into spiritual complacency and insensitivity. Godly ministers and teachers will keep us aware of the "*day of the Lord*," when He returns in power and great glory. Ungodly leaders will neglect this subject, or take novel approaches to it, so that the people are left without an alert conscience concerning the return of their Lord.

NOT IN DARKNESS. What a piece of good news! Those who are living by faith are **not** "*in darkness*." They are not living blindly, with no vibrant and true direction or goal. Those who are "*not in darkness*" can "*see the day approaching*." ^{HEB 10:25} They are living alertly, with their "*senses exercised to discern good and evil*." ^{Heb 5:14} They are walking "*in the light as He is in the light*," ^{1 JOHN 1:7} They are not "*ignorant*" concerning the coming of Jesus "*the second time*." ^{1 THESS 4:13; HEB 9:28}

A vital aspect of spiritual life is where we are **NOT**. Countless professing believers are "*in the darkness*" concerning the return of their Lord. They are not preparing for the day, hear little about it, and seem to be disinterested concerning the whole subject. They are not living with "*the day of the Lord*" in mind. They live too close to the world, and are too involved in its affairs. Their interests have little to do with heaven, or dwelling forever in the courts of the Lord. What is said of the Thessalonians cannot be said of them. Whether men wish to acknowledge it or not, such people are tottering on the very precipice of condemnation.

THIS DAY. "*The day of the Lord*" is the preeminent day for those who are in Christ Jesus. This is the day that will overtake the wicked as a thief, bringing sudden destruction upon them. ^{5:3} It is "*the great and notable day*," and the Gospel is declared with it in mind. ^{ACTS 2:20} This is the day in which our spirits will be saved. ^{1 COR 5:5} It is the day of ultimate rejoicing, ^{2 COR 1:14} in which "*the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up*." ^{2 PET 3:10} For those who walk in darkness, this is "*the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God*," ^{ROM 2:5} in which God will "*judge the secrets of men*." ^{ROM 2:16} The awareness of this day will constrain men to "*cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light*." ^{ROM 13:11} The objective is to be "*blameless*" in this day. ^{1 COR 1:8}

This is the day when every person's work will be assessed, and appropriate reward or loss will be realized. ^{1 COR 3:13} It is the "*day of redemption*," when we will be clothed with immortality, death will lose its sting, and the grave will lose its victory - the day when we will receive a glorious body like unto His. ^{EPH 4:30; 1 COR 15:55-56; PHIL 4:20-21} What possible reason can be adduced for the remarkable silence on this subject from the pulpits of the land?

Let it be clear that those who preach a gospel that eliminates the coming of the Lord have preached "*another*

gospel. " 2 COR 11:4; GAL 1:6 They have reduced hope, if not eliminated it altogether. A message that does not apprise people of the return of Jesus puts the people at a decided disadvantage. Such a gospel makes it easier for Satan to work and for sin to creep into the church. We should not be surprised when immortality, strife, contention, and all manner of sin and foolishness surfaces in assemblies that are fundamentally ignorant of the return of Christ. People who do not ponder this day will find it easier to sin. Satan will more easily deceive them, and his arrows will find their way into their hearts and minds. There is no darkness as thick as the one caused by an ignorance of Christ's return. Those who walk in such darkness do not ponder the judgment. They have no thought for the reward Jesus will bring with Him. They forget they will give an account for every idle word, and that their works will be brought into judgment. They forget the heavens and earth will pass away, and therefore live in them as though they were always going to be here. Oh, it is serious beyond measure to be ignorant concerning "*the day of the Lord!*" A heart that does not long and wait for it will grow hard. There is no alternative for such a soul but to walk in darkness.

OVERTAKE YOU AS A THIEF. There is a vast difference between being overtaken by the day of the Lord and being blessed by it. None who are overtaken have the promise of being saved by it. Those who are "*surprised*"^{NIV} by this day will experience "*sudden destruction.*" For such, Jesus will break up their house, taking what they have and confronting them with His glory, which sharply contrasts with the darkness in which they walked. You will search in vain for any good that will come to those who are not expecting Christ's return. If people are not waiting for God's Son from heaven, the danger in which they are living is beyond comprehension. By using the word "*overtake*" the Spirit emphasizes the certainty of Christ's return. That day will override both time and circumstance. Prepare for it!

YOU ARE SONS OF THE LIGHT

"⁵ *You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness.* " ⁶ *Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober.* " Here the Spirit places the accent where we must place it. **Who we are, when correctly seen, will determine what we do.** Here is something that must be affirmed again and again. This is what we have been made in Christ Jesus. It is the result of new creaturehood and the consequence of salvation. Furthermore, this is common throughout the household of faith. No person in Christ Jesus is excluded: "*You are ALL . . .* "

SONS OF LIGHT AND DAY. Because we have been "*begotten,*" or "*born again,*"^{1 PET 1:3,23} we are called "*sons,*" or "*children.*"^{KJV, NRSV} We are not merely constituents of an historical movement, or followers of a certain approach to living in the world. We are not people who have merely embraced a philosophy of life, or are adhering to a set of rules. We are twice the offspring of God: once by nature, and finally by grace. The expression "*sons of light and sons of the day*" emphasizes the **means** by which we became sons, and the realm in which our new life is sustained. This is a vital distinction concerning which we need understanding.

The means by which we became sons. God's glorious light was the means through which we were born again. Through it we were illuminated concerning our natural condition and the great salvation announced by the Gospel. Scripture refers to this as when we "*were illuminated*" or "*were once enlightened.*"^{HEB 6:4; 10:32} The details of this new-birth experience are declared in Second Corinthians 4:6. "*For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*"^{NKJV} Working through the Gospel of Christ, which is God's power "*unto salvation,*"^{ROM 1:16} God revealed Himself to us. He did this by showing us His Son in the message of the Gospel. That illumination was effective, for He "*commanded*" the light to shine into our hearts. That regenerative work constitutes us "*sons of light.*" As Jesus said, "*While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.*"^{JOHN 12:36} Were it not for this light, we could not have been born again.

The realm in which spiritual life is sustained. Spiritual life cannot be sustained in darkness, or ignorance. The more ignorance dominates a person, the more dead they are. Many people, because of their unfamiliarity with God and the things of God, are like the certain man who fell into the hands of thieves and was left "*half dead.*"^{LUKE 10:30} Their ignorance is alienating them from the life of God, but they do not even know it.^{EPH 4:18} In order for our lives to be sustained in Jesus, we must "*walk in the light as He is in the light.*"^{1 JOHN 1:7} If we conduct our lives "*in the light,*" certain benefits will be realized, namely: "*we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.*" However, there is no promise of either of these essentials if we are not walking in the light - in spiritual illumination and awareness. The implications of this are far reaching, and devastating to the majority of Western *Christianity*. Far too much contemporary church-life is tolerant of spiritual darkness, and often is even guilty of perpetrating the same. It is inexcusable.

NOT OF THE NIGHT OR DARKNESS. Our new lives have nothing whatsoever to do with the night or the darkness. "*The night*" has to do with the **domain** in which men walk. It is a realm where spiritual darkness and

ignorance reside. It is where a lack of awareness of the day of the Lord is cultured and enhanced. "*The night*" is the territory where men do not think of God, Christ, salvation, or the day of the Lord. It is the realm where men are comfortable in sin and are dominated by this present evil world. The children of God cannot survive in "*the night*." "*The darkness*" is what rules the night. When men walk in the night, they become ignorant - blind to the realities of life and godliness. When a person chooses to live where darkness dominates, he "*does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.*" ^{1 JOHN 2:11} **It is not possible to be godly when one walks where God is not welcome, and the things of God are out of order!** Wherever spiritual light is out of order, spiritual life cannot be sustained. This is precisely why some professed believers die spiritually while sitting in church pews.

LET US NOT SLEEP. To "*sleep*" is to live as though nothing with eternal significance was going to happen. It is to live without the "*day of the Lord*" in mind. In this sense, "*sleep*" is a prelude to spiritual death - being cut off from God. David called it "*the sleep of death*," and prayed God would enlighten him so he could avoid it. ^{PSALM 13:3}

WATCH AND BE SOBER. To watch is to look forward to Christ's return, anxiously anticipating it. To be sober is to be alert, serious, and not deceived by the wicked one. Where these are absent, sin will gain the advantage, and a place for Satan is made. When men "*sleep*," neither of these indispensable traits are possible.

SLEEP AND DRUNKENNESS IN THE NIGHT

" ^{5:4} ***For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night.***" This is a most serious statement, with remarkable implications. It declares there is a realm that encourages both sleep and drunkenness. Neither of these can be experienced in the day or in the light. Both are tailored for the night, and are promoted by the darkness. In fact, "*sleep*" and being "*drunk*" cannot be avoided if one lives in spiritual darkness.

SLEEP AT NIGHT. Spiritual and moral "*night*" dulls spiritual capacities and closes the "*eyes of the understanding*." ^{EPH 1:17} If you have ever worked with low-lifers, drunkards, drug addicts, and carousers, you know this to be true. One can hardly break through the ignorance and disinterest that covers such poor souls like a heavy mantel. When a person walks in the realm of spiritual night, his soul begins to fall asleep. How carefully, for example, believers must guard their souls when they go to work. For the most part, the places where we earn our living are like the marketplaces of Athens - dominated by the night. When our bodies are in such places, our hearts and minds must walk in the light. If we allow ourselves to become absorbed by the culture of the night, we will fall asleep spiritually. The Word will no longer be important to us, and the coming of the Lord will be the last thing we think about. How true it is, "*those who sleep, sleep at night.*"

In another sense, "*night*" is the whole temporal order - it is time, and the fashion of this world, which is passing away. ^{1 COR 7:31} To become absorbed with temporal things is to be in the night, and to be in the night puts one to sleep. It is in this sense that we are admonished, "*And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand.*" ^{ROM 13:11-12} "*The day*," in this case, is the day of the Lord - the ultimate day that will dissipate the night and all shadows. By saying "*The night is far spent*," the Spirit means everything that is **not** in harmony with the Gospel. This is the domain of opposition to the things of God. It encourages the neglect of the soul and the preeminence of the body. It is the time in which the devil works, and the saints must grapple with a wayward law within. ^{ROM 7:23}

DRUNK AT NIGHT. Drunkenness is intoxication, dissipation, and being filled with something that distorts thought and corrupts the whole person. In the body, it applies to being filled with wine, or other forms of liquor. It also includes drugs, which have been popularized in our culture. To be "*drunk*" is to lose possession of one's faculties, and thus become more vulnerable to the devil. Ordinarily, those who are drunk and "*drunk at night*." In a hedonistic society, however, that is addicted to pleasure and fleshly gratification, such has become popular in the daytime also.

One can become "*drunk*" on other things also. The great spiritual harlot of the book of Revelation is said to be "*drunk with the blood of the saints*." ^{REV 17:6} She derived her pleasure from slaughtering the people of God. Whatever makes one "*drunk*," unalert toward God, and the vassal of the devil, can be included in this.

In recent years, some professed believers have referred to being "*drunk in the Spirit*," which is a complete contradiction of terms. They base their misconception on Ephesians 5:18. "*And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit.*" They betray their ignorance by ignoring the remainder of the thought: "*Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of*

our Lord Jesus Christ; submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God." ^{5:19} Such holy activities require an alert spirit and mind. It cannot be done while staggering about and falling under the imagined power of the Holy Spirit. The Ephesian text did not say to be drunk in the Spirit, but to be "*filled with the Spirit.*" Any place such an experience is mentioned in Scripture, the individual always became profitable to others, articulate in the things of God, and keenly aware of eternal verities. That is something that can only happen in the day, never in night.

We have lived to see well known religious personalities fall into moral degradation. Some have marveled that such things could happen. Be sure, when religious leaders fall, it is because they have been walking in night and living in darkness. You cannot fall in the light. It simply is not possible. That is why Jesus said, "*If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.*" ^{JOHN 11:9-10} Settle it in your mind, walking in the night produces results, and they are not good. Such results are related to condemnation and death. Equally true, walking in the light yields results, and they are good: salvation and life with God.

LESSON #29

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

" ^{5:8} *But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation.* ⁹ *For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,* ¹⁰ *who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.*" ^{NKJV} (1 Thessalonians 5:8-10)

INTRODUCTION

How are those in Christ to conduct their lives? How should life itself be approached? The answer to these questions is found in the reason for which Christ died for us - the ULTIMATE reason. In our text, the Spirit propels us to the time when the heavens and earth that now exist will have passed away, and the new heavens and earth will be revealed. From another viewpoint, He addresses our lives AFTER we die, or "sleep." Lifting us beyond time and circumstance, we are reminded why Jesus died, and what God has really intended for those in Christ Jesus. These are realities that are related to "the day," where there is illumination and understanding. It is apparent from this passage that living in this world tends to cast men and women into spiritual stupor, dulling their sense of eternal realities. The Spirit therefore shouts them awake, so they can see matters the more clearly. A listless life, lived in apathy or indifference to the truth of God, is not acceptable to Him. Neither, indeed, is there any safety for the soul in such a manner of life. Even when the saints are persecuted and experience great difficulties in this world, they must be reminded of why Christ died for them, and what God has determined for them.

THE PROPER APPROACH TO LIFE

" ^{5:8} *But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation.*" ^{NKJV} Having reminded us of the type of activities that take place in the night, the Spirit now turns our attention to how living in the light influences the way we live. There is no place for ignorance and misdirected lives in the light!

OF THE DAY. By saying we are "of the day," the Spirit means our new lives are adapted to live in the light of the Lord's presence. New hearts and minds are well suited to live with God's countenance upon us (Num 6:26; Psa 4:6). We are born again to "walk" in the "light of" His "countenance" (Psa 89:15). That is, we have been made to survive the scrutiny of God, living with His eye upon us. For many, this is a disconcerting and frightening thought. However, in Christ, we have been re-created to live under the watchful eye of the Lord who weighs, or evaluates, the "actions" of men (1 Sam 2:3).

Notice how the Spirit reasons with us: "let us who are of the day." He recognizes the work of God within us, and addresses us from that point of view. Like all men, the Thessalonians had a part that needed to be subdued, but they were addressed as those who were well adapted for the light and for the day. In doing this, our attention is drawn to what we are in Christ, **not** what we are in Adam. This perspective is necessary to do what He now admonishes. Many a poor soul has been weighed down with such exhortations because they were not convinced they were "of the day." They were laboring **for** Divine acceptance instead of **because** of it. The Spirit reasons with us as those who have already been received by God.

BE SOBER. This is an especially appropriate word for our time. Much of the religion of our day actually encourages a lack of sobriety. It lulls people into spiritual sleep, like Delilah lulled Samson to sleep on her knees. The word "sober" means discreet and watchful. It is remaining calm and collected in our spirit, not rattled by life's difficulties. It is being free from mental and spiritual excess and confusion. It is being self-controlled, clear-headed, and self-possessed. All of that means the individual is not pulled about by circumstances, or tossed too and fro by the winds of life. Their minds are not hyped up by substances or intoxicating pleasures. Nor, indeed, are they dull and listless because of indifference and disinterest. The "sober" person is alert, sensitive, discerning, and aware of what is going on.

In verse six we were admonished to not sleep, "as do others; but let us watch and be sober." This sobriety particularly has to do with watching and waiting for the Lord's return, that it not catch us unawares. The Spirit admonishes "aged men" to "be sober" (Tit 2:2). "Young women" are also exhorted to "be sober" (Tit 2:4). "Young men" are admonished to "be sober" (Tit 2:6). All saints are told to "gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet 1:13). **No part of our lives is to be lived so as to make Christ's return a surprise to us.** To live in such a manner as to fail to "be sober." How needful this exhortation is in our times.

THE BREASTPLATE OF FAITH AND LOVE. The child of God needs protection for the heart, soul,

mind, and strength. Walking in the light does not mean there are no hazards! Because we are to love the Lord our God with all of these capacities, they have become a target for the evil one. The Lord has, however, equipped us with marvelous protection. The "*breastplate*" is a spiritual covering for the heart, soul, mind, and strength - the vital parts of our inner beings. Here, that protection is "*faith and love*." Both have to do with an embrace of the Lord Himself. "*Faith and love*" are frequently put together (1 Tim 1:14; 2 Tim 1:13; Gal 5:6; Eph 6:23). Faith connects us with the Lord and Divine resources now. Love is our response to the love of God, which has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5; 1 John 4:19). This is our love for God. It is revealed as we "*keep His commandments: and His commandments are not grievous*" (1 John 5:3). Spiritual life cannot be lived without a vibrant connection with the Lord and a strong love and preference for Him and His Word. Where either of these is missing or weak, the person becomes vulnerable to the devices and harassment of the wicked one.

THE HELMET OF THE HOPE OF SALVATION. This helmet protects the mind from delusion, fear, doubt, and being anxious. It is the persuasion that we are saved, accepted in the Beloved (Eph 1:6), the sons of God (1 John 3:1), and with our names written in heaven (Lk 10:20). This involves "*the full assurance of understanding*" (Col 2:2), "*the full assurance of hope*" (Heb 6:11), and "*the full assurance of faith*" (Heb 10:22). This is the "*confidence and rejoicing of the hope*" that is to be possessed "*firm unto the end*" (Heb 3:6). The person who wears this marvelous "*helmet*" is convinced that the Lord's death, resurrection life, and present enthronement at God's right hand, is for him. Such know they have been delivered from the power of darkness, and have been placed into the Kingdom of God's dear Son (Col 1:13).

APPOINTED TO OBTAIN SALVATION

"⁹ For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Whereas the first part of our text was an exhortation, this verse confirms the reasonableness of that exhortation. The Spirit shows us that what we have been admonished to do perfectly accords with the very nature of salvation. It is unreasonable to do otherwise.

GOD DID NOT APPOINT. God does make appointments! He appointed the world of Noah's time to destruction by water (Gen 6:7). He appointed the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:17). In both cases, there was no way to avert the destruction-the appointment to wrath. The only hope for Noah was found in the ark, which would survive the judgment of God. The only hope for Lot was to flee from the city, separating himself from it. There **are** "*vessels of wrath fitted to destruction*" (Rom 9:22). But those in Christ are not in that number. When God made Jesus "*a curse for us*" (Gal 3:13), all who "*receive Him*" (John 1:12) were excluded from God's cursing and wrath.

OBTAIN SALVATION. Exclusion from the curse is not an end of itself. The objective is not simply to be exempted from wrath, but to "*obtain salvation*." Inherent in this word is the fact that the fulness of our salvation has not yet been received. The "*day of salvation*" includes nourishment in the light, as well as deliverance from darkness (2 Cor 6:2). We are presently "*heirs of salvation*," ministered to by a vast company of angels in preparation for what is to come. In its fulness, "*our salvation*" is "*nearer than when we believed*" (Rom 13:11). Presently, we are being "*kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time*" (1 Pet 1:5). That is salvation in its fulness, and for which we are presently being prepared and oriented. The revelation of this salvation will take place when Jesus comes "*the second time*," "*to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him*" ^{NIV} Heb 9:28).

The salvation to which those in Christ have been appointed is "*with eternal glory*" (2 Tim 2:10). That is, God has appointed us to be "*glorified*," as affirmed in Romans: "*and whom He justified, them He also glorified*" (Rom 8:30). It should be readily apparent that we have not yet been glorified. That means there still is some saving to be done! When Jesus returns, He will "*change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself*" (Phil 3:20-31).

Obtaining salvation involves being "*heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ*" (Rom 8:17). It includes an eternal reign with Christ (2 Tim 2:12), and being given "*the Kingdom*" (Dan 7:18,22,27). It involves having every vestige of the curse removed, when "*God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away*" (Rev 21:4).

All of these benefits are presently "*tasted*" in the first-fruits sense. However, their fulness is yet to come. Whatever we experience in this world is only the beginning, not the culmination. As good as the things are now, they will be better in the world to come. Then we will receive the fulness of what we now have tasted. As Jesus Himself said, "*Verily I say*

unto you, *There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting*" (Luke 18:29-30). Faith, love, and hope, bring us "*more in this present time.*" It also prepares us for "*the world to come,*" and for glorification.

Until that "*eternal glory*" is experienced, and as long as we are in "*this present evil world,*" we are in a situation that requires sobriety, "*the breastplate of faith and love,*" and "*the helmet of the hope of salvation.*" These three abiding graces, "*faith, hope, and love*" (1 Cor 13:13) are to be found in increasing measure in us as we wait for the return of our Lord.

THROUGH OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST. The salvation that is yet to be "*obtained*" will be administered "*by our Lord Jesus Christ.*"^{KJV} This is not a mere technicality, nor is it something that happens by rote, or automatically. The idea is that Jesus, who is presently bringing us to glory (Heb 2:10), will soon bring glory to us. He will "*receive*" us unto Himself (John 14:3), change our vile bodies (Phil 3:21), and bring His reward with Him (Rev 22:12). He will lift us from the cauldron of conflict, destroy our adversaries, and usher us into His presence. The glorious things for which we are presently being prepared will be brought to us. How precious is the admonition, "*Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be BROUGHT TO YOU at the revelation of Jesus Christ*" (1 Pet 1:13). That is when we will "*obtain*" the salvation being ministered by the Lord Jesus.

That is the aim of being made a "*new creation in Christ Jesus*" (2 Cor 5:17). It is to "*obtain*" the fulness of salvation - not merely in this world, but in the world to come, the new heavens and the new earth wherein dwells righteousness (2 Pet 3:13). Let no one be moved from this hope, or lapse into spiritual sleep that leaves one thinking only of this world.

THE REASON CHRIST DIED FOR US

"^{5:4} *Who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.*"^{NKJV} The Spirit further develops this thought, namely that of being readied for eternity with Jesus - "*so shall we ever be with the Lord*" (4:17).

WHO DIED FOR US. The "*doctrine of Christ*" (Heb 6:1; 2 John 9) will never take us where the death of Christ is not a primary consideration. This was a death that occurred in "*due time,*" or at the "*right time*" (Rom 5:6). It is associated with a specific time because it was intended to fulfil a specific objective. Sufficient time was allotted to confirm that we were, in fact, sinners, and in sore need of a Savior (Rom 5:8). He "*died for our sins,*" in order to rid us of them, and remove them from the face of our God (1 Cor 15:3). In that death, the head of the serpent was bruised (Gen 3:15). He was "*wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed*" (Isa 53:5). In His death, He "*gave Himself a ransom for many*" (Matt 20:28). He purchased the church with His own blood through His death (Acts 20:28), bringing them justification through His blood (Rom 5:9). We were "*reconciled to God by the death of His Son*" (Rom 5:10), and "*bought with a price*" (1 Cor 6:20). Jesus gave Himself for our sins to "*deliver us from this present evil world*" (Gal 1:4), and "*redeem us from the curse of the Law*" (Gal 3:13). Because of the death of Christ, we have been "*brought near by the blood of Christ*"^{NKJV} (Eph 2:13). Jew and Gentile have been drawn together in one body because of that death (Eph 2:14), and the "*law of commandments contained in ordinance*" has been "*abolished*" as a means to righteousness (Eph 2:15; Rom 10:4). Jesus gave Himself for us that He might present us to Himself "*a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish*" (Eph 5:27). Our Lord "*made peace through the blood of His cross*" (Col 1:20), in order to present us "*holy and unblameable and unproveable in His sight*" (Col 1:22). In His death, Jesus also "*delivered us from the wrath to come*" (1 Thess 1:10). Now the Spirit will enlarge on this most wonderful truth - the voluntary death of Christ.

WAKE OR SLEEP. This refers to our condition when Jesus returns. The word "*wake,*" or "*awake*"^{NASB}, refers to those who are "*are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord*" (4:15,17). This is the generation that will not experience death in the normal sense, but will be "*changed*" from mortality to immortality in the twinkling of an eye (1 Cor 15:51-52). The word "*sleep*" refers to those who have died, being "*absent from the body*" (2 Cor 5:8). This does NOT refer to those who "*sleep in the night,*" indulging the appetites of the flesh (5:7). Regardless of the condition of "*the elect*" (Mk 13:22; Col 2:12), whether they have already departed from the arena of battle, or remain in a state of sobriety and readiness, a common destiny is reserved for them all. This is the ultimate objective for Christ's

death.

LIVE TOGETHER WITH HIM. This is an eternal perspective. While we do have fellowship with Christ now (1 Cor 1:9), and He dwells within our hearts by faith (Eph 3:17), that is not the life to which the Spirit now expounds. This refers to our "*gathering together unto Him*" (2 Thess 2:1). This is the time to which Jesus referred when He said, "*And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also*" (John 14:3). Until that time, and by faith, Jesus dwells with us where we are, making His abode with us (John 14:23). However, this is not the ultimate aim of Christ's death, even though it is most blessed and absolutely indispensable. We will "*live together with Him*" when we are "*glorified*," receiving our resurrection bodies, made to be "*like Him, for we shall see Him as He is*" (1 John 3:2). Any person who comes short of this has lived in vain. Then we will be complete, will reign, and will never again be subjected to weakness.

It is a tragedy beyond description that so very little is being said these days about this aspect of Christ's death. He died in order that we might "*live together with Him*," in fulness, uninterrupted satisfaction, and an unchallenged reign. If this hope is taken away from God's people, they will not be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. Persecution will become too weighty for them, and this world will not appear as evil as it really is.

The sum of the matter is this. Christ died in order that we might share in His life, and do so eternally. He had no temporal benefits for us in mind when He died. He set His face toward the future, when His joy would be brought to its peak by being joined together with His bride - "*the joy set before Him*" (Heb 12:2). Child of God, live for that day, for that is why Christ died! Uproot your affections from the passing realm (1 Cor 7:31), and place them in the heavenly places, where Christ sits on the right hand of God (Col 3:1-3). That is where Jesus wants you. If that is where you want to be, He will lead you there!

LESSON #30

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

" ^{5:11} *Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.* ¹² *And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you,* ¹³ *and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves.* " ^{NKJV} (1 Thessalonians 5:11-13)

INTRODUCTION

The reality of the soon coming of the Lord should bring us to certain strong conclusions. Some of them are provided in this text. The body of Christ is comprised of believers who have been integrated with God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and one another. They have even been brought into accord with holy angels and the "*spirits of just men made perfect*" (Heb 12:22-24). This circumstance forbids the rise of self-centeredness or a quest for personal satisfaction in this present evil world. The imminent return of our Lord (and His return can be viewed in no other way) necessitates spiritually profitable affiliation with His people. We live in a time when contemporary Christianity has placed the emphasis on reaching those who are yet in darkness. While that may appear to be a most noble emphasis, when the body of Christ is weak and emaciated, it only becomes the occasion for perpetuating spiritual death. If the body of Christ is not ready for His return, it makes little difference how they have spent their time. Somewhere in the religious maze that is all around us, we must find time to actually fulfill what this text declares. As will be very apparent it will take both wisdom and effort to see to it that these things are accomplished.

THE ROLE OF COMFORT AND EDIFICATION

" ^{5:11} *Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.* " Other versions read, "*Therefore encourage one another, and build up one another.* " ^{NASB.NIV} This is a spiritually logical conclusion to what has been declared concerning the Lord's return.

THEREFORE. The word "*therefore*," or "*wherefore*," ^{KJV} means "consequently," or "for which cause." The idea is that in view of what has been revealed, these are the things that are in order. In view of the fact that **Jesus is coming back as a thief in the night**, ^{5:2-4} plundering and spoiling all who are not ready for His return, certain activities are mandated. They are not optional, they are imperative. In view of the fact that **we are children of the light and children of the day**, ^{5:5-8} that status must be maintained. Therefore the following activities are essential. Because **God has appointed us to obtain salvation**, ^{5:9} the things that follow are compulsory. Because **Jesus died for us so we could live forever with Him**, ^{5:10} what follows is obligatory. It is not possible to be prepared for Christ's return without these things!

COMFORT ONE ANOTHER. The word "*comfort*" speaks of a helping ministry—one of assisting the saints in preparing for the return of their Lord. The word means to console, encourage, to call near, and to entreat. Pictorially, it is like a sympathetic person coming along side a struggling soul and assisting them on their way. The most thorough picture of this activity is found in the Holy Spirit, who is called "*the Comforter*" ^{KJV} (John 14:16,26; 16:7). Other versions use the word "*Helper*," ^{NKJV.NASB} "*Counselor*," ^{NIV.RSV} and "*Advocate*." ^{NRSV}

Words are involved. Comforting is more than putting the arm around a slumping shoulder, although that is a vital part of empathy. The word "*comfort*" includes the idea of admonition, instruction, and exhortation. It involves cheering the heart of the fainting with words, or speech: i.e., as in "*comfort one another with these words*" (4:18). As our "*Comforter*," the Holy Spirit, encourages and strengthens us by bringing to our remembrance the words of Jesus (John 14:26), and testifying to our spirits of Him (John 15:26). The feet of a comforter are beautiful because he brings good news. Such a person shifts the attention of the saints from their affliction to their coming glory. One of the roles of prophesy is to "*comfort*" everyone (1 Cor 14:31). Comfort clarifies our vision, sweeping away the clutter of worldly care and imaginations. It assists people in focusing their attention on the glory to come rather than on the sorrows of this time.

There are believers who are rarely comforted in the sense of our text. Even in their most religious moments, little is said that convinces them of the sure return of their Lord and the glory that will be obtained at that time. The availability of heavenly resources and the joy of Divine fellowship are largely withheld from these poor souls. One can only imagine the devastating effects that the absence of spiritual comfort has upon God's people.

EDIFY ONE ANOTHER. Whereas "*comfort*" has to do with readjusting our focus and getting back on our feet spiritually, edification as to do with progress in the Lord. Both of these activities are essential. Comfort is needed to recover, and edification is essential to move forward. Both ministries rank unusually high in the work of the Lord.

The noble ministry of edification. This is the principal ministry in the church. Nothing must be allowed that minimizes its importance or neutralizes its effect. To edify is to build up, like raising up an edifice. It is to fortify the truth in the soul of another, clarifying its magnitude and enabling spiritual growth and advance. When we are edified we become more capable of walking in the light (1 John 1:7) and more confident to draw near to the Lord (Heb 10:22). We become more proficient in resisting the devil (James 4:7) and putting to death the deeds of the flesh (Col 3:5). We also become capable of ministering comfort to others (2 Cor 1:4).

Every believer is to "*please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification*" ^{NKJV} (Rom 15:2). The very first effect of prophesying is "*edification*," and it is deliberate, not by chance (1 Cor 14:3). Believers are admonished to "*seek to abound for the edification of the church*" ^{NASB} (1 Cor 14:12). In fact, in our assemblies we are admonished, "*Let all things be done for edification.*" ^{NKJV} (1 Cor 14:26). The purpose for all spiritual gifts is said to be, "*for the edifying of the body of Christ*" (Eph 4:12). A weak, uninformed, and vacillating church brings no glory to Jesus. Edification ensures such a condition does not occur.

Authority to edify. Edification is not incidental. Divine authority must precede this holy work. Thus Paul said he had received "*authority*" for "*edification*" (2 Cor 10:8). This occurred because he was associated with the Head, Jesus Christ. Through Paul, Jesus ministered to the body of Christ, edifying them. The same ministry takes place in a measured degree as we hold steadfastly to the Head. He will minister through us, building up His people (Col 2:19). The Thessalonians were faithfully engaged in this holy work of edification.

RECOGNIZING THOSE WHO LABOR AMONG US

"¹² *And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake.*" All who are in Christ Jesus are members of His body (Eph 5:30) and all have been accepted by God (Eph 1:6). All have been washed, sanctified, and justified (1 Cor 6:11). But all are not equal. The body of Christ is not a democracy, with everyone having an equal vote, so to speak. Now the Spirit will admonish us to recognize this situation. There are people among us who are further along than we are, and whose words carry more weight. The importance of us recognizing this situation is seen in the strong admonition of the Apostle: "*I URGE you, brethren.*" Other versions read "*beseech you,*" ^{KJV} and "*appeal to you.*" ^{NRSV}

RECOGNIZE THOSE WHO LABOR. There are people within the body of Christ who are noted for their indefatigable efforts - people who feed the sheep. The word "*labor*" literally means to become fatigued, or wearied with work. Many a soul scarcely gives enough of themselves to the work of the Lord to ever become tired or weary. They know nothing of "*toil*," as when the disciples labored to row their boat through a storm (Mk 6:48). However, there are those who do "*labor in the word and doctrine*," or "*who work hard at preaching and teaching*" ^{NASB} (1 Tim 5:17). Such souls are gifts from God. They acknowledge with Paul, "*I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls*" (2 Cor 12:15). He pictured his life as "*being poured out as a drink offering*" (Phil 2:17). Jesus spoke of a "*laborer*" who was "*worthy of his wages*" (Lk 10:7). Paul compared such workers to an ox who "*treads out the grain*" ^{NKJV} (1 Tim 5:18). Such souls are most unique, and, proportionately, there are not many of them.

The responsibility of any body of believers is to "*recognize*," or "*know*," ^{KJV} who these laborers are. Who gives themselves more fully to the comfort and edifying of the saints? Who is more aggressive in the work of teaching and building up the saints? The recognition of such souls is the acknowledgment of Christ's gifts to us. These people have been placed in the body where it has pleased God (1 Cor 12:18), and we honor Him by recognizing them.

WHO ARE OVER YOU IN THE LORD. This is too difficult for some to receive. Other versions read, "*have charge over you in the Lord.*" ^{NASB} Peter refers to those charged with feeding the flock of God (1 Pet 5:2). Paul affirms they are to guard "*all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd* [feed, KJV] *the church of God which He purchased with His own blood*" ^{NKJV} (Acts 20:28). Three times the Spirit refers to such people as those who "*have the rule over you*" (Heb 13:7,17,24).

Not bosses. These are not bosses, governing the body of Christ in all of its incidentals. They are spiritual leaders who lead by "*example*," not coercion (Heb 13:7; 1 Pet 5:3). They are "*over*" us because they "*labor in the word and in the doctrine*," being placed in their position by Christ Himself for the building up of the saints. **It is their activity that makes them what they are, not their position or office!**

WHO ADMONISH YOU. Here the Spirit further clarifies who is to be recognized. These are not merely people who have leadership skills. They are not those with academic credentials, or those who merely hold an elective office. Those who are "*over*" us constantly remind us of the Word and will of the Lord. They "*admonish*" us. The NASB

read, "*who . . . give you instruction.*" The word "*admonish*" is an exceedingly large one. It includes the ideas of warning, exhorting, teaching, and instructing. In Christ, there are no silent leaders. Those who are "*over*" us in the Lord consistently bring the Word of God to bear upon the situation. They have a message from the Lord, insight into His Word, and perception of the circumstances. It is our responsibility to recognize such souls. It will assist us in better preparing to meet the Lord, separating ourselves from iniquity and pressing forward.

ESTEEM THEM VERY HIGHLY. We are to love all of the brethren, but we are not to give them all the same esteem. There are some souls who are to be esteemed "*very highly.*" Paul told Timothy such individuals were to be given "*double honor*" (1 Tim 5:17). The NIV reads, "*highest regard.*" This is not a fleshly regard, or a mere recognition that they work hard. The high regard results from the unusual benefits such individuals bring to us. They comfort us, thereby relieving the burdens of life. They edify us, causing us to become stronger in faith, hope, and love. In the book of Hebrews the Spirit says to "*remember*" them, "*obey*" and "*submit*" to them, and "*salute,*" or greet, them (Heb 13:7,17,24).

In love. Our regard for these leaders is an expression of spiritual love. We love them because they have helped us to progress in the faith and perfect holiness in the fear of God.

For their work's sake. Underscoring that this is not political or formal esteem, the Spirit again focuses on the work of these noble souls. They have lived to bring clearer vision and greater understanding to the saints. That is their "*work,*" and we honor them for it.

" 5:13 ***Be at peace among yourselves.***" It is more than passingly interesting that Paul adds these words after speaking of having a high regard for those who labor tirelessly for the building of our souls. However, once we understand the nature of the flesh, and of its constant efforts to dominate the assembly of the saints, this admonition becomes clear.

FACTIONS IN THE CHURCH. If spiritual leaders are not honored "*for their work's sake,*" factions can arise within the church. This very thing happened in Corinth, who had been exposed to some of the greatest of spiritual leaders. Once Paul chided them for their divisions, saying, "*Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?*" (1 Cor 1:12-13). That is the manner in which flesh gives honor to men. **It exalts their persons rather than their work!** The result is division, and the result of division is the absence of peace. The Corinthians were not at peace among themselves. It is said of them, "*For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? For when one says, 'I am of Paul,' and another, 'I am of Apollos,' are you not carnal?*" (1 Cor 3:3-4). They did not highly regard in love those God sent to them, and they did not respect them for the sake of their work. They were not at peace among themselves.

WE MUST BE AT PEACE AMONG OURSELVES. Peace among the brethren is not a luxury, but a necessity. Jesus once said to His followers, "*have peace one with another*" (Mk 9:50). This is loving one another as Jesus loved us (John 13:34). It is not allowing knowing one another after the flesh to get between us and God - and such an approach to our brethren **will** have that impact (2 Cor 5:16).

GOD'S LOVE AND PEACE. The experience of God's love and peace, to a measurable extent, depends upon us being at peace among ourselves. As it is written, "*Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you*" (2 Cor 13:11). We are to expend effort to "*keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*" (Eph 4:3). What is even more, the peace of God will NOT rule our own hearts if we are at variance with our brethren. "*Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace*" (Col 3:15). Many a soul has been thrust into a life of confusion and strife simply because they refused to dwell peaceably with their brethren. They delighted in troubling the waters, and thus were troubled themselves. The sensitivity of the Lord in this matter is reflected in the words of Solomon. "*These six things doth the LORD hate . . . he that soweth discord among brethren*" (Prov 6:16-19).

THE FRUIT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS. Here is something with which the saints are to be "*filled*" - "*the fruit of righteousness*" (Phil 1:11). This is the "*harvest,*"^{NRSV} or crop of righteousness. It involves personal benefits that are realized because a person is righteous. In this case, the righteousness is what has been imputed to us because of our faith (Rom 4:22-24). The "*fruit*" is the marvelous outgrowth of that righteousness in our hearts, minds, and lives. It includes "*the fruit of the Spirit*" (Gal 5:22-24; Eph 9), "*holiness*" (Rom 6:21-22), and "*thanksgiving*" proceeding from our lips (Heb 13:15). How is one to experience such marvelous fruitage? How can

the Holy Spirit work in us abundantly, producing a spiritual harvest that brings glory to God and comfort and edification to His people?

They are sown in peaceful environs. This fruit is both sown and harvested in peaceful realms. Where there are dissension and trouble, spiritual fruit withers, and people become unprepared for the coming of the Lord. Thus James wrote, *"For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown **in peace** of them that **make peace**"* (James 3:16-18). Verse eighteen reads this way in the NIV, accenting the effect peace has upon the righteous. *"Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness."*

The introduction of agitation within the body of Christ causes a disruption of peace. When peace leaves, spiritual sowing is reduced, and spiritual harvest begins to diminish. Consequently, the coming of the Lord begins to pose a threat rather than minister a blessing. Hope begins to die, and unbelief begins to rise. Oh, it is not idle word - *"Be at peace among yourselves."* When such fails to happen, there has not been proper regard for those who are feeding the sheep. Instead, the attention has been turned to the personal desires of those who walk in aloofness from the Lord. However, where those who are willing to spend and be spent for God are correctly esteemed, readiness for the Lord's return will result.

LESSON #31

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

" 5:14 *Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all.* 15 *See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.*" NKJV (1 Thessalonians 5:14-15)

INTRODUCTION

The child of God is faced with a temptation to view life in Christ from distorted perspectives. Two of these involve opposite extremes. The first is to over-simplify spiritual life, approaching it with a sort of naivety that disarms the soul and gives the advantage to Satan. The second is to overly-complicate life in Christ, so that fear grips the heart and strong confidence becomes nearly impossible. Institutional religion is an approach to the faith that places the emphasis upon the organization rather than the Savior. It stresses abiding by the rules of the institution, depending upon its leaders, and courting its favor. In such an environment, the extremes just mentioned flourish. Institutions that place an emphasis on their own leaders tend to encourage an over-simplification of spiritual life. Those that have a harsh legalistic bent cause overly-complicated views of that life. Our text will devastate both approaches, showing that the believer is responsible for being personally involved in the great salvation of God. It will also confirm there are souls within the body of Christ who have been weakened by the good fight of faith. It is not enough for such souls to simply belong to the right church, or to embrace the proper teaching. Provision has been made for refurbishing their strength and clarifying their vision. Faith will move our lives in a spiritually profitable direction, where all who are seeking to dwell with the Lord will experience benefit from our presence and our words. While we are engaged in a battle, it is not with flesh and blood, and thus we cannot become involved in retaliatory or harmful words and deeds.

WARN THE UNRULY, COMFORT THE FAINTHEARTED

" 5:14a *Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted . . .* " The church at Thessalonica was experiencing opposition and persecution (1:6; 2:14). Yet, this circumstance did not relieve them from being personally involved in the good work of the Lord. While there are certain limitations realized when we suffer for righteous ness sake, such opposition cannot render the church useless. Faith can cause us to rise to the occasion, ministering in the name of the Lord while under duress.

WE EXHORT YOU. To "*exhort*" is to move someone to action - to provoke them to engage in an effort that is difficult. Exhorting is both gentle and strong. It is gentle in the sense of pleading, inviting, or begging. It is strong in the sense of being necessary and important to spiritual life. An exhortation is not a mere suggestion.

This is now the second time the Spirit provokes an exhortation to the Thessalonians (4:1). Exhortation is a vital aspect of spiritual life. Faithful ministers of the Word are admonished to "*exhort*" (1 Tim 6:2; 2 Tim 4:2). Believers are admonished, "*exhort one another daily . . . lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.*" (Heb 3:13). A prophet speaks to men in "*exhortation*" (1 Cor 14:3), and servants of God are to "*give attention to . . . exhortation*" (1 Tim 4:13).

The very necessity of exhortation presupposes the existence of influences that tend to wear us down, making us inactive. There are times when we must be stirred up to action, and moved with powerful constraints to do certain things that encourage spiritual life.

WARN THE UNRULY. Other versions use the word "*admonish*." NASB/NRSV **The word "warn"** means to caution or reprove gently. It is something that precedes a stern rebuke. It is a word that is addressed to someone going in the wrong direction, but who has not yet chosen to live in transgression. Warning is very much like exhorting. It is urging the individual to change direction, or to avoid imminent danger. There would be far less sin in the professed church if there were more timely and fervent warnings issued.

The unruly are the disorderly - those who have strayed from the main path, and are headed in the wrong direction. Such have not made "*straight paths*" for their feet, and are living in a spiritually slipshod manner (Heb 12:13). Such are not alert in their souls, but are falling asleep, drifting into the territory that is dominated by the devil. Other versions use the word "*idle*," or "*idlers*." NIV/NRSV The ASV uses the more precise word "*disorderly*." The paraphrased BBE version reads, "*those whose lives are not well ordered*." The NJB reads, "*those who are undisciplined*."

The word refers to those who are out of rank, irregular, and departing from the proper manner of life. These are people who do not live with any spiritual consistency. They are too easily distracted by pleasure and other pursuits. Churches are literally filled with such people. They are to be "*warned*" - reminded the path they are walking does lead to sure destruction. God will not play games with them! Nor, indeed, will Satan fail to see their sloppy and spiritually unalert lives. They will be snared by him!

COMFORT THE FAINTHEARTED. The KJV refers to the "*feble-minded*." This does not refer to those

deprived of wisdom, but to those whose minds have been weakened by trial, so that the things of God cannot be clearly seen. The literal meaning of the word is "*little-spirited*," showing such people are discouraged or disheartened. Their strength has dissipated, and, in the heat of the battle, they have been "*cast down*" (2 Cor 4:9; 7:6).

Elsewhere being "*fainthearted*" is described in these words: "*we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life*" (2 Cor 1:8). David once described the experience with these words: "*there is but a step between me and death*" (1 Sam 20:3). This suffering occurs while one is engaged in the good fight of faith. It is not the consequence of neglecting one's soul. The opposition of sinners can cause you to become "*wearied and faint in your minds*" (Heb 12:3). For this reason remedial action is urged.

Comfort speaks of encouragement. Believers are assailed with temptations, and opposed by the godless when they do good. They even have a law within their members that finds evil present with them when they desire to do good (Rom 7:21,23). All of this often causes the saint to become disheartened, disappointed, and discouraged.

Who can place a proper value on encouraging words at such times! Surely, "*A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver*" (Prov 25:11). Such comfort brings the weary soul to its right mind. The Divine power that is devoted to them is thus confirmed (Eph 1:19). The "*eternal inheritance*" that awaits the faithful is seen more clearly (Heb 9:15). Once again, the truth that "*God is for us*" rises in the sky of life to brighten the day and strengthen the heart (Rom 8:31). Child of God, speak of the present grace and the coming glory to those who are weary in the battle. Give their minds fresh and eternal realities to think upon.

UPHOLD THE WEAK, BE PATIENT WITH ALL

"^{14b} . . . *uphold the weak, be patient with all.*" Our hearts must become acutely aware that believers are not in a constant state of perceived strength and glory. By this, I mean they are not always on top of life, fully confident, and masters of all the situations they face. That this is the ideal cannot be denied. That it is always our state is emphatically denied, even though we fervently desire such to be our experience. In addition to this, there are young believers among us who are not spiritually mature. Their vision is somewhat blurred, and they are not rooted and grounded. This portion of our text concerns such souls.

UPHOLD THE WEAK. Other versions read "*support the weak*,"^{KJV} "*help the weak*,"^{NASB} "*sustain the weak*,"^{Darby} and "*take tender care of the weak*."^{NLT} To "*uphold*" means to treat the weak with such consideration that they do not fall. It is holding them up, like someone who has lost strength to stand on their own.

It is to be understood that "*the weak*" are not weak by choice. This is not speaking of those who repeatedly fall into sin and immorality. Such conduct is not the result of weakness, but of deliberate choice. Such souls are told, "*sin no more*" (John 5:14; 8:11). **In this text, weakness refers more to the conscience than a loose and sinful life.** Such people, for example, existed in Corinth. Some of them did not realize an idol was really nothing. Thus, when they saw someone eating meat that had been offered to idols, they would do the same, consciously giving honor to an idol. Because of these brethren, the Corinthian saints were told not to eat meat offered to idols before such souls. Solemnly the Spirit says, "*But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ*" (1 Cor 8:12).

There are uninformed and weak souls in the body of Christ who tend to think more of their old life than of the glories to come. They are not merely to be tolerated, but supported. Elsewhere the Spirit witnesses, "*We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves*" (Rom 15:1). The idea is to **enable the growth of such souls**, not to leave them in a state of weakness. Burdens that exceed their strength are not to be laid upon them. Jesus rebuked the masters of the Law in His day for burdening weak souls. "*For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers*" (Matt 23:4). Our text is an admonition to help along the weak and uninformed in order that they might gain strength. It is an effort that will result in Christ being formed in them (Gal 4:19).

Upholding, or supporting, the weak also involves giving to them what spiritual resources we have - considering them, and seeking their stability. It even includes helping those who have been deprived of the normalities of life. All of this is covered in Paul's words to the elders from Ephesus. "*I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'*"^{NKJV} (Acts 20:35).

BE PATIENT WITH ALL. Other versions read, "*be longsuffering toward all*,"^{ASV} and "*putting up with much from all*."^{BBE} Here, the word "*patient*" means to bear long with, being of a forbearing spirit, and not losing heart because of the weakness of some poor souls. Being "*patient*" is being able to put up with a lot of manners

that could agitate the soul and cause inconsideration, and even hatred, to rise in the soul.

Being "*patient with all*" is an effort to maintain the "*unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*" It is living with "*all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love*" (Eph 4:2-3).

Sometimes this involves "*bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do*" (Col 3:13). Be sure, this does not mean believers are to be tolerant of gross iniquity in those who wear the name of Jesus. The Word of God is clear that immortality is not to be endured among the saints (1 Cor 5:11-13; Matt 18:17). Too, those who cause divisions and hindrances are not to be countenanced by God's people (Rom 16:17). Those who insist on living unruly and disorderly lives, rejecting all appeals, have no place among believers (2 Thess 3:6). This text does not negate all of those appeals. It speaks of another circumstance.

Being "*patient with all*" puts the most favorable interpretation on questionable conduct, "*thinking no evil*" (1 Cor 13:5). It assumes the sincerity of those who are novices, and do not yet see the things of God with clarity. The aim of the longsuffering is to clear the ground so they can grow, all the while feeding them the good things of God as they are able to bear them. We must not become wearied with the weak. If the fainthearted must be comforted again and again, we must do so without being irked with their tendency to discouragement. This is not urging us to tolerate the sins of others, but to earnestly seek to correct their juvenility by bringing them up higher. The demand for such work must not produce impatience within us.

LESSON #32

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

"^{5:16} *Rejoice evermore.* ¹⁷ *Pray without ceasing.* ¹⁸ *In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.*" ^{KJV} (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

INTRODUCTION

Living by faith involves a certain disposition, temperament, or attitude. Life is lived under the canopy of God-awareness. By this, I mean the facts that God is, and that He is a Rewarder of those who diligently seek Him, overshadow everything else. There are matters that remain prominent in the soul when the individual lives by faith. The works of God, the promises of God, and the will of God, are always brought to the forefront of thought. Christ Jesus, the Savior of the world, is the One through whom all of these things are perceived. The primary message is the Gospel, and the fundamental habitations are the "*heavenly places*." Apostolic exhortations are always given within the framework of these considerations. It is vital that we see this, not being distracted by "*this present evil world*" or things confined to the realm of flesh and blood. Our text is an example of this kind of reasoning. It is the beginning of a series of short, but pungent, exhortations. They are not laws, like those uttered from Sinai, which were contrary to the nature of those who heard them. These exhortations are in perfect accord with the new heart and spirit given to those who have believed on the Son. They are a summons for the "*new creation*" to rise to prominence, dominating the flesh and its various desires and expressions. If you remove eternity from your perspective, none of these exhortations make sense, and none of them are doable. The "*new man*" not only equips one to do these things, he cannot conduct himself in contradiction of them. This passage is nothing less than a delineation of the manner in which life in Christ is lived. To fail in these matters is to quench the Spirit and refuse Him who speaks from heaven.

REJOICE EVERMORE

"^{5:16} *Rejoice evermore*" Other translations read, "*Rejoice always*," ^{NKJV} "*Be joyful always*," ^{NIV} and "*Have joy at all times*." ^{BBE} The Spirit is urging a consistent manner of behavior - one that relies upon the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, the government of faith, the effectiveness of hope, and the sensitivity of love. These are words addressed to the "*inner man*" (Eph 3:16), where Christ dwells. They have a drawing effect upon the new nature, pulling it into prominence. They also make perfect sense in the Spirit.

REJOICE. This has **no** reference to fleshly joy or pleasure. It is not natural hype or excitement. Fleshly exultation is temporal, fading from prominence as soon as difficulty looms on the horizon of life. It distracts the soul from reality, and drags one into the domain of flesh and blood. Such rejoicing is never promoted in Scripture, but belongs to "*the pleasures of sin for a season*" (Heb 11:25). The rejoicing of our text is not induced by humor or the consideration of things that are amusingly ridiculous.

The various ways in which the Spirit speaks of rejoicing assist us in seeing its marvelous scope. We "*rejoice in hope of the glory of God*" (Rom 5:2). We "*Rejoice in the Lord*" (Phil 3:1; 4:4), and "*in Christ Jesus*" (Phil 3:3). There is "*rejoicing in hope*" (Rom 12:12), as well as "*in the truth*" (1 Cor 13:6). To "*rejoice*" is to "*joy in God*" (Rom 5:2) and have "*joy in the Holy Spirit*" (Rom 14:17). This is "*gladness*" that springs from hearing the good news of the Gospel of Christ, and is "*obtained*" when we are reconciled to God (Isa 35:10; 51:3,11).

Like all spiritual expressions, "rejoicing" is insightful. It is the result of comprehending spiritual realities. Because of this, the heart can "*be glad with exceeding joy*," even when difficult sufferings are being experienced. As it is written, "*But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy*" (1 Pet 4:13). This is a joy that **blends with eternity**, being extended and enhanced by the coming of the Lord. **Any form of joy that will dissipate in the full glory of Christ must be allowed no place of prominence in the heart of the child of God.**

This is not a mere exhortation to be happy in the flesh, or in a laughing state. It is not a summons to a mere pleasant demeanor. It is quite possible to be happy while dominated by unbelief. A sterling example of this is found in the reaction of Christ's disciples to the sight of the risen Christ. "*When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. But while they still did not believe for joy, and marveled . . .*" (Luke 24:40-41).

The NRSV captures the wonder of this expression: "*While in their joy they were disbelieving.*" Other versions read, "*they still could not believe it for joy*," ^{NASB} and "*they still did not believe it because of joy.*" ^{NIV}

There is a form of joy that actually inhibits faith, anchoring the soul to things that are seen rather than the unseen realities of the Kingdom. I fear that much of the contemporary enthusiasm that abounds in some church circles is this kind of joy.

Rejoicing is the eruption of joy, and is inseparably linked with faith. It is called "*the joy of faith*" (Phil 1:25). It comes from the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen. When the "*eyes of the understanding*" are opened (Eph 1:18), the fountain of true joy is also opened. The heart that cannot "*see*" the things of God cannot truly rejoice.

Because of its relation to faith, rejoicing is also related to hope, another form of spiritual insight (Rom 5:2; 12:12; Heb 3:6). "*Hope*" has to do with the persuasion of "*good things to come*" (Heb 9:11). It peers past the confusion of appearance into "*the world to come*," seeing an "*eternal inheritance*" and a coming reign with Christ (Mk 10:30; Heb 9:15; 2 Tim 2:12). In the glow of the future God has promised to those who believe, "*the sufferings of this present time*" appear but weightless motes on the scales of eternity (Rom 8:18; 2 Cor 4:17).

The exhortation to "*Rejoice!*" is a summons to consider the marvelous glory that is to come, and the remarkable benefits that faith has brought to us now. What we have received in Christ dwarfs all of the difficulties that we experience while strangers in this world.

EVERMORE. Why does the Spirit admonish us to "*Rejoice evermore*," or "*always*"? Why not declare that there are certain times, or seasons, of the soul when rejoicing will simply happen independently of any effort from us? It would sound good, indeed, to those living on the periphery of the Kingdom, to hear of a rejoicing that descended upon us like an overpowering wind from heaven, forcing us to laugh uncontrollably and experience some sort of mystical strength. But even a fool knows that such rejoicing cannot be "*always*," for it renders the individual unproductive and nearly worthless to others. "*Evermore*" means this rejoicing is always appropriate. It also emphasizes that it comes from the focus of the heart, not by Divine imposition. **In Christ, no facet of life or period of time makes rejoicing impossible!** Everything about spiritual life can contribute to our joy, accenting the future and de-emphasizing temporal experiences. **Thus, the joy of the Lord becomes our strength** (Neh 8:10).

PRAY WITHOUT CEASING

"¹⁷ **Pray without ceasing**" Other versions read, "*pray continually*," ^{NIV} "*pray constantly*," ^{RSV} "*pray unceasingly*," ^{Darby} and "*keep on praying*." ^{NLT} Here is an expression that has been greatly misunderstood. Consequently, much of what has been said concerning it has neutralized its truth, putting it beyond the reach of the saints.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN. This is not an admonition to pray unendingly, as though life was a sort of continual prayer. There may be a general sense in which this is true, but that is not the meaning of our text. Not even Jesus prayed without any interruption. In Gethsemane, Jesus told His disciples, "*Sit here while I go and pray over there*." When He returned from that prayer, the Scripture says "*went away again the second time, and prayed*," and again, "*went away again, and prayed the third time*" (Matt 26:36,42,44). Earlier in His ministry, Jesus "*withdrew Himself into the wilderness, and prayed*" (Luke 5:16). Yet, of all people, Jesus Christ prayed "*without ceasing*."

Nor, indeed, is the admonition to merely maintain an attitude of prayer, ready, as it were, to lift up any crisis to the Lord. While such an attitude is necessary and comely, that it is not the intention of this admonition. This is speaking of prayer itself. It is not to cease.

REGULAR AND CONSISTENT. In this sense, **prayer is never to be found removed from our manner of life**, reserving it only for crises and great difficulties. It is to be regular, a daily part of life. The truth of the matter is that spiritual life cannot be sustained independently of meeting with God. Prayer comes in a variety of forms, all of which are essential to living by faith. These include *petitions* (special requests, Phil 4:6; 1 John 5:15), *supplications* (urgent needs or entreaties, 1 Tim 2:1), *thanksgivings* (insightful recognition, 2 Cor 9:12), *intercessions* (pleading for others, 1 Tim 2:1; 1 John 5:16), *praise* (perceptive acknowledgment, Heb 13:15), *inquiry* (Gen 25:22), etc.

Praying without ceasing is **always resorting to the Lord** like seeking people did during His earthly ministry (Mark 10:1). It is said of Christ's custom to go to Gethsemane with His disciples, "*Jesus oftentimes resorted thither with His disciples*" (John 18:2). **It was a first resort, not a last one.** It was a frequent one, not an occasional one. He prayed "*without ceasing*."

Life's circumstances must never cause the spring of prayer to dry up! Nor, indeed, can we allow our responsibilities to push prayer into the background of life. Prayer always blends with the legitimate duties of life. At the point prayer is out of order, the individual has become involved in something that is not lawful. Nothing that is right

turns our eyes away from God. Everything about living by faith involves dependency upon the Lord.

NOT GIVING UP. Praying without ceasing also involves importunity, or persistence. In my judgment, this is the emphasis of this admonition.

The teaching of Jesus. In a stirring parable, Jesus spoke "*to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint* [or lose heart]." He told of a widow who was being treated unjustly. She resorted to "*a judge*," seeking to be avenged of, or get protection from, her adversary. The judge ignored her petition "*for a while*." However, the woman persisted in her petition until the judge finally relented saying, "*I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me*." The Lord then expounded the parable with these stirring words, "*Hear what the unjust judge said. And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?*" ^{NKJV} (Lk 18:1-8).

Here, God's "*elect*" are depicted as crying out to Him "*day and night*" with no apparent relief. Instead of running quickly to their aid, the Father "*bears long with them*," like Jesus did with the Syrophenician woman with an afflicted daughter (Matt 15:22-28). The same type of forbearance was seen in Christ's lingering response to the cries of Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-52). Both the Syrophenician woman and Bartimaeus persisted in their petitions, confirming it is the nature of the Lord to honor importunity, or perseverance in prayer.

Purpose in Divine delays. We must see that Divine purpose is found in what appears to be delays in answers to prayer. Persistence, or praying "*without ceasing*," causes faith to more fully assert itself. It summons our reasoning faculties into play, as we "*order*" our "*cause*," presenting our case to the Lord as a discerning priest (Job 5:8; 23:4). Every cause does not require persistence. A single and very brief request was uttered by sinking Peter (Matt 14:20), and the Philippian jailor as well (Acts 16:30). However, there are other times when persistence is required, as when Paul prayed about his "*thorn in the flesh*" (2 Cor 12:8), or Jesus did in Gethsemane (Matt 26:39-44), or Paul in his desire for Israel to be saved (Rom 10:1). Persistence in prayer causes the flesh to lose strength and the spirit to gain it. Do not be drawn into the foolish notion that repeated prayers evidence unbelief. They often are the evidence of faith!

IN EVERYTHING GIVE THANKS

^{5:18} "*In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.*" The very fact that we must be exhorted to engage in thanksgiving speaks of the liabilities associated with living in the world. Like all activities related to living by faith, thanksgiving is not mechanical, or mere empty and lifeless routine.

THANKSGIVING IS RECOGNITION. Thanksgiving flows from the recognition of God's mercies and gifts. It is not possible to give acceptable thanks for something that is not, to some degree, perceived or understood. For this reason, thanksgiving abounds "*to the glory of God*" (2 Cor 4:15), for **it is the recognition of what the Lord has done**. This is why "*thanksgiving*" is the seasoning of all prayer. It is to prayer what "*salt*" was to "*every sacrifice*" (Lev 2:13; Mk 9:49). When, therefore, we make requests "*known unto God*," it is to be "*with thanksgiving*" (Phil 4:6). Among other things, this confirms that no circumstance of life can effectively obscure what the Lord has done in and for us. No matter how urgent the request, our minds much reach into the past and bring back an offering of thanksgiving for the things the Lord has done. Many a request is offered in futility because it lacks thanksgiving.

IN EVERYTHING. Elsewhere we are exhorted to "*give thanks always for all things*" (Eph 5:20), acknowledging that it is God alone with whom we have to do (Heb 4:13). However, that is not the point of this admonition. Here is yet another dimension of prayer. Thanksgiving is to be given to God "*in all circumstances*." ^{NIV} Whether we are on the mount of transfiguration or the furnace of fire, thanksgiving is in order - "*in everything*."

It seems to me that the Spirit is emphasizing the appropriateness of thanksgiving even in our trials - like the persecutions the Thessalonians were enduring. The fountain of thanksgiving can erupt in the desert of trial, like "*rivers*" of water "*gushed*" from the rock in the wilderness (Psa 78:15-16; 105:41). What hardship of life is capable of stopping the well of thanksgiving? Only the stone of unbelief can cause thanks to cease! When sorely afflicted like Job, "*give thanks*." When enjoying seasons of peace and prosperity like Joseph on the throne of Egypt, "*give thanks*." When imprisoned by your enemies like Paul, "*give thanks*." When you perceive the working of the Lord in your life as Jacob did, "*give thanks*." When your enemies are aggressive against you, as those of Daniel, "*give thanks*."

"*IN everything, give thanks!*" It will bring refreshment to your soul and joy to your heart. It will reduce your load and increase your hope. It will accent what is ahead for you, and diminish what you are going through. It will assist you

in not understating the good things you enjoy now, or overstating the evil that comes upon you. "***In everything, give thanks!***"

GIVE. Thanks is something you "give" to the Lord. It is a sacrifice you offer to God of your own will. One of the great benefits of being in Christ Jesus, and having Him intercede for us at the right hand of God, relates to the giving of thanks. "***Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name***" ^{NKJV} (Heb 13:15). Our lips, which once spewed forth "*the poison of asps*" (Rom 3:13), can now be the source of thanksgiving to God. At some point, thanksgiving must find expression from our **lips**. Our energies must be marshaled to voice our thanksgiving to God. This is involved in yielding our members as instruments of righteousness to God (Rom 6:13). When we were in the world, we spoke sinfully, let us now speak to God with thanksgiving.

THE WILL OF GOD. It is not often that men think of God's will as giving thanks to Him. We must remember that heaven is effected by our prayers. Certain exalted "*living creatures*" are said to stand before the very throne of God with "*golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints*" ^{NKJV} (Rev 5:8). Here are prayers rising from the domain that had been completely dominated by the wicked one (1 John 5:19), and they are filled with insightful thanksgiving! This is a testimony to the effectiveness of God's great salvation! God **wants** these thanksgivings to be offered to Him by us. It is His "*will*." Clearly, therefore, when they are not offered, we are not in His will.

IN CHRIST JESUS. This expression means that in Christ Jesus full provision is made for the offering of thanks "*in all things*" or under all conditions. **Christ's atoning death, empowering resurrection, and effective intercession work to this end.** Nothing about salvation inhibits such thanksgiving. This not merely what God wants from us, it is what He desired to be realized through His great salvation, as implemented by His Son. This is one of the appointed outcomes of life in Christ Jesus. If that life is not quenched or neglected, thanksgiving "***in all circumstances***" will take place. It is the nature of the new man to engage in such lofty and satisfying activity. Among other things, that means the closer you are to the Lord, the more thanksgiving will be expressed through your lips in prayer. Be convinced that this is well pleasing to the Lord, especially when circumstances seem to be against it.

LESSON #33

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

"^{5:19} *Quench not the Spirit.* ²⁰ *Despise not prophesyings.* ²¹ *Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.*" ^{KJV} (1 Thessalonians 5:19-21)

INTRODUCTION

Spiritual life is sensitive - not sensitive like hyper-emotional person, but sensitive like pupil of the eye, or a precious and valuable flower. There are appointed influences that sustain the soul. They are not mere technicalities, but are personal involvements vital to the maintenance of the life we received when we were quickened from death in trespasses and sins. You will also observe that these involvements are not simplistic, like those experienced by a mere child. They require focus, attentiveness, and judgment. Neither, indeed, can they be sporadic, or occasional. There is no time when the admonitions before us can be ignored or considered secondary and non-essential. These are not for special times or seasons. They are not mountain peaks for the soul, but the road on which we travel to glory. It is not unusual for professed believers to live their lives in the crisis mode. By that, I mean they fervently apply themselves to matters pertaining to the soul only when life becomes too difficult to negotiate alone. This manner is not only impractical, it is totally unacceptable. Those who only resort to the Lord when the seas are stormy will not make progress toward glory. Such seek the Lord when they "*are at their wit's end. Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble, and He bringeth them out of their distresses. He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then are they glad because they be quiet; so He bringeth them unto their desired haven. Oh that men would praise the LORD for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!*" (Psa 107:23-31). Thus spiritual life is sought to be maintained from crisis to crisis, or storm to storm. Our text will not show us the "*better way*," it reveals the manner in which we work out our own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12). These are areas in which the Lord works in us, to do and to will of His good pleasure.

QUENCH NOT THE SPIRIT

"^{5:19} *Quench not the Spirit.*" Other versions read, "*Do not put out the Spirit's fire.*" ^{NIV} "*Extinguish not the Spirit.*" ^{DUOAY-RHEIMS} "*Do not put out the light of the Spirit.*" ^{BBE} "*Do not stifle the Holy Spirit.*" ^{NJB}

The word "*quench*" means cause to cease, thwart, block, stifle, suppress, and restrain. It is a strong word! It is the same word Jesus used when speaking of the fires of hell - "*the fire is not quenched.*" It is also the same word our Lord used in the parable of the ten virgins, when He said the lamps of the foolish "*are gone out*" (Matt 25:8). The word "*quench*," therefore, is not a frothy and inconsequential word, as though we are admonished not to discourage the Spirit or make His work difficult. This is not speaking of slowing down the work of the Spirit, but of stopping it altogether. It is not lowering the flame, or making the influence of the Spirit less prominent, but extinguishing it altogether.

QUENCHING THE SPIRIT? To "*quench*" the Spirit is to stop His illumination, so that we are no longer able to perceive or comprehend the things of God. It is to stifle His power, so that we are no longer able to stand, or be renewed in the spirit of our minds. Those who "*quench*" the Spirit refuse to let the fire of godly devotion burn in their spirits. They grow cold and calloused, becoming indifferent to the needs of their soul. Heaven is no longer their goal, and the presence of the Lord is no longer sought with fervency. All of these are evidences that the Holy Spirit has been grieved. Many a religious soul is living in a state where they have so quenched the Spirit of God that He no longer works within them. They often attempt to fix the blame for the condition upon others. The truth is, however, that they themselves have quenched the Spirit. No other person has the power to extinguish the flame of the Spirit within an individual. If His work is stopped, we are the ones who have done it!

A similar expression is found in Ephesians 4:30. "*And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.*" Here the emphasis is on the effect of human neglect upon the Spirit Himself. He is "*grieved*," or made sorrowful by the inconsideration of those who "*neglect so great salvation.*" The Spirit Himself is distressed and pained by those who stop His work within them. On the other hand, quenching the Holy Spirit has to do with thwarting His work, stopping the remarkable change from "*glory unto glory*" by a preference for the things of this world.

We should not be surprised that such a thing is possible. It is said of ancient Israel, "*Yea, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel*" (Psa 78:41). Here, the word "*limited*" does involve being

pained, troubled, or wounded. However, it also involves the cessation of God's work for the individual, for God does not work for good in those who continually cause Him grief. The impact of Israel's hardheartedness on the Lord is recorded in Psalm 78:21-22. *"Therefore the LORD heard this, and was wroth: so a fire was kindled against Jacob, and anger also came up against Israel; because they believed not in God, and trusted not in his salvation."* Again, the same chapter records these words, *"When God heard this, He was wroth, and greatly abhorred Israel"* (v 59). Again, Psalm 106:40 declares, *"Therefore was the wrath of the LORD kindled against His people, insomuch that He abhorred His own inheritance."*

Do not imagine that those who provoke the Lord to anger will still be blessed by Him. Are we not solemnly warned, *"Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than He?"* It is still a *"fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God"* (Heb 10:31), and those who *"quench"* the Spirit are doing precisely that - falling into His hands. We must settle it in our minds that the Holy Spirit is providing an inner means through which the Lord can bless and direct us. Apart from His indispensable work, Christ does not dwell in our hearts (Eph 3:16-17), and the blessing of God cannot be upon us.

HOW IS THE SPIRIT QUENCHED? Quenching the Spirit is the **opposite of walking in the Spirit** (Gal 5:16,25). It is **the antithesis of "obeying the truth through the Spirit"** (1 Pet 1:22). Quenching the Spirit is **the reverse of sowing to the Spirit** (Gal 6:8). It is **the opposite of walking in the light** as He is in the light (1 John 1:7).

A carnal mind quenches the Spirit, *"for to be carnally minded is death"* (Rom 8:6). The Holy Spirit leads us to *"put to death the deeds of the body"* ^{NKJV} (Rom 8:13). Quenching the Spirit, therefore, is **refusing to put those deeds to death**. Being *"unthankful,"* or being ruled by ingratitude, puts out the flame of the Holy Spirit (2 Tim 3:2). When *"an evil heart of unbelief"* is found in men, the Spirit is quenched, for He cannot and will not work in an environment of unbelief (Heb 3:12). The dreaded blight of lukewarmness abruptly terminates the working of the Holy Spirit (Rev 3:16). It is the business of every believer to see to it that the Holy Spirit is **not "quenched,"** for there is no hope in such a state.

You will have no more of the Spirit than you intend to have. You will get no closer to the Lord than you intend to get. You will be no more like Christ than you intend to be.

DESPISE NOT PROPHECYINGS

²⁰ ***Despise not prophesyings.*** Other versions read, *"do not despise prophetic utterances,"* ^{NASB} *"do not treat prophecies with contempt,"* ^{NIV} *"Do not despise the words of prophets,"* ^{NRSV} and *"Do not scoff at prophecies."* ^{NLT}

"Prophecyings" are insightful words uttered under the illumination of the Holy Spirit. They can be the foretelling of the future, but that is not the emphasis of this word. **Prophecying refers more to forth-telling than fore-telling.** Here it is used in the New Covenant sense. *"But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men"* ^{NKJV} (1 Cor 14:3). Through words, the souls of men are strengthened, built up, and made adequate for the good fight of faith. Through words, men are moved to engage themselves more fully in the good and acceptable, and perfect will of God. Through words men are comforted, their sufferings alleviated, and the struggles related to living by faith are mitigated, or made bearable. In this sense, a *"prophet"* is able to skillfully handle the Word of the Lord (2 Tim 2:15), opening it up to the hearts of men. He is able to make the will of the Lord more discernible, confirming that it is both sensible and accessible.

"Prophecyings" are words that pertain to *"life and godliness."* They are utterances that clarify Christ and His work, confirm the transitory nature of life in this world, and shine the jewel of hope. Such words put the foundation stone in place so that men can build their lives upon it. They lift men from the domain of temporality into the *"heavenly places."*

DESPISE NOT! To *"despise"* is to regard lightly, or perceive to have little or no significance. It is to esteem least, and refuse to give the place of preeminence to a thing. It involves disdain something, or disregard it, rejecting it as something vital.

We live in a time when professed Christians have been brought to despise prophecying, or insightful words that bring edification, exhortation, and comfort. Some people prefer praise to prophecy. Others favor music over prophecy. Some would rather have discussion than to submit their minds to insightful declarations. It is not unusual to follow whole bodies of younger people who would rather play games than to hear prophecyings. The solemn word to all such people is this: ***"Despise not prophesyings!"*** Do not put them into the background as though they were not fundamental. *"Prophets"* rank only behind Apostles in the Divine order of things (1 Cor 12:28). A single person prophesies at a

time, with no more than two or three at a gathering. So vital is the speech that it is to be "*judged*" by other prophets - tested and evaluated to determine its truth (1 Cor 14:29).

Prophecy is the superior gift that is to be sought. In an extended word on this matter, the Spirit declares prophecy to be especially sought. It yields edification, exhortation, and comfort. Paul desired "*even more*" that saints prophecy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in an unknown tongue (1 Cor 14:1-5). How serious it is, therefore, to despise prophesyings, pushing them into the background and accounting them nothing.

CONTEMPT FOR DOCTRINE. In some circles, it is fashionable to speak derisively of "*doctrine*," as though there was something inherently unprofitable in it. Doctrine is teaching, or the communication of realities upon which life is founded and the understanding made profitable. The Scriptures themselves are "*for doctrine*" (2 Tim 3:16). God refers to His own speech as "*My doctrine*" (Deut 32:2). The recovery of man from the snare of sin is declared to involve "*learning doctrine*" (Isa 29:24). The preaching and teaching of Jesus were called "*His doctrine*" (Matt 7:28). The early church "*continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine*" (Acts 2:42). In a very real sense, to despise prophesyings is to disdain doctrine - to consider it inconsequential and subordinate to other interests. The solemn word from heaven is, "*Despise not prophesyings!*"

"Prophecyings" occur when the Holy Spirit of God and the voice of man join in accord.

Included are the promises of the Prophets, who foretold of "*the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow*" (1 Pet 1:11). The prophecies of the nature of life in Christ, the reception of a new heart and a new spirit, are not to be despised (Ezek 36:26). His promise of the triumph of those who wait upon the Lord is to be held in high regard (Isa 40:31)

The prophecies of the Apostles regarding apostasy and spiritual decline are not to be despised, as though they had no value (2 Thess 2:3; 1 Tim 4:1-3; 2 Tim 3:1-5; 2 Pet 3:3). Their powerful articulation of the effectiveness of Christ's death, resurrection, and intercession are to be highly valued, and not despised. The declaration of the return of the Lord, our gathering to Him, and the rewarding of the faithful, are not to be forfeited in favor of dealing with contemporary novelties and transitory experiences.

Here is surely a word that must be sounded forth in our time: "*Despise not prophesyings!*" Do not embrace an empty religious form that allows little place for speaking the mind of God.

PROVE AND HOLD

"^{5:18} ***Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.***" Other versions read, "*Test all things; hold fast what is good,*" ^{NKJV} "*But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good,*" ^{NASB} "*Test everything. Hold on to the good,*" ^{NIV}

Here is an essential aspect of spiritual life that is much neglected in our time. Those who have embraced a sectarian view of things test little that is declared to them. They suppose the official spokesman of the party is always right. Others assume everything that is unfamiliar to them is wrong. Neither view is right nor tolerable. Our minds must be engaged whenever we hear or read anything that comes in the name of the Lord. Two responsibilities are held before us. They are not optional activities, else we would not be exhorted to engage in them. To fail in any or both of these areas is to give the advantage to the flesh and the devil. Error cannot be avoided, and truth cannot be embraced without these.

PROVE ALL THINGS. Proving all things, or testing everything, is to teaching what refining is to the verification of precious metals, and testing is to the validation of precious gems. **We are not to take for granted that every word purported to have come from God is actually from Him.** Even the words of prophets are to be proved, judged (1 Cor 14:29). The nobility of the Bereans was found in them searching the Scriptures every day to confirm that what was preached to them by Paul and Silas was true (Acts 17:11). Many self-appointed preachers and teachers would soon disappear from the scene if this admonition was taken seriously. Those who speak the truth in Christ have no fear of their words being tested.

Through John the beloved, the Spirit elaborates on the reason for this requirement. "*Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world*" (1 John 4:1). Not a few, but "*many false prophets*" have gone into the world. Many of them are in our region! It is dangerous to listen indiscriminately to those who speak in Jesus' name. This does not mean we are to be skeptical of everyone. It does mean we are not to be casual or gullible in our hearing. We are not admonished to ignore what people say, but to prove, or test, it.

Satan's messengers are cunning in their presentations. It is not always easy to detect the error of their message. This is because "*his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness*" ^{NKJV} Satan himself "*transforms himself into an angel of light,*" therefore making it difficult for him to be detected (2 Cor 11:14-

15). This condition mandates that we enter into the holy work of "*proving all things.*"

HOLD FAST WHAT WHICH IS GOOD. It is not enough to merely identify what is false. Proving all things will also discover to the heart what is true and good. Just as surely as letting go of what is false is important, so it is imperative to "*hold fast that which is good.*" To "*hold fast*" means to maintain a grip on what is "*good,*" not letting it get away from us. Among other things, this shows us that "*good things*" (Tit 2:3) cannot profit us if we do not hold on to them. Even after we have heard the liberating truth of the Gospel, we must "*give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip*" (Heb 2:1). Keep in mind, your adversary the devil is engaged in an effort to rob you!

The things of God do not stay with you automatically. Fail to think upon them, and you will drift away from them. Decline to mediate upon them, and they will no longer be accessible to you! Remember you are sanctified through the truth, and God's Word is truth (John 17:17,19). That is why it is so necessary to determine what is really "*good,*" and to hold on to it with zeal. This is what Hebrews 2:1 calls "*paying much closer attention.*" ^{NASB}

What is held fast will not be able to be taken away by others. This is precisely the point Jesus made about Mary, when speaking to her sister. "*But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her*" (Luke 10:42). No such guarantee, however, is given to those who do not maintain a hold upon what is good. When "*good*" is held loosely, it cannot be held continually. If neglected, it will eventually slip away from ones grasp, with all of its benefits leaving with it.

Many a soul has fallen away from the Lord simply because they were too easygoing in regard to holding on to what was good. They preferred only minimal exposure to the truth of God, and even then were not zealous to hide it in their heart. Such foolish souls have placed status, pleasure, and temporal things above their own souls. To all such Jesus says, "*For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?*" Mark 8:36). Gaining the "*whole world*" has nothing whatsoever to do with proving all things and holding fast what is good. Rather, such an unlawful quest requires the neglect of both!

LESSON #34

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

" ^{5:21} *Abstain from all appearance of evil.* ²³ *And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.* ²⁴ *Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.*" ^{KJV} (1

Thessalonians 5:22-24)

INTRODUCTION

In Apostolic doctrine, it is the manner of the Holy Spirit to leave the people with an acute consciousness of God and Christ. No writing is of any real profit that does not impress the will and power of God upon our spirits. The Epistle of First Thessalonians is an excellent example of this. "God" is mentioned thirty-five times, with four references to Him as "He." The "Father" is mentioned four times. "Jesus" is mentioned seventeen times, "Christ" fourteen times, and "Lord" twenty-five times. Jesus is called "Him" two times. There are four references to the "Spirit." That is one hundred and five references to Deity in this rather brief Epistle. That is an average of more than one reference to Deity per sentence (105 references in 92 sentences). Of the 1,900 words in this Epistle, over 5% of them are direct references to Deity. All of that may seem rather academic, but it does confirm certain realities to our heart. Those moved by the Holy Spirit will speak much of the Father, Son, and Spirit. They will address matters within the framework of Deity. The will of God will be central in their thoughts. The redemption of Christ will be at the heart of all considerations. The enlivening Spirit will be prominent as well. **Faith cannot "come" or flourish where Deity is not prominent.**

ABSTAIN FROM ALL APPEARANCE OF EVIL

" ^{5:22} *Abstain from all appearance of evil.*" In Scripture, brevity does not suggest a lack of importance. This particular expression will lift us above the realm of lifeless definitions, showing us that evil is sometimes insinuated, or suggested. Our sensitivity to wickedness is to be keen, and our senses exercised to "*discern both good and evil*" (Heb 5:14).

ABSTAIN. Other versions use the words "avoid," ^{NIV} "*refrain yourselves*," ^{DOUAY} "*hold aloof*" ^{DARBY} "*keep from*," ^{BBE} "*keep away from*," ^{NLT} and "*shun*." ^{NJB} This is a strong word that reveals personal diligence and discipline. While a strong faith and the empowerment of the Spirit is suggested, the individual who "*abstains*" is discerning and determined. Evil is not avoided by accident, or because God has not allowed it to be seen. Rather, a deliberate choice has been made, and an alert spirit has enabled the abstaining to be accomplished.

To "*abstain*" means to hold one's self at a distance from evil, refusing to come within the perimeter of its influence (and there is a border within which evil defiles you)! To "*abstain*" is to keep away from, and keep your hands off. It is more than not committing sin, or falling into transgression. "*Abstaining*" is an action that will protect the person from indulging in sin. It is refraining from being around sinful influences. It is not looking toward things that defile, dwelling upon them, or allowing them to influence us.

There are a number of things from which we are admonished to "*abstain*." They include "*pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood*" (Acts 15:20,29); "*fornication*" (1 Thess 4:3), and "*fleshly lusts*" (1 Pet 2:11). Our text adds another broad category, "*all appearance of evil*." We are not to allow ourselves to be enticed by and drawn to such things. Rather, in an exercise of our will, and in strong faith, we stand aloof from all defiling influences. This is an exceedingly large exhortation! It shows us how immense salvation is, and how much of our persons is engaged in it.

APPEARANCE. Other versions read "*every form*" ^{NKJV} and "*every kind*." ^{NIV} In my judgment, those words do not adequately convey the sense of the text. The second meaning of the word "appearance" is "form" or "kind." However, the primary meaning is "the external or outward appearance."

Doctrines. This exhortation particularly relates to the preceding admonition about hearing messages purporting to come from God (vs 20-21). There are some doctrines that have the "*appearance of evil*." They tend to give license to the flesh and cast the soul into lethargy. Such teachings foster lukewarmness and do not urge involvement with God. The people of God are not to willingly subject themselves to such words. The servant of God is to devote himself to "*the form of sound words*" (2 Tim 1:13), speaking the things that are "*proper for sound doctrine*" ^{NKJV} (Tit 2:1). This being the case, it is certainly out of order to give attention to things not falling into this classification. It is no marvel that Jesus solemnly warned, "*Take heed what ye hear*" (Mark 4:24).

Iniquity in general. This admonition, however, is broader than things that are heard. It also includes all manner of sinful appearances. "**Evil**" has a form, or shape, just like a human, a dwelling, or a vehicle. That form cannot contain the truth of God. The Gospel will not fit into it. **Things pertaining to life and godliness do not come in the form, or "appearance of evil."** There are things that look more like evil than like good. There are appearances that more readily promote iniquity than righteousness. While we are not to judge according to appearance, we are not to be deceived by it either. **Not judging according to appearance does NOT mean there are good things that look bad.** It does NOT mean that righteousness or righteous people sometimes appear as though they are evil. We are to hate even the "*garment spotted by the flesh*" (Jude 23). When Jesus said, "*judge not according to appearance*" (John 7:24), he was warning us **there are things and people that look good, but are really evil - not vice versa.**

Some things are known to be wrong - fornication, witchcraft, theft, murder, etc. But there are other things that "*appear*" to be wrong. They lean the wrong way - toward the flesh and away from God. They stir up the flesh, and not the Spirit. They make it easier to be ungodly, and more difficult to be godly. The children of God are to keep themselves from such things, not allowing themselves to be brought under their influence.

EVIL. Something that is "*evil*" tends to degenerate. It is harmful to the soul, unprofitable, and cannot be used in the service of God. "*Evil*" has the hand of the devil upon it and contaminates the souls of those it touches. To "*abstain from evil*" is to keep oneself "*unspotted from the world,*" a required mark of true religion (James 1:27). If the devil is "*the evil one*"^{NASB} (1 John 5:18), then "*evil*" is anything and everything that is wed to him. It is something he uses, and something he promotes. We are to stand aloof from such things, and do so zealously. We cannot afford to be attracted by them, or to imagine they are harmless. "*The appearance of evil*" is NOT innocent or harmless. It is dangerous! Stay away from it.

SANCTIFYING THE WHOLE

"²³ **And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.**" Here is one of the great prayers of Scripture. It is most uncommon to hear this kind of speaking within the professed church. Nevertheless, this is how the Spirit leads concerned souls to pray. This is the objective of God, and therefore the Spirit moves men to so pray.

GOD OF PEACE. The phrase "*very God of peace*" is equivalent to "*the God of peace HIMSELF*"^{NKJV} or "*God Himself, the God of peace.*"^{NIV} The Father is personally involved in our salvation. Because of Christ, and through the Spirit, He Himself works within us. God has Himself reconciled us (2 Cor 5:18-19), predestinated us unto adoption (Eph 1:5), directs our way (1 Thess 3:11), and gives us peace (2 Thess 3:16). Jesus promised the Father would dwell within us (John 14:23). He does so as the Author of peace.

SANCTIFY YOU WHOLLY. Other versions read "*sanctify you completely,*"^{NKJV} "*entirely,*"^{NIV} "*through and through,*"^{NIB} and "*in every way.*"^{BBE}

Sanctification. To sanctify is to hallow, make sacred, or render fit to be used. It is to separate from the profane and devote to the holy. That work involves two things. First, separation from all defiling elements. Second, uniting with all that is holy. Where these two have not occurred, sanctification has not taken place. In this text "*sanctification*" has to do with expression and conduct. It is being holy, completely devoted to the Lord and untainted. The following texts also approach "*sanctification*" in this sense: (1 Thess 4:3-4; Heb 13:12-13; 1 Pet 3:15).

Wholly. The salvation of God has to do with the entire person: completely and totally. There is no place for seasonal religion, or devoting only a segment of our life to the Lord. There are three marvelous pictures seen here. First, that unless God is involved in the work, it will not, in any way, be done. He is behind the entire work! Second, that the work of Christ is powerful enough to effect the whole person. Third, that the saints are to expect this will be done through their faith, because of Christ, and through the Holy Spirit. Let us have done with all forms of part-time religion. Heaven recognizes no such form of pretended faith.

OUR WHOLE SPIRIT. The parts of our being are listed in order of their priority, from the greatest to the least. The closer we are to the Lord, the more our thoughts and purpose will conform to this priority. The human spirit is the inmost part of our being. **It is to our persons what the most holy place was to the tabernacle. It is where we are united to God.** Here is where we are "*renewed*" (Eph 4:23). This is the "*inward man*" that is daily growing in strength (2 Cor 4:16), where we "*delight in the law of God*" (Rom 7:22), and are being changed "*from glory to glory*" (2 Cor 3:18). Your "*whole spirit*" is all of your real person-all that is born again.

YOUR WHOLE SOUL. The "*soul*" is the expressive part of our beings, where thoughts, intentions, and the will are resident. **The soul is to our being what the holy place was to the tabernacle. It is where we work and serve.** The soul can be "*cast down*" (Psa 42:5), and is yet to be saved (Heb 10:39). It is distinguished from our spirit, although both are unseen. Only the Word of God, however, is capable of making the division between them (Heb 4:12). Isaiah also recognized this distinction. "*With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early*" (Isa 26:9). Our "*whole soul*" being sanctified involves our thoughts, affections, preferences, and will being completely devoted to the Lord. In the sanctified soul, loves and hates, joys and sorrows, are in synch with God.

YOUR WHOLE BODY. Here is the weakest and most vulnerable part of our constitution. Although this is true, yet our bodies do not belong to us. They have been purchased by God, and are to be devoted to Him (1 Cor 6:13-19). The sanctification of the body involves God being magnified in it (Phil 1:20). It includes subduing its sinful inclinations, refusing to allow it the prominence in our life (1 Cor 9:27). A sanctified body is one that is yielded to God (Rom 6:13). In such a case, we are "*holy in body*" (1 Cor 7:34).

PRESERVED BLAMELESS. The word "*preserved*" is used because life in Christ begins with blamelessness in every part of our persons. That state, however, must be preserved, or "*kept*." A "*blameless*" spirit is in fellowship with the Lord, walking in the light, living by faith, and walking in the Spirit (1 Cor 1:9; 1 John 1:7; Heb 10:38; Gal 5:16,25). A "*blameless*" soul has its affection placed on things above (Col 3:1-3), abstains from fleshly lusts (1 Pet 2:11), and is possessed in patience (Lk 21:19). A "*blameless*" body is one in which sin is not carried out, where the Holy Spirit resides and God is glorified (1 Cor 6:19-20). Such a person remains "*blameless and harmless*," though in a "*crooked and perverse nation*" (Phil 2:15). **The fervent prayer to God for the accomplishment of this sanctification confirms what a large and necessary work it is.** We do well to enter into this work energetically.

A FAITHFUL GOD WILL DO IT

"^{5:24} . . . unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it." The preservation of our spirit, soul, and body in a blameless condition is not a once-for-all work. It requires the personal involvement of God Himself until the very end. You may rest assured, if your salvation requires the constant involvement of God, there is surely no point at which your own participation is minimized or excluded.

UNTO THE COMING. This is the point toward which the child of God looks: "*the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ!*" We remember Him around His table in anticipation of this coming: "*til He come*" (1 Cor 11:26). This is when our final change will occur (Phil 3:20-21). It is when our rewards will be received (Rev 22:12), and the "*crown of righteousness*" accepted (2 Tim 4:8). This is when "*every man will receive praise from God*" (1 Cor 4:5). This is the time of which Jesus spoke when He said, "*Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods*" (Matt 24:46-47). To be found deficient at that time will be disastrous.

Everything about salvation points to the coming of the Lord Jesus. Believers are waiting for the Lord from heaven (1 Thess 1:10). Then is when the heavens and earth will be burned up, and the new heavens and a new earth will appear. The awareness of this dictates that we live a holy and godly manner of life, anticipating Christ's return (2 Pet 3:10-13). God is at work, preserving our entire persons until "*the great and notable day of the Lord*" (Acts 2:20).

One of the betraying signs of an unacceptable church is the near-total absence of a looking and longing for the return of the Lord. When this subject is rarely spoken of from the pulpit, and is not in the hearts and mouths of the people, they are not close to God. If "*God Himself*" is working in prospect of that day, the absence of such an awareness in the people only confirms He is not working in them. Such are on the precipice of disaster!

FAITHFUL IS HE. Faith is not content to merely ponder possibilities. It deals with "*substance*" and "*evidence*," and thus must be founded on the rock of Divine purpose, not floating clouds of imagination (Heb 11:1). **The closer you are to earth, the more uncertain things become.** "*Everlasting consolation and good hope*" (2 Thess 2:16) cannot be maintained in the lowlands of flesh and blood. But when the soul rises into the heavenly realms on the pinions of faith, the faithfulness of God becomes more apparent. Thus the soul becomes convinced that "*God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord*" (1 Cor 1:9). **He is committed to the work of your salvation!** Because He is "*faithful*," He will "*not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it*" (1 Cor 10:13).

He is not faithful to you, but faithful to Himself and His word. Your faith is what takes hold on that

reality. He is the *"faithful Creator"* who maintains what He has created (1 Pet 4:19). Thus it is written, *"He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself"* (2 Tim 2:13). Those believing the record He has given of His Son can live *"In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began"* (Tit 1:2). Even when we fail we are promised, *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:9).

WHO ALSO WILL DO IT. Can you believe that God is *"faithful"* to sanctify your spirit, soul, and body, preserving you *"blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ?"* Indeed, the Spirit fairly shouts to our hearts, *"He will do it."*^{NIV} Although a most mysterious prophet, Balaam was right when he said, *"hath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?"* (Num 23:19). As was true in the deliverance of a remnant from Jerusalem, *"the zeal of the LORD of hosts shall do this"* (2 Kgs 19:31). Our God will *"finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness"* (Rom 9:28). As one who is in Christ Jesus, you can be *"confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ"* (Phil 1:6). In strong confidence you can confess with the sweet Psalmist of Israel, *"The LORD will perfect that which concerneth me"* (Psa 138:8). The great God of heaven has not only exalted His Son to give gifts to the church *"for the perfecting of the saints"* (Eph 4:12), He Himself is also devoted to that very work.

A novice might wonder why Paul prayed so ardently for something God was sure to do. Such thoughts reveal a lack of acquaintance with God. The saved have been called into the great work of the Kingdom. They are participating with the Lord in the completion of the work. This requires their personal commitment to the Lord, as well as their prayers for one another. This confirms that salvation is no small work, and is never to be so viewed.

LESSON #35

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

" ^{5:25} *Brethren, pray for us.* ²⁶ *Greet all the brethren with an holy kiss.* ²⁷ *I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren.* ²⁸ *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.* " ^{KJV} (1 Thessalonians 5:25-28)

INTRODUCTION

Having reminded the brethren at Thessalonica of key matters related to working out their salvation with fear and trembling, the Apostle now moves into an appropriate conclusion. As with all Apostolic writings, he will leave his readers acutely aware of the work of the Lord, their responsibility to the household of faith, and the need for an abundance of grace. It is not only important that the children of God speak about the right things, they must also leave one another with thoughts that tend in the right direction. If God has raised us up and made us sit together with Christ in heavenly places, then our activities, including our thoughts, should be in toward that realm. Tragically, much of what is discussed in the name of Christ tends toward self-centeredness. You will note that, with great care, the Spirit leads the brethren to consider others first, and themselves last. Even then, the grace of Jesus Christ is provided for blessing, not the gratification of earthly desires. Paul leaves the brethren with an awareness of his own labors, and the need he has for Divine assistance. He also reminds them of the need for a congenial spiritual atmosphere in which saints can be strengthened and encouraged in the Lord. There is also a need to share this good word from God with everyone. As simplistic as all of this may seem, with no focus on personal problems, it is on the part of wisdom to consider what it being said. These exhortations are calling the people into an environment where they can be "*laborers together with God*" (1 Cor 3:9).

PRAY FOR US AND GREET THE BRETHREN

" ^{5:25} *Brethren, pray for us.* ²⁶ *Greet all the brethren with an holy kiss.* " There is a unity among the people of God that is initiated by the Holy Spirit, yet is maintained by the saints themselves. Thus it is written, "*walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*" (Eph 4:1-3). This marvelous unity, however, involves more than being forbearing and patient with one another. It is not merely the absence of turmoil and conflict - although it is too often viewed in this manner. The "*unity of the Spirit*" involves the participation of the brethren in kindred matters. This includes being mindful of the labors of related spirits, and upholding those labors with our prayers.

PRAY FOR US. Paul often expressed this desire. It was not a mere formality, or a casual and heartless expression. Ponder the various manners in which he made this request known.

Eleven requests. To the Romans, he asked that they pray for **(1)** his deliverance from "*those who do not believe,*" **(2)** that the offering he was bringing to Jerusalem would be "*received,*" **(3)** that he would be able to "*come*" to them in Rome, and **(4)** that he would be "*refreshed*" together with them (Rom 15:30-32). He told the Corinthians **(5)** they could "*help*" him through their prayers (2 Cor 1:11). He asked the Ephesians to pray **(6)** that "*utterance*" would be given to him that he might open his mouth "*boldly*" (Eph 5:18-19). He reminded the Philippians that their prayers would **(7)** cause things to "*turn out*" to his salvation (Phil 1:18). The Colossians were asked to pray **(8)** that "*a door of utterance*" would be opened to Paul (Col 4:3). In his second letter to the Thessalonians, Paul asked them to pray **(9)** that the word of the Lord would "*run and have free course,*" and **(10)** that he would be "*delivered from unreasonable and wicked men*" (2 Thess 3:1-2). Paul told Philemon to prepare a place for him to stay, **(11)** for "*through*" Philemon's "*prayers*" he was confident he be "*given*" to him (Phile 22).

Know what to pray for. In these requests you can sense the necessity of the Lord's involvement in every aspect of the Kingdom. No part of the Apostle's labors was entered into without a consciousness of a need for the Lord. Yet, all of this did not happen without some effort on the part of Paul. He had to see what was needed, and ask for prayers in that area. Two times Solomon wrote, "*A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself*" (Prov 22:3; 27:12). In Paul's case, he did not "*hide*" himself, but armed himself by asking the saints to pray for him. He knew he would confront those who "*do not believe,*" and thus asked to be delivered from them. He knew Satan would attempt to hinder his preaching, so asked saints to pray a "*door of utterance*" would be opened to him. He desired men to pray that what he preached would "*run and have free course.*" He foresaw he would confront "*unreasonable and wicked men,*" so sought deliverance from them.

All of this reveals a heart that is in tune with God and His purpose. Paul knew that no aspect of spiritual life is

accomplished without the Lord. He knew he was a man, and thus required guidance and power from God. He did not depend upon oratory or excellence of speech to touch the hearts of men. He knew, "*Except the LORD build the house, they labor in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain*" (Psa 127:1). He did not pray that God would reveal what he should do. He already knew that. He prayed that he would fulfill his ministry to the glory of God and the advantage of men.

GREET ALL THE BRETHREN. The phrase "*all the brethren*" is frequently mentioned in Scripture (Acts 15:3; 1 Cor 16:20; Gal 1:3; 1 Thess 4:10; 2 Tim 4:21). The phrase confirms that in Christ "*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus*" (Gal 3:28). To "*greet all the brethren*" is a display of accord, confirming the absence of a sectarian and divisive spirit. Unfortunately, this perspective has been largely destroyed in our time. Not only is sectarianism seen in varied theological emphases, it is also seen in the preference for groups within the body of Christ: i.e., young, old, married, single, etc. These divisions have come to be so cultured that many professed believers live in a total unawareness of "*all the brethren*."

To "*greet*" means to welcome as one's own, and embrace with joy. It means to salute, or give tribute to one, as a member of the body of Christ. Such a salutation confirms the brethren are not known "*after the flesh*" (2 Cor 5:16).

AN HOLY KISS. Greeting one another with a kiss was, and still is, an Eastern custom. But it was not to be a mere custom! Four times the Spirit admonishes that saints greet one another with "*a holy kiss*" (Rom 16:16; 1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12; 1 Thess 5:26). It is an expression of spiritual affection, and is not to be executed in a fleshly manner. The opposite of a "*holy kiss*" would be one like that of Judas' (Lk 22:47-48). It is not intended to foster improper familiarity or inflame the desires of the flesh. It is sacred.

READ THIS EPISTLE TO ALL THE HOLY BRETHREN

"²⁷ *I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren.*" Here we see there is a responsibility for everyone in Christ to be subjected to the Word of the Lord. The Epistle, or letter, to the Thessalonians was not to be confined to certain individuals, specific times, or general regions. This circumstance confirms that God speaks in such a manner as to benefit all believers in all time. Our views and explanations of Scripture must take that into account. Spiritual life is not characterized by earthly distinctions, but by heavenly ones - and they do not change.

I CHARGE YOU. To "*charge*" is to earnestly appeal to, urging one, so to speak, to take an oath to do what is admonished. Other versions read, "*I adjure you,*"^{NASB} "*I solemnly command you,*"^{NRSV} "*I give orders to,*"^{BBE} and "*My orders . . . are.*"^{NJB} While flesh does not like to be so urged, there are matters that must be pressed upon the saints of God. That is one of the purposes for the gift of "*exhortation*" (Rom 12:8). In a sense, every person is an individual with personal rights and responsibilities. That view, however, is not a primary one in the body of Christ. One aspect of salvation is that God "*sets the solitary in families*" (Psa 68:60). Specifically, in Christ we become part of "*the whole family in heaven and earth*" (Eph 3:15). The text before us is to the family, and no part of it is omitted.

Part of the Apostolic ministry included the people being "*charged,*" as a "*father doth his children*" (1 Thess 2:11). Certain responsibilities were placed upon them. They were not burdensome like those imposed by the scribes and Pharisees (Matt 23:4). Rather, they were areas in which spiritual life was to be cultured and the flesh subdued. Brethren, for example, were charged "*before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers*" (2 Tim 2:14).

There are obligations in Christ that are to be fulfilled, and they should not be withheld from the people. Familiarity with "*the Scriptures*" ranks high in these obligations. After all, they alone are able to make us "*wise unto salvation*" (2 Tim 3:15). They also enable God's people to "*be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works*" (2 Tim 3:17).

READ THIS EPISTLE. This is not merely a personal plea from Paul, as though he was speaking only from himself. Solemnly he wrote, "*I charge you by the Lord.*" It is the Lord's manner to have His truth shared among His people. The Colossians were also told to share the Word of God. "*Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea*"^{NKJV} (Col 4:16). This confirms God's Word is not provincial, confined to certain times and places.

TO ALL THE HOLY BRETHREN. Among other things, this sanctifies the assembly of the people of God. This charge does not allow for going to each believer's home and reading the epistle. It assumes the saints come

together for mutual benefit and edification. Even of old time "*they that feared the LORD spake often one to another*" (Mal 3:16). How much more this is true in Christ Jesus. One of the very first marks of the early church was that they "*were together*" (Acts 2:44). When the disciples were waiting for the fulfillment of Christ's promise, they "*assembled together*" (Acts 1:4). The blessing of Pentecost did not occur until the people "*came together*" (Acts 2:6). Paul wrote to the Corinthians of "*the whole church*" coming "*together*" in "*one place*" (1 Cor 11:20; 14:23). It was at such a gathering that this epistle was to be read.

I have taken the time to mention this somewhat elementary point because of the general disdain that people have these days for godly assemblies. It is exceedingly difficult to find a person that has a yearning to meet together with kindred spirits in Christ Jesus. When such gatherings are possible, it is vain to hope for godly direction and blessing when they are ignored. It has never been God's manner to isolate His people from one another.

To All. Whether the word includes doctrines, exhortations, corrections, reproofs, or instruction in righteousness, it is for all saints. Young and old, male and female, bond and free are to hear it. No part of the body of Christ is to be deficient in their knowledge of God's Word. Institutionalism has produced an environment in which the ignorance of God's Word is allowed. Certain parts of the body are not expected to be able to handle the things of God, or comprehend the great mysteries of the Kingdom. It is not unusual to find assemblies, for example, where ladies and young people are not expected to be conversant concerning the things of God. There is no basis for this in God's Word. In fact, it contradicts the truth.

The holy brethren. Some later versions omit the word "*holy*." Of course, there really are no other kind of "*brethren*." This expression views the people of God as sanctified and accepted in Christ Jesus. God is their Father, Jesus is their brother, and the Spirit dwells within them. Their sins are remitted, and their names written in heaven. They are truly Christ's "*holy brethren*."

A FITTING CONCLUSION

"²⁸*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.*" Here is a most fitting conclusion to this short, but pungent, epistle. It is a word suffering saints need to hear. It is a blessing spiritual life requires. This is to an inspired epistle what a stamp is to a letter placed into the mail. It validates the communication, confirming that the blessing of God is upon it. It affirms that this has been sent to them under the direction of King Jesus, for His grace cannot go where His will is not prominent!

THE GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST. Ordinarily, in the minds of many, grace is considered in association with God the Father. Thus we read of "*the grace of God*" (Lk 2:40; Acts 11:23; 13:43; Tit 2:11, grace "*from God our Father*" (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3), and "*the grace of our God*" (2 Thess 1:12; Jude 4). **However, grace is also associated with the Lord Jesus Christ.** Thus we read of "*the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ*" (Acts 15:11; 2 Cor 13:14). Ten times we read of "*the grace of OUR Lord Jesus Christ*" (Rom 16:20,24; 1 Cor 16:23; 2 Cor 8:9; Gal 6:18; Phil 4:23; 1 Thess 5:28; 2 Thess 3:18; Phile 1:25; Rev 22:21). "*Grace*" is said to come "*from the Lord Jesus Christ*" as well as "*from the Father*" (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Eph 1:2; Phil 1:2; 2 John 3). We also read of "*the grace of Christ*" (Gal 1:6). In fact, the last words of the Bible are almost identical to our text. "*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen*" (Rev 22:21).

Jesus Christ is the means through which grace comes to us. Until He laid down His life, took it up again, and was exalted to the right hand of God, precious little was known about the grace of God. The expression "*grace of God*" is found twenty-four times in the New Testament Scriptures, and not a single time in the Old Testament Scriptures-in **any** version! The phrase "*grace in thy sight*" is found thirteen times from Genesis to Malachi, but only three of them apply to God's sight (Ex 33:13,16; 34:9). In those passages, God spoke of Moses finding grace "*in My sight*" (Ex 33:12,17). Noah is said to have "*found grace in the eyes of the Lord*" (Gen 6:8). Ezra spoke of grace being shown to the chosen people "*for a little space*" (Ezra 9:8). Jeremiah spoke of those surviving the onslaught of the sword finding "*grace in the wilderness*" (Jer 31:2).

In all of those Old Testament references, grace is never used in the sense of our text. From Noah through Ezra and Jeremiah, "*grace*" nearly always meant NOT being destroyed. It was never used of a spiritual environment in which the people walked. **It involved more of a withholding of a curse than the conferment of a blessing.** Too often, churchmen view it much the same way for our time, but that is a serious mistake!

WITH YOU. In Christ Jesus, grace comes to be with us! We "*stand*" in it (1 Pet 5:10), it teaches us (Tit 2:11-12), and the gift of righteousness "*abounds*" to us by grace (Rom 5:15). The "*exceeding grace of God*" is now "*IN*" us (2 Cor 9:14). Those in the Son "*know the grace of God in truth*" (Col 1:6). It "*brings salvation*" in all of its fulness to us (Tit 2:11), and we actually become "*stewards of the manifold grace of God*" (1 Pet 4:10).

We can now "*grow in grace*," obtaining more of its benefits and power (1 Pet 3:18). This is no longer an era of a "*little grace*," as in Ezra's day. Now "*great grace*" can be "*upon them all*" (Acts 4:33). We are what we are "*by the grace of God*" (1 Cor 15:10), and conduct our lives acceptably before God in the world "*by the grace of God*" (2 Cor 1:12). Now we are "*justified freely by His grace*" (Rom 3:24). Now we read of "*the riches of His grace*" (Eph 1:7; 2:8). In His grace, God has made us "*accepted in the Beloved*" (Eph 1:6).

All of this marvelous plentitude is because of Jesus Christ! That is precisely why it is called "*the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ*." If it was not for Him, the foregoing affirmations would not and could not be made. From beginning to end, our experience of grace is owing to Christ Jesus. It is still true, "*through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved*" (Acts 15:11). "*Life more abundantly*" (John 10:10) can be credited to "*abundant grace*" (2 Cor 4:15).

The life of faith requires grace - a lot of it. The work of God necessitates the grace of God. Christ living in you cannot be realized without His grace! That is why Paul pronounced this benediction. He knew that without grace, not a single aspect of spiritual life can be lived. We cannot refuse to sin without grace, and we cannot be holy and godly without it. Everything God requires of us demands His grace. Blessed is the one who knows it!

AMEN. The word "*Amen*" at the conclusion of a saying means, "*so be it, or let it be fulfilled*." Let it stand precisely as it has been stated. Let nothing be changed, and nothing rejected or spurned. When we join in saying "*Amen*" (1 Cor 14:10), we make the saying our own, hiding it in our heart. Now, "*let all the people say, Amen*" (Psa 106:48).