

THE HOPE OF GLORY

1 THESSALONIANS

THE BIBLE NOTEBOOK

Verse By Verse Bible Studies

By
Johnny L. Sanders, D. Min.

DEDICATION

To

Those Who Preach the Gospel
of the Lord Jesus Christ

With Conviction and Compassion

But Never Compromise!

FOREWORD

by

Ray Wells

Church, Minister Relations Director
Louisiana Baptist Convention

"I have used the Bible Study Notebooks of Dr. Johnny Sanders for a number of years. I have found that he brings together the best of exegetical study and flavors the study of God's word with the devotional insights that encourage, challenge, and assist me in Bible Study. Every year, when I find out what our Annual Bible Study is, I call Johnny and ask what he has on that book. His notes will be a valued tool for Pastors and other Ministerial teachers of God's word. For the Seminary graduate, this will bring together many of the sources that you would want to study. For the Minister that does not have the seminary background, Johnny's Bible Notebooks will give you the best Bible study and do it in language that you will be glad to use. For the Bi-Vocational pastor this work is a God-send for you in making the most of your study time."

PREFACE

Following formal training at Mississippi College and New Orleans Baptist Theological

Seminary I became convinced of my need for a disciplined program of Bible study. For years I had either followed the curriculum or taken elective classes, but now I had to assume responsibility for what I would read, what I really studied, how I would study, and when I would study. Before long, a method of study began to develop around three commitments. (1) There was the commitment to study Scripture, (2) an awareness of the importance of preserving what I had gleaned from these studies, and (3) the desire to share what I had gleaned with others.

Through prayer and study, I became convinced that there is a need for something, both for the lay-person and the busy pastor, which might help fill the gap between the critical commentary and the devotional commentary - something which would provide some critical commentary and some illustrations and practical applications. I decided to call it *The Bible Notebook*. The first book to be published from this series is *Undeclared: Finding Peace in a World Full of Trouble*, a verse by verse commentary on the Book of Philippians, now in the second printing.

This study is my first complete draft, not a finished product. Let me repeat - **this is not a finished product**. It is what the general heading implies - my Bible Notebook. It needs a lot of rewriting and editing before it will be ready for publication. I am making it available at this time to pastors who will be teaching the Thessalonian Epistles in Winter Bible Conferences in the year 2000. In many some cases I simply included quotations as we once prepared index cards, with plans to go back and evaluate what I saved and decide whether to rewrite, delete, or save what I have.

All scripture is from the New American Standard Bible, unless otherwise noted. The Bible Notebook is designed to be used with an open Bible.

INTRODUCTION

THE CITY. Thessalonica was both the capitol and the largest city in the province of Macedonia at the time of Paul's ministry there. It was a free city located on a major Roman highway, and a very important city commercially because it was a major market city.

THE CHURCH. We have only two sources of information about the founding of the church at Thessalonica, the Book of Acts (Luke's narrative is found in Acts 17) and the Epistle itself. Paul visited the church on his Second Great Missionary Journey. On the First Missionary Journey, Paul and Barnabas founded a number of churches in the Gentile territory of Galatia, including Pisidian Antioch, Lystra, Iconium, and Derbe. On the Second Missionary Journey, Paul was accompanied by Syllas (Sylvanius) after he and Barnabas had a disagreement over John Mark, who had begun the first missionary trip with them but had turned back at Perga. Paul refused to take Mark again, so Barnabas took him and went to Cypress, and Paul took Silas and returned to the churches established on the First Missionary Journey.

There was a very important reason for their follow-up visits. Following the First Journey, Paul and Barnabas reported that Gentiles were being saved the same way Jews were being saved - by grace through faith. There arose a major protest by Judaizers who believed that since salvation is of the Jews, the Gentiles must first become proselytes to Judaism and then they could become Christians - that is, Law plus grace, a doctrine the Scripture strongly rejects. When they could not reach a peaceful settlement of the issue in Antioch of Syria, Paul asked for a conference in Jerusalem to try to work out the problem. The great Jerusalem Conference in A. D. 51 clarified the issue and James, the half-brother of our Lord, wrote the opinion of the conference - it was not a ruling. The conference claimed no authority over local churches and imposed no rules on them, but there is no denying the influence of those godly leaders on local churches, even in Gentile countries.

Paul was anxious to go back to the church that had been established on the First Missionary Journey to read the letter from James before the Judaizers visited them to confuse the saints. As we learn in Paul's letter to the Galatians, the Judaizers were on their way and they would do their best (should we say, their worst?) to seduce them. Judaizers were Jews who professed faith in Jesus Christ, but insisted that since salvation was of the Jews, Gentiles would have to embrace Judaism, which included accepting the seal of Judaism, circumcision, before they could become Christians. In other words, they taught Justification by grace plus works, which doctrine is absolutely rejected in Romans 11:6. This writer devotes many pages to the discussion of the three theories of Justification in study on Galatians in the Bible Notebook Series. Briefly, here it should suffice to point out that there are three theories of Justification (one of many metaphors for salvation in the New Testament).

- (1) Justification by works which is unquestionably refuted in Scripture (Eph. 2:9; Gal. 2:16).
- (2) Justification by grace plus (anything) is as emphatically rejected (Rom. 11:6; Gal. 3:3).
- (3) Justification by grace and grace alone is the only provision in the New Testament (Eph. 2:8ff; Gal. 2).

When Paul and Silas reached Lystra, they found a family, consisting of a young man and his mother and grandmother (Timothy, Eunice, and Lois) who were very faithful to the Lord. They must have been saved on the First Missionary Journey. Timothy, whom Paul identifies as his son in the ministry, joined the missionaries and they went on to Troas where they met a physician who would join them and in time would be inspired to write two major works that are included in the New Testament - Luke and Acts.

While at Troas, they had been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to go into Asia. Instead, Paul received a vision of a man from Macedonia asking him to come over to Macedonia to help him. Following the vision, Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke traveled to Philippi, a very important Roman city where there was a Roman garrison, but such a small Jewish population that they did not have a synagogue (they lacked ten heads of families). That being the case, they went down by the river side on the Sabbath to worship and there met Lydia, a seller of purple (dyes and materials) from Thyatira. She was converted and the church at Philippi was almost certainly established in her home.

After intense controversy in Philippi, the arrest of Paul and Silas, their miraculous release, and the conversion of the Philippian Jailer (Acts 16), they left the city and traveled to Thessalonica where the church was established, but the hostile opposition of non-believing Jews forced them to leave. They went down to Berea where the people were more receptive, yet discriminating - they searched the Scriptures daily to see if Paul and his friends were telling them the truth. When the Jews in Thessalonica heard about what was happening in Berea, they traveled to that city and stirred the people up against Paul. Believers ushered them to the sea coast and put them on a vessel to Athens where he preached his famous sermon on Mars Hill. Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica and Silas either to Berea or Thessalonica. After a brief stay in Athens Paul went on to Corinth where he was rejoined by Timothy and Silas. They would minister there for some three years. It was from Corinth that Paul wrote the First Epistle to the Thessalonians.

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (ISBE) provides a brief account of Paul's experience in Thessalonica:

Here we are told that Paul, after leaving Philippi, began his next siege against entrenched paganism in the great market center of Thessalonica. He went first into the synagogues of the Jews, and for three Sabbath days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures. Some of them, Luke tells us, "were persuaded, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few." This very naturally excited the jealousy of the Jews who found themselves losing the social prestige that came from having a large number of Greeks, including some of the nobility, resorting to them for instruction. Accordingly, they raised a mob of the worst men in town and brought the leading members of the church before the magistrate. These brethren, Jason and certain others, who seem to have been men of some property, were compelled to give bond to preserve the peace, and the intense feeling against Paul made it necessary for him, for the sake of these brethren as well as for his personal safety, to flee from the city.ⁱ

As the ISBE makes clear, Paul and his companions, Silas and Timothy (Luke is not mentioned but he writes the account), evangelized the city and established the church against the strong opposition of the Jews who did not receive Christ. Their stay in Thessalonica was brief, but they were successful in planting a church that would be known throughout that part of the world for its faithfulness to the Savior (Acts 17:4). There was not, however, time to disciple the new believers while they were there, so as we might expect, questions arose concerning faith and practice. This

epistle was written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to provide some answers.

PURPOSE. In order to appreciate and understand the various books of the New Testament, it helps to know something about the author, the recipients, circumstances, and purpose of the letter. The Holman Bible Dictionary provides some insight:

To help the new church, Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians not long after Timothy came to him (1 Thess. 3:6). This probably means not long after Timothy's arrival at Corinth (Acts 18:5) rather than his being with Paul in Athens (1 Thess. 3:1-2), for the shorter period scarcely allows enough time for the problems with which the apostle deals in the letter to have arisen. An inscription referring to Gallio (Acts 18:12) enables us to date that proconsul's time in Corinth as the early fifties.ⁱⁱ

The authenticity of 1 Thessalonians is almost universally accepted by Bible students. It follows the Pauline style, it was accepted by early Christians, it included in their lists of New Testament books, and it deals with some of the problems known to have existed very early in the life of the church. One of the first questions we would expect was, what will happen to believers who die before Christ returns?

Among the problems the Thessalonian church faced was persecution by pagans (2:14) and a temptation for believers to accept pagan sexual standards (4:4-8). Some of the Christians seem to have given up working and to have relied on the others to supply their needs (4:11-12). There was uncertainty about the fate of believers who had died, and some of the Thessalonians appear to have thought that Christ would come back soon and take them all to be with Him. What would happen to those who had died before the great event (4:13-18)? Paul's reply to this gives us information about Christ's return that we find nowhere else. Again, some of the believers seem to have been concerned about the time of Jesus' return (5:1-11). So Paul wrote this pastoral letter to meet the needs of inexperienced Christians and to bring them closer to Christ.ⁱⁱⁱ

DATE. There is a lot more disagreement about the date than the authorship. Holman says

Paul probably wrote 1 Thessalonians early in A.D. 50 (though in view of the uncertainties this must be regarded as no more than approximate). Plainly, this is one of the earliest of Paul's letters and one of the earliest Christian documents surviving.^{iv}

The Eason Bible Dictionary disagrees:

The first epistle to the Thessalonians was the first of all Paul's epistles. It was in all probability written from Corinth, where he abode a "long time" (Acts 18:11, 18), early in the period of his residence there, about the end of A.D. 52.^v

So, which is right? Those who accept the earlier date must date the Jerusalem Conference in A. D. 49. I accept the latter date because I accept A.D. 51 as the date for the Jerusalem conference. The date, however, is immaterial when it comes to the interpretation of this epistle.

A Suggested Outline of 1 Thessalonians (Wiersbe)

I. Personal: "We give thanks remembering..." (1-3)

- A. How the church was born (1)
 - 1. An elect group (1:1-5)
 - 2. An exemplary group (1:6-7)
 - 3. An enthusiastic group (1:8)
 - 4. An expectant group (1:9-10)
- B. How the church was nurtured (2)
 - 1. A faithful steward (2:1-6)
 - 2. A gentle mother (2:7-8)
 - 3. A concerned father (2:9-16)
 - 4. A loving brother (2:14-20)
- C. How the church was established (3)
 - 1. Through the Word (3:1-5)
 - 2. Through prayer (3:6-13)

II. Practical: "We beseech you..." (4-5)

- A. Walk in holiness (4:1-8)
- B. Walk in love (4:9-10)
- C. Walk in honesty (4:11-12)
- D. Walk in hope (4:13-18)
- E. Walk in light (5:1-11)
- F. Walk in gratitude (5:12-13)
- G. Walk in obedience (5:14-28)

Each chapter of this epistle ends with a reference to the second coming of Christ. Paul relates His coming to: salvation (1:9-10); service (2:19-20); stability (3:13); sorrow (4:18); and sanctification (5:23).^{vi}

FIRST THESSALONIANS

Verse by Verse

I. A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CHURCH AT THESSALONICA, 1:1-3:13.

A. Greeting, 1:1.

1:1 - PAUL. Paul is Saul of Tarsus, who is introduced to us in Acts 6 as a young Pharisee who, with obvious approval, watched the clothes of those who stoned Stephen. Student of the famed Gamaliel in Jerusalem, Saul was destined to become a leader in the persecution of believers throughout the region. He persecuted Christians so mercilessly that bothered him years later when he thought about it. With authorization from the Sanhedrin, the supreme court of Judaism, and “breathing threats and murder,” he was taking the persecution of Jewish believers to Syria when he was struck down on the road to Damascus in an encounter with the risen, ascended Lord (Acts 9).

Paul was converted and called to be an apostle to the Gentiles, to Jews, and even to kings. After being stricken with blindness and then having his sight restored in Damascus, he spend three years in Arabia studying the Scripture so that he might apply all he had learned as a young student of the Old Testament to the Jesus as the Messiah. He returned to Damascus, where he had a narrow escape when he was lowered from the wall of the city in a basket so that he might escape from those who wished to silence him. Back in Jerusalem he was befriended by Barnabas - everyone needs a Barnabas in his life - and because of opposition he went back to Tarsus. Later, when Barnabas needed help in his ministry in Antioch of Syria, he went to Tarsus, found Saul and persuaded him to return to Antioch to assist him.

The Holy Spirit led believers to set aside Barnabas and Saul for an extended missionary journey further into Gentile territories. They left as a team of Barnabas and Saul and returned as Paul and Barnabas. Saul began using the Roman name in Gentile lands and became the leader as their work progressed. At the time of this writing he is teamed with Silas and Timothy, and part of the time Luke, whose presence is indicated by the “we” sections of Acts.

SILVANUS. (Latin, form of Silus). Silas accompanied Paul on two missionary journeys and then accompanied Peter on a missionary journeys. Holman has the following on Silas:

One of his first missions was to carry news of the Jerusalem conference to the believers at Antioch (Acts 15:22). He and Paul left Antioch together on a mission to Asia Minor (15:40-41) and later to Macedonia. In Philippi the two were imprisoned (16:19-24), but they later won the jailer and his family to the Lord after God delivered them from prison. Later in his ministry Silas teamed with Peter on missions in Pontus and Cappadocia. He also served as Peter’s scribe, writing 1 Peter and perhaps other letters. Many believe that he composed and arranged most of the letter since Peter probably had little education.^{vii}

TIMOTHY. The personal name means, “honoring God.” He is introduced in the introduction, but the following article by Robert J. Dean in the Holman Bible Dictionary adds to our knowledge of Timothy:

Friend and trusted coworker of Paul. When Timothy was a child, his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois taught him the Scriptures (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15). A native of Lystra, he may have been converted on Paul's first missionary journey (Acts 14:6-23). Paul referred to Timothy as his child in the faith (1 Cor. 4:17; 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2). This probably means that Paul was instrumental in Timothy's conversion. When Paul came to Lystra on his second journey, Timothy was a disciple who was well-respected by the believers (Acts 16:1-2). Paul asked Timothy to accompany him. Timothy's father was a Greek, and Timothy had not been circumcised. Because they would be ministering to many Jews and because Timothy's mother was Jewish, Paul had Timothy circumcised (Acts 16:3).

Timothy not only accompanied Paul but also was sent on many crucial missions by Paul (Acts 17:14-15; 18:5; 19:22; 20:4; Rom. 16:21; 1 Cor. 16:10; 2 Cor. 1:19; 1 Thess. 3:2, 6). For example, when Paul was unable to go to Corinth, he sent Timothy to represent Paul and his teachings (1 Cor. 4:17). Later when Paul was in prison, he sent Timothy to Philippi (Phil. 2:19). Paul felt that no one had any more compassion and commitment than Timothy (Phil. 2:20-22).

So close were Paul and Timothy that both names are listed as the authors of six of Paul's letters (2 Cor. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1; Philem. 1). In addition, Paul wrote two letters to Timothy (1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2). As Paul's ministry neared the end, he challenged Timothy to remain true to his calling (1 Tim. 1:18). As Paul faced death, he asked Timothy to come to be with him (2 Tim. 4:9). At some point in his life, Timothy was imprisoned; but he was released (Heb. 13:23).^{viii}

THE CHURCH OF THE THESSALONIANS. Following the accepted letter writing style, Paul introduces himself and his companions, and follows that with the greeting, "*to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.*" The word church denotes an assembly; in the New Testament it connotes those who are called out by the Lord according to His grace, for His purpose.

GRACE TO YOU AND PEACE. The following commentary on the use of these two words used in the greeting is from the book, *Undefeated! Finding Peace in a World Full of Trouble*, by this writer. That which is said of the Philippian Epistle applies here:

As we have seen, Paul begins Philippians with the typical style for a Greco-Roman letter of the day, including the author, and the recipients, and a greeting. But Paul's greeting is not the standard greeting, either for the Jewish readers or the Greek readers, but a combination of the Greek and Jewish greeting which brings together concepts precious to the early church. The normal Greek greeting, *chairein* carries the basic idea of joy, pleasure, beauty. Grace is from the Greek word *charis*, which in NT means God's unmerited favor and love).^{ix}

In a Greek letter, it could simply mean "greetings" (James 1:1). As used in the New Testament, it refers to the unmerited favor of God. It is easier to define than to believe. To believe in grace we have to give up our arrogance, and ideas about our own worth (self esteem). We can never accept something as ours because of our own merit. We can never claim God's blessings as our right or as our property by our own merit.^x

Peace (*eirene*, Gk.; *shalom* in Heb.) is the usual Hebrew greeting. The word carries the idea of joining, or weaving together. "Peace in the Jewish sense is the symphony of life made meaningful through a right relationship with God. The theological order is significant as well; it is only through the grace made available by the shed blood of the spotless Lamb of God that peace will come."^{xi} Peace is positive and not negative. It connotes far more than the absence of strife and hostility - it expresses the desire for harmony with God and with other people.

Here, peace has to do with a new relationship and points to blessings we receive because of grace. There is a problem, however. Today we usually understand peace to mean an inner peace of mind, but Paul was not a post-Freudian psychologist. God seeks to save neurotics. There are sincere Christians who are deeply troubled. Believers are often put to the test. How, then, does grace bring us peace? When one accepts Christ, the warfare between himself and God is over. So, Paul prays for them to realize what they already have (it was not dependent upon his prayer). From the point of one's new birth in Christ the Lord seeks to make the peace that passes all understanding a reality in every aspect of the life of His children.

That other Christian writers would be influenced by Paul's new letter writing style is seen in the writing of the early Church Fathers. Polycarp, who was probably an infant at the time of Paul's martyrdom, would write to this same church a half-a-century later. He began his letter:

Polycarp, and the presbyters with him, to the Church of God sojourning at Philippi: Mercy to you, and peace from God Almighty, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior, be multiplied."^{xii}

Paul prays for both grace and peace. They can only come in that order. Grace is the source of peace - peace is always dependent upon grace. If God withdraws his grace, there will be no peace and we would be lost. Prayer for grace recognizes a continuous need. The grace of God always comes as His free and unmerited gift; it is never our private possession - not an inalienable right. "That Gentiles have finally been made partakers in this marvelous mystery of God is the prime cause of the keynote of joy sounded throughout the epistle."^{xiii}

Millions are seeking peace today, but they will never find it anywhere except in the Prince of Peace. Perhaps you have seen the bumper sticker, or read the words on a church sign: NO JESUS, NO PEACE, KNOW JESUS, KNOW PEACE. Let me try to adapt that to this Scripture - there is

No joy without peace,
No peace without grace,
No grace without Jesus.^{xiv}

B. Paul's Commendation of the Church, 1:2-10.

1:2 - WE GIVE THANKS. This was a special church to Paul, and for that reason it is understandable that he would begin his letter with the words, "*We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers.*" See other epistles of Paul for his prayer for the church (Phil. 1:3, for example). An old proverb says, "Little people talk about people; average people talk about people; big people talk about ideas." Assuming a measure of truth in that proverb, how might we apply that to the prayers of the saints? Weak Christians thank God for things? Average people thank God for the people who mean the most to them? Mature Christians thank God for what He is doing through the lives and testimonies of others? However we answer it is food for thought.

1:3 - WORK OF FAITH . The missionary founder of the church at Thessalonica thanks God for them, "*constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father.*" Paul uncompromisingly asserts that salvation is by grace through faith, not of works.

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them (Eph. 2:8-10).

...Nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified (Gal. 2:16).

No one is saved by works, but everyone who is saved is saved unto good works. There is spiritual good and there is human good. I benefit when my neighbor practices human good rather than human evil. But when he practices spiritual good (works of faith) God benefits and so do I. Bearing that fact in mind, we must go on to see that there are works of faith (of the spirit) and there are works of the flesh. "Works of faith" must surely parallel the fruit of the spirit listed in Galatians 5:22-23: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law."

LABOR OF LOVE. The works of faith are also classified as “labor of love.” Lost people live and work for themselves (Eph. 2:1-2), but the true believer lives and works for the Lord, and that work is a labor of love. The highest motivation for serving God is His love for us. Next is our love for Him and then our love for others. Remember what had happened in the church at Ephesus before the end of the First Century? Jesus had this to say to the church in the Revelation:

But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place--unless you repent (Rev. 2:4-5).

Any church that has left its first love must repent or face the judgment of God. One wonders how many churches there are in the world today whose lampstand has been removed, but the people go right on meeting every Sunday, singing the same hymns, hearing the same sermons, and supporting the same programs, never realizing that they come closer being a joke to the world than a light. There is but one hope for the church that has lost its first love - revival.

STEADFASTNESS OF HOPE. This denotes the patient endurance of believers while waiting for Christ's return (v. 10). Steadfastness of hope is an indication of faithfulness and trust in Jesus Christ, a source of joy in His service. It is also a key to Sanctification. This is one of the lessons we should glean from James 1:4-8:

Knowing that the testing of your *faith produces endurance*. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.. But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being *a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways* (emphasis added).

We must not stand idly by waiting for the Second Coming or for Judgment Day. “Trust in God and in His saving purposes leads us to work for Him. Love for God and His creatures prompts us to act in love for others. Hope in Christ's promise of eternal life inspires us to continue working patiently until the promises are completely fulfilled.”^{xv} [DSB: QV].

1:4 - KNOWING, BRETHREN BELOVED BY GOD. We are the “beloved of God” if we are in Christ. Without the love of God there would be no Gospel - no good news at all. The whole Bible is simply the unfolding story of God's love.

HIS CHOICE OF YOU. This speaks of election, a vital doctrine which has often been presented in such a way as to confuse others. While I devote a lot more space to this subject in my commentary on Ephesians than here, I must stress the importance of the great doctrine, and at the same time acknowledge that I do not have all the answers. The following quotes will suffice at this point in our

study of this epistle. The first two are brief quotations from two popular study Bibles and the third, which is considerably longer, is from Warren Wiersbe.

Election is a doctrine for the "elect" of God. Election reminds us that salvation is a work of God; it is the assurance of the providence of God; election is bound up in the foreknowledge of God (cf. Rom. 8:29, note; 1 Pet. 1:2).^{xvi}

In relation to believers, God's choosing is sovereign (Rom. 9:11), it is pretemporal (Eph. 1:4), it is for salvation (2 Thess. 2:13), and it is proved by the fruit that accompany salvation (v. 5; Col. 3:12).^{xvii}

The word "church" in the Gk. is *ekklesia*, which means "a called-out group." The church is not a social club; it is a spiritual organism, an organization composed of people whom God has "called out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). This calling is purely of grace (Eph. 1:3ff). Though we are in the world physically, we are not of the world spiritually (John 15:19). These saints lived in Thessalonica but dwelled in Christ. Paul explains the miracle of this calling in 2 Thes. 2:13-14. God sent Paul and Silas to Thessalonica with the Word of God. The people heard the Word, believed, and were saved. After receiving Christ, they discovered that they had been chosen in Him by God through grace! Read also 1 Peter 1:1-4.

The mystery of God's election and man's decision will never be fully explained this side of heaven. Just keep in mind that the Bible teaches both. "How do you reconcile these two truths?" a man once asked Spurgeon. The preacher replied, "I never try to reconcile friends." These twin truths of election and decision are not contradictory; they are complementary. As far as God the Father is concerned, we were saved when He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4); as far as the Spirit is concerned, we were saved when we responded to His call and received Christ; as far as the Son is concerned, we were saved when He died for us on the cross.^{xviii}

1:5 - FOR. With the word "for" Paul introduces a clause that explains the way in which election works. "However one understands this mysterious doctrine, the text makes clear its intimate relationship to the gospel of Christ, the preached word, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit."^{xix}

OUR GOSPEL. Paul says, "*for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.*" By "our gospel," he is referring to the Holy Scripture and truth revealed to him by divine revelation. "Paul has just noted that inner Christian qualities find expression in the way the believer lives his or her life. Now he makes a similar point. The Gospel comes as words, but not simply *with* words. The Holy Spirit infuses these words with power, and the two have a visible impact."^{xx}

This Scripture is the inspired revelation of God's redemptive love, the communication of the good news of Jesus Christ: His virgin birth, His immaculate life, His death, burial, and resurrection, His present ministry of intercession, and His promised return for His church. The Holy Spirit gives power to the words of the Bible, including those Paul writes here, enabling individuals to make a commitment to the Lord. This is a source of great joy to believers.

IN POWER AND IN THE HOLY SPIRIT. The Gospel is not only the "good news," it is the most powerful force on earth because the Holy Spirit uses it as His sword to bring deep conviction of sin and, thereby effect the salvation of the lost person. Human reason and eloquence are not enough. Only God's power leads to salvation; we can only witness to that great power.

WHAT KIND OF MEN WE PROVED TO BE. Paul will elaborate on this in 2:3-12. He and his companions had served the Lord without compromise and simply left it up to the Holy Spirit to affirm his message and ministry.

1:6 - YOU ALSO BECAME IMITATORS OF US. Having no Bible to follow, the saints at Thessalonica had followed the example of the missionaries "*and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit.*" The Thessalonian Christians had imitated, and were imitating, the Lord and the apostles in responding to the Gospel in spite of "much tribulation." See 1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1.

JOY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. Tribulation, trials, and disappointments cannot destroy the joy one finds in Jesus Christ. Joy is a great theme of the Epistle to the Philippians. In it we see a picture of the suffering and deprivation to which Paul had been subjected, and yet the joy that was far too deep to be reached by any tribulation.

1:7 - AN EXAMPLE. Paul continues to praise the Lord for the faithfulness of the saints at Thessalonica: "*So that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.*" The word for "example" means a pattern or model. Those hostile to the Gospel forced the missionaries to leave the city, but not until a church was planted there would be a model to all churches in that part of the Roman world. Macedonia was the northern province of Greece; Achaia was the southern part. This is the miracle of the Gospel - from "hearers" to "followers" to "examples!" These people at Thessalonica heard the Word, welcomed it, believed it, and many had paid a great price for their faith.

The Word imparts faith (Rom. 10:17) and brings joy (Acts 8:8, 39; Jer. 15:16). Having believed, these new Christians followed Paul, associated themselves with a local fellowship, and became examples to all around them. They were not only followers of Paul, but also of the churches (2:14); for in the NT, Christians were expected to be a vital part of the local fellowship. Their testimony reached throughout the whole area and helped lead others to Christ.^{xxi}

1:8 - SOUNDED FORTH. "*For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in*

Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything.” The Gospel Paul had preached there was echoed (reverberated) by the Thessalonians into all of Greece and beyond. He commends the Thessalonian Christians for their intense evangelistic and missionary zeal. They were not only carrying out the Great Commission, they were setting an example for every church of every age. This is exactly what the New Testament church is supposed to be doing. This is the kind of church that gains praise from the Lord.

Their witness went beyond their homes into different parts of the Roman Empire. One dimension of their witness was in the quality of life that salvation produced in them. They had "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (v. 9). Their testimony is likened to the ringing blast of a trumpet, the echo of which continues to be heard. That they had such a reputation despite persecution is a marvelous testimony of their "faith toward God." It is during times of difficulty that one's faith in the Lord is especially precious, sustaining, and essential.^{xxii}

The faith and faithfulness (they are inseparable) of the church at Thessalonica had spread through the surrounding region of Macedonia just as the faith of the church in Rome had spread throughout the world (Rom. 1:8). What a challenge for contemporary churches to become models for missions in the surrounding territory! Their faith spread beyond their own province or state (Macedonia) and to the next province of Achaia. But their interest in missionary outreach became known far beyond even those regions. "Their central testimony concerned the change in their lives Jesus had brought about and their confidence in His return (vv 9-10)."^{xxiii}

A TIMELY INTERLUDE: While working on this study, I have been reading two very interesting books. The first book is *Rights and Duties*, by Russell Kirk (Spense Publishing Company, Dallas, 1997, pp. 286). Kirk has authored a number of works, including two outstanding volumes book, *The Roots of America Order*, and *The Conservative Mind*, which I not only recommend, but urge every student of history to read. Kirk stresses repeatedly that of the fifty-five Framers of the United States Constitution, at least fifty "would have subscribed to the Apostles' Creed."^{xxiv}

He contrasts the U. S. Constitution with the French constitution, which was written by "Deists, skeptics, and atheists."^{xxv} A great contrast with the Framers of the U. S. constitution is seen in that "As Christians, most of them would have said that only the things of God are sacred."^{xxvi} In chapters entitled "A Natural Aristocracy," and "Marriage of Rights and Duties," he reveals much of the character of the Framers, and the more I read those chapters the more I saw the influence of the Gospel on many of those "gentlemen." These people worked through their differences with Christian dignity - as Christian Gentlemen. In fact, "with only three or four exceptions, they were Christians of one persuasion or another: that is, they took their primary assumptions about the human condition, consciously or unconsciously, from the Bible. Probably nearly all of them had been effected by *The Pilgrim's Progress*."^{xxvii}

The second book, by another of my favorite writers, Thomas Sowell is *Conquests and Cultures*. It is a part of a trilogy along with *Race and Culture* and *Migration and Culture*. I cannot

stress the potential these books have in solving many social problems and assuaging and quenching racial tensions in America and the world. Sowell reveals the influence of groups on cultures resulting from both conquests and migrations. Sowell meticulously follows movements of various religions and ethnic groups and their influence on culture where they settled. For example, when the Romans conquered Britain, the natives were raised to new cultural levels, but when the Roman armies were needed to defend the borders elsewhere, the culture regressed and remained behind that of the more civilized nations for centuries.

Sowell chronicles the influence of various Christian groups as they came into contact with other groups, mentioning the institutional traditions of the Catholic church, the emotionalism of Southern religious tradition, and “the austere, rigid, and cerebral religion of the Puritans who settled in Massachusetts.”^{xxviii} Sowell’s grasp of the influence of the Puritans is worth noting. He writes:

The importance to the Puritans of individual understanding of the Bible spurred them to promote widespread literacy and to produce, both in East Anglia and in Massachusetts, higher rates of literacy than in the general population and a disproportionate contribution to the intellectual elites of both Britain and colonial America. Nor was this reverence for education limited to an elite or even to those who were educated themselves. Hundreds of families throughout New England responded to appeals to donate either 12 shillings per family or a peck of grain to help support the fledgling little college established near the Charles River, early in the colony’s history, by John Harvard.

The intellectuality of the Puritans was a product of their religion and the rigid morality that derived from it. The Puritan colonies of America, like their counterparts in England, had much lower rates of illegitimacy than among their countrymen at large.^{xxix}

There is a reason for this interlude (interruption) at this point, and that is that a church like the one in Thessalonica can influence the moral and political climate of the religion in which the members live, and help shape the culture for generations to come. For years I have read conservative magazines and newsletters in my own personal effort to avoid being deceived by the major media outlets and their “talking heads.” If anyone doubts that they would mislead us, check out Brent Bozell’s research on the Internet. I am not talking about a conspiracy, but an agenda. Conservative writers (I subscribe to the *Conservative Chronicle* which carries 64 columns each week) and talk-show hosts like Rush Limbaugh and Ken Hamblin often make good points, but there is one thing that disturbs me in some of their commentary. From time to time I hear someone stress the point that they would like to get the government out of people’s lives and “trust people to do the right thing.” Or someone will mention the “universal goodness of man.”

There is one big problem with the goodness of man - he does not have any! The Bible is very clear on this point. Jesus could not have been more emphatic, there is none good - not one. Paul wrote, “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23, KJV). Jeremiah wrote, The

heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jer. 17:9, KJV). There is a major difference between many modern secular conservatives and the conservative Framers of the Constitution, many of whom were influenced by the Calvinism of the Reverend John Witherspoon (James Madison was a student of Witherspoon). Those Christian conservatives understood that America must be protected against the avarice, greed, covetousness, and lust for power found in fallen man, and they gave us a Constitution which protects us against many (but not all) of their temptations. They simply did not trust politicians to “do the right thing.” The great threat to our freedom is a judicial system that asserts itself over the legislative and executive branches of our government. “As John Randolph of Roanoke observed, with reference to tendencies of the federal courts in his own time, ‘I can never forget that the Book of Judges is followed by the Book Kings.’”^{xxx}

Neither Republicans nor Democrats, both of whom supply ample examples of the Depravity of Man, can save our culture or preserve our freedom indefinitely. Many people are aware of the “slippery slope” on which our culture has been suspended (actually, slipping) since America entered the Post-Christian era in our history. Only a spiritual revival can save America and only the Gospel of Jesus Christ can bring revival. If America were filled with churches like the church at Thessalonica I believe God would use us to bring about a spiritual awakening such as the world has never seen. Do I believe that is going to happen? Don’t ask. Please, don’t ask. Read what Paul has to say about the Apostasy and then ask yourself what you think we are facing.

Is there hope? The Apostasy is coming (some would say, has come). There is hope for revival today if God’s people seek it with all their hearts. The following story of a revival in one Arkansas church came to me via e-mail from the Baptist Press:

What began as a traditional Sunday worship service at North Main Church in Jonesboro ended with 21 church members making a profession of faith. "It was like the top came off the church and God came in," said Shelia Woznick, who was among those who committed their life to Christ in that service.

The service on Sunday, July 25, was not centered on a special emphasis, nor did it feature a guest speaker. According to Tommy Stacey, pastor of the church, the revival experience was simply an "out pouring of the Holy Spirit."

"The flood gates of heaven opened," said Stacey. "There was never a dull moment. There was no begging or pleading. People just came." The people that came, however, were not unchurched people. It was the sound technician, the organist, the nursery workers and the Sunday school teachers. Many of the more than 30 people that have been saved in the past few Sundays were long-standing church members. Stacey explained the church had seen "showers of blessings" before as a few church members were saved. On this Sunday, however, "the whole rain" came on the congregation. This revival among church members began with a profession of faith from Dorothy Hinson. Hinson, a former church secretary and now a nursery worker, came to know the Lord in her home the Sunday night one week prior to the unexpected revival service. The elderly Hinson explained she had grown up in church and had always thought she was saved at a young age; however, for the past three

months, Hinson had serious doubts about her relationship with God, but now those doubts are gone. When Hinson shared her salvation experience with Stacey, he asked that she give her testimony during Sunday's worship service. That testimony combined with a simple salvation message promoted others who had doubts about their salvation. Hinson said she had no idea her salvation would be the catalyst for a revival. Hinson said, "The people being saved shocked me as much as I shocked them."

Among those shocking salvations was Ida Dacus, the church organist. Dacus explained she had known for quite sometime that she did not have a real relationship with God, but she did not share that fear with anyone.

"What difference will it make if I am not saved -- no one knows and no one cares," said Dacus when describing how she wrestled with the decision to be saved. Now, as a new Christian, Dacus said she now realizes that salvation makes a big difference. This difference has also been felt by the entire church. Stacey explained people come to church each Sunday "anticipating what God will do next." The pastor further explained he saw this revival as an affirmation of work the church has done and as preparation for the ministry God has given them.

Stacey and the congregation see their God-given ministry as a community outreach. As Stacey explains it, North Main Church is on the "other side of the railroad tracks" from many of the other churches in town. This location allows them to reach an unchurched area. Just one day prior to the spontaneous revival, the church had completed the building of a new home for Marvie Dunlap, an elderly lady in the area. Dunlap's house had become too run down to live in so the church had a house they owned moved to her land. This is just one outreach in which the church is involved. The congregation also assists in a crime prevention program with local police and is continually making a difference in their community. "We're trying not only to preach the Gospel but to live the Gospel," explained Stacey.^{xxx1}

(JONESBORO, Ark. (BP)-- Unanticipated revival stirs Arkansas church to commitment By Rachel Raines)

1:9 - THEY THEMSELVES. *"For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you."* That is, people everywhere the good news was proclaimed gave testimony to the conversion of the Thessalonians.

HOW YOU TURNED TO GOD. People throughout the known world knew how the Thessalonians believers had "turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God." The church at Thessalonica was made up mostly of converts from pagan religions and not from Judaism (2:14-16). The Jews in that city had been especially hostile to Paul and his companions and to the Gospel they preached, even to the point of following them to Berea to stir up the Jews the against them.

The Victor Bible Background Commentary makes an valuable contribution to the thought expressed here:

The Gospel message focuses our attention on Christ and the salvation God offers us in Him. Early Christian evangelists did not attack idolatry, but rather presented Jesus. Conversion was not a turning from idols to God, but a turning to God from idols. That is, the decision to turn to God was critical; the decision to reject idolatry followed.

We sometimes lose sight of this conversion order. We agitate for prayer in school, or against abortion, and urge social change. We confront an alcoholic or child abuser, and urge personal reformation. But salvation is not a matter of turning from alcohol to God. It's a matter of turning to God (and then) from alcohol.^{xxxii}

The God of Christianity stands in sharp contrast to the gods of the pagan nations, then and now. The true God is revealed to us in the mighty events of the Bible. He is a living God, not some empty philosophy or scheme, not some human creation set up as an idol. The one true God enters into personal relationships with His people. He hears our prayers, He help us, he cares for us as individuals.

1:10 - TO WAIT FOR HIS SON FROM HEAVEN. Their hope, and ours is in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, "*whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.*" That hope in hope of the return of Christ is rooted in the fact that God raised Him from the dead. The Resurrection was the crowning miracle of the New Testament and essential to the proclamation to the Gospel. Those professing Christians who reject the literal resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead are without defense when they express belief in any other part of the Bible. Our resurrection is directly connected to His resurrection from the dead.

JESUS, WHO RESCUES US. Jesus Christ is the One Who rescues us from the fearsome wrath that is coming. The NKJV has "delivers us." Jesus is our great Deliverer. He is ever rescuing the perishing.

THE WRATH TO COME. "The wrath" denotes the coming judgment - the Great Judgment Day. Comments on this phrase are insightful:

God will reveal His furious wrath on the judgment day. Only one way of escape is possible. We can trust in Jesus. Otherwise we suffer His wrath.^{xxxiii}

The resurrection of Christ is the focus of a Christian's constant attitude of attentive service while he awaits the return of Christ. This event will deliver the believer from the time of wrath . The preposition "from" (*ek*, Gk.) favors exclusion from ("out of") the tribulation period rather than being sustained in it (i.e., "preservation within"), though the latter view is possible (see Rev. 3:10).^{xxxiv}

Pulling a statement from each of the above quotations should help keep us focused. First, "We can trust in Jesus." Second, "The resurrection of Christ is the focus of a Christian's constant attitude of

attentive service while he awaits the return of Christ.” Judgment and wrath are on God’s calendar - they are coming. But Christians have no reason to fear final judgment, because Jesus Christ, the resurrected One, is coming again to rescue us from the wrath.

C. Paul's Conduct Among the Thessalonians, 2:1-12

1. He and his companions preached with boldness, 2:1-4.

In this chapter Paul outlines something of his method as well as his motives his ministry at Thessalonica. This was his philosophy of missions, evangelism, and ministry in general throughout his life, in every place he served. He writes that he ministered

- (1) in spite of suffering, insult, and opposition (vv. 1, 2).
- (2) without error or deceit (v. 3) or flattery (v. 5).
- (3) like a gentle mother (vv. 7, 8) and caring father (vv. 11, 12).

In addition, he appeals to God as his witness (v. 5) and to the Thessalonians’ own firsthand knowledge of his ministry in their midst (“you know, vv. 1, 2, 5, 11; “you remember,” v. 9; and you are witnesses,” v. 10).

This is enough to justify the claim “that our coming to you was not in vain.” Paul left all ministers of the Gospel an example to follow. “Chapter 1 describes the ideal church; chapter 2 provides a picture of the ideal pastor or Christian servant. Paul has told us how the Gospel came to Thessalonica; now he tells us how he ministered to the young believers. This is an outline of Paul’s “Follow-up Program,” and it explains why most of his converts stayed true to the Lord and why his churches grew. He gives us four pictures of the ideal Christian worker.”^{xxxv}

2:1 - OUR COMING TO YOU WAS NOT IN VAIN. The missionary has already written that his ministry there was not without results (1:5). After reviewing his ministry in their city (2:1-12), he will return to this assessment in verse 13.

2:2 - PHILIPPI. *“But after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition.”* They already knew the story of the suffering, injustice, and humiliation to which the missionaries were subjected in Philippi, but he alludes to it here again. The word translated “mistreated” means to treat insolently. Paul had been mocked, ridiculed, falsely beaten, and imprisoned along with Silas. God sent an earthquake to deliver them, at which time the Philippian jailer was converted (Acts 16: 12-40). By adding “mistreated” to “suffered” he is probably recalling the injustice of their having him illegally beaten, before learning that he was a Roman citizen.

“More than the bodily suffering it was the personal indignity that had been offered to him as a Roman citizen” (Milligan), for which account see notes on Acts 16:16-40, an

interesting example of how Acts and the Epistles throw light on each other. Luke tells how Paul resented the treatment accorded to him as a Roman citizen and here Paul shows that the memory still rankled in his bosom.

The insult in Philippi did not close Paul's mouth, but had precisely the opposite effect "in our God." It was not wild fanaticism, but determined courage and confidence in God that spurred Paul to still greater boldness in Thessalonica.^{xxxvi}

AMID MUCH OPPOSITION. The KJV has "with much contention," others, "in much conflict." The word (*agoon*) is the figure of the athletic games. It may refer to outward conflict like Phil. 1:30, or inward anxiety as in Col. 2:1. Paul had experienced both while in Thessalonica. The Greek term was used to describe the strain of an athletic contest such as a wrestling match or a race, two of their favorite events.

2:3 - OUR EXHORTATION. The word denotes a persuasive discourse, calling others to (for) instruction, admonition, encouragement, or comfort.

DOES NOT COME FROM ERROR OR IMPURITY OR BY WAY OF DECEIT. He is probably responding to a number of charges brought against him by his opponents who claimed, first of all, that the Gospel Paul preached was based on error. A second charge concerned impurity (that Christianity encouraged sexual immorality) and third, there was a charge of deceit (that his methods were underhanded). "Paul was not an impostor seeking fame and self-gratification, as were so many of the Gentile teachers of his day (see Phil. 1:16; 2 Pet. 2:10, 14; Jude 8; Rev. 2:14, 15). Estius tells us that Simon Magus and Cerinthus taught for such motives."^{xxxvii}

2:4 - APPROVED BY GOD. "*But just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts.*" Paul uses the perfect passive indicative of the verb (*dokimazoō*), meaning to put to the test, "but here the tense for completed state means tested and proved and so approved by God. Paul here claims the call of God for his ministry and the seal of God's blessing on his work and also for that of Silas and Timothy,"^{xxxviii} The original Greek meaning would be "approved by trial." Paul, however, "attests that this approval does not come from any personal merit but only from the grace and mercy of God (Acts 9:15; 1 Cor. 7:25; 2 Cor. 3:5; 1 Tim. 1:11, 12)."^{xxxix} Paul was a veteran of controversy in local church ministry (Acts 11:25-26), one evangelistic, missionary journey (Acts 13-14), potentially explosive church-wide debates (Acts 15), and now part of a second missionary journey. In all of this he was approved by God.

ENTRUSTED WITH THE GOSPEL. This is awesome! How incredible it is to be "entrusted with the Gospel"! We often hear or read about the stewardship of money and material things, but we need also to remember that every believer is a steward of the Gospel and the Word of God. "God gave the message to Paul (1 Tim. 1:11); Paul in turn committed it to Timothy (1 Tim. 6:20), and Timothy was expected to commit it to faithful people in the churches who would then commit it to others (2 Tim. 2:2). The main responsibility of a steward is to be faithful (1 Cor. 4:1-2); and it is on

the basis of this faithfulness that we will be tested and rewarded when Christ comes.”^{x1}

NOT AS PLEASING MEN. Generations of ministers of the Gospel have been, and are indebted to a spiritual giant for his contribution to biblical scholarship. A. T. Robertson taught Greek and New Testament at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, wrote texts for Greek grammar and authored numerous other important books. He helped give Southern Baptists credibility with the old mainline denominations. Robertson, in addition to his scholarship, had a practical understanding of ministers, as shown by the following comments:

Few temptations assail the preacher more strongly than this one to please men, even if God is not pleased, though with the dim hope that God will after all condone or overlook. Nothing but experience will convince some preachers how fickle is popular favour and how often it is at the cost of failure to please God. And yet the preacher wishes to win men to Christ. It is all as subtle as it is deceptive. God tests our hearts (the very verb *dokimazoô* used in the beginning of this verse) and he is the only one whose approval matters in the end of the day (1 Corinthians 4:5).^{xli}

2. His Ministry in Thessalonica, 2:5-9.

2:5 - FLATTERING SPEECH. *“For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed--God is witness.”* “Flattering speech” denotes cajolery, which is an attempt to persuade by use of insincere, hypocritical speech. People of all ages have observed the hypocrisy of flattery, as Edythe Draper reveals in these ancient quotes and proverbs:

Danish Proverb - Treachery lurks in honeyed words.

Ethiopian Proverb - When flatterers meet, the devil goes to dinner.

Arabian Proverb - Flattery: a mouth that praises and a hand that kills.

Aesop (Fl. C. 550 B.C.) - Men seldom flatter without a purpose; and they who listen to such music may expect to pay the piper.^{xliii}

James S. Hewett, *Illustrations Unlimited* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1988) p. 207) provides these additional quotes:

Louis XIV (1638–1715) - I would have praised you more had you praised me less.

We hate the hypocrite more keenly than the mere liar because the hypocrite adds to his lie the lacquer of flattery, which we are gullible enough to accept as tribute to our merit (Paul Eldridge)

Flattery is like chewing gum--enjoy it briefly, but don't swallow it!^{xliiii}

PRETEXT FOR GREED. Here we have the charge of self-interest rather than the simply the desire to please people as in verse 4. Paul's preaching and his letters to the Thessalonians were not calculated to make a favorable impression on them. He asked them to remember how he had spoken. "He never wore a false face, preaching to gain something for himself. Because they could not know this, Paul appealed to **God** as the **witness** of his motives."^{xliv}

ILLUSTRATION: GREED.

For many years Hetty Green was called America's greatest miser. When she died in 1916, she left an estate valued at \$100 million, an especially vast fortune for that day. But she was so miserly that she ate cold oatmeal in order to save the expense of heating the water. When her son had a severe leg injury, she took so long trying to find a free clinic to treat him that his leg had to be amputated because of advanced infection. It has been said that she hastened her own death by bringing on a fit of apoplexy while arguing the merits of skim milk because it was cheaper than whole milk.^{xlv}

2:6 - NOR DID WE SEEK GLORY FROM MEN. "*Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others...*" Paul had denied that he was motivated by greed. Upon the repudiation of covetousness follows naturally the repudiation of worldly ambition. See Acts 20:19; 2 Corinthians 4:5; Ephesians 4:2. "This third disclaimer is as strong as the other two. Paul and his associates had not tried to extract praise or glory out of (*ex*) men."^{xlvi}

OUR AUTHORITY. "*Even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority.*" How might they have asserted their authority on the Thessalonians? Paul was an apostle, and as such he had apostolic authority which he would assert later in dealing with a problem in the Corinthian church. But the idea here seems to be one of making demands on them for their support. "Paul makes clear his right as an apostle to financial support but says he behaved as selflessly as a nursing mother (v. 7)."^{xlvii}

The missionaries were **not** seeking the **praise** of any man but the praise of God. Traveling philosophers and orators were common in the Roman Empire. They itinerated from place to place, entertaining and seeking a personal following for fame and fortune. Paul and his companions had nothing in common with such men! Rather than seeking something for themselves they delighted in giving to others freely.^{xlviii}

2:7 - GENTLE . "*But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children.*" The original idea was to be gentle in dealing with the faults of others. All ministers of the Gospel should be gentle in dealing with people, not demanding their rights, but doing all things for the good of the church and individual members. Russell Kirk holds that a key to reaching peaceful compromises at the Constitutional Convention was that the Framers were gentlemen - he uses the term, "natural aristocrats" of them. He provides us with a definition:

A gentleman must be a man of good breeding; also he must be a man of honor who would not lie or cheat; a man of valor who would not flee before enemies; a man of duty, who would serve the commonwealth as magistrate or member of an assembly; a man of charity, spiritual and material. Undoubtedly some of the Founders were what Fuller called Degenerous Gentlemen, selfish and cunning opportunists; but most lived as best they might by gentlemen's rules. And some of them - Washington, Dickinson, Mason, Rutledge, Gouverneur Moris, and others - had fulfilled all their lives the gentleman's obligations of manners, honor, valor, duty, and charity; and so would live until the end.^{xlix}

No less should ever be said of a Christian. We should be gentle. There is never an excuse for crudeness, arrogance, or haughtiness. The believer, in fact, will go beyond being a gentleman both because he/she has the higher motivation and of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the live of the Christian.

AS A NURSING MOTHER. This imagery was given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, but if Paul had come up with it on his own, we would call it a stroke of genius. Here Paul uses the imagery of a mother feeding her children. He did not feed on them; he fed them. The Greek word *trophos* ("nursing mother") is a tender and vivid picture of Paul's relationship with this church. "It should move the Thessalonians to hold him in high regard so that his influence might continue throughout the lifetime of his spiritual children. The word 'cherishes' further emphasizes the nursing mother's activity as well as her attitude."^l

If it seems odd that, a man, should compare himself to a "nursing mother," consider 1 Cor. 4:14-15 where he states that as a spiritual parent he had "begotten" the Corinthian saints through the Gospel.). Also, in 2:9-13, he uses the image of a father, but the main thought here is that of loving care.

New Christians need love, food, and tender care, just as a mother would give to her own children. Newborn babes need the milk of the Word (1 Peter 2:2) and then must "graduate" to the meat (1 Cor. 3:1-4; Heb. 5:11-14), the bread (Matt. 4:4, and see Ex. 16, the manna), and the honey (Ps. 119:103).

How a mother feeds her child is almost as important as what she feeds it. How important it is that we who are older Christians feed the younger believers lovingly and patient.^{li}

2:8 - AFFECTION. "*Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us.*" The Greek denotes bonding, connecting oneself with another; to be closely attached to another. This is "an unusual word indicating the yearning love of a mother for her children. Paul's pastoral heart is laid bare in these verses."^{lii}

2:9 - OUR LABOR.. “For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.” The word Paul uses (*mochthon*) means to travail. It is the word for really hard, difficult word, harder than normal toil (*kopos*). Paul, intellectual though he was, was not afraid of hard work. He did manual labor (making tents) in order to preach and teach the Gospel without charge.

3. He had behaved blamelessly, 2:10-12.

2:10 - DEVOUTLY AND UPRIGHTLY AND BLAMELESSLY. Paul continues, “You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers.” Robertson translates the phrase “How holily and righteously and unblameably.”

Paul calls the Thessalonians and God as witnesses (*martures*) to his life toward you the believers (*humin tois pisteuousin*) dative of personal interest. He employs three common adverbs that show how holily toward God and how righteously toward men so that they did not blame him and his associates in either respect. So there is a reason for each adverb. All this argues that Paul spent a considerable time in Thessalonica, more than the three sabbaths mentioned by Luke. The pastor ought to live so that his life will bear close inspection.^{liii}

2:11 - EXHORTING AND ENCOURAGING AND IMPLORING. Continuing in the same vein, Paul writes, “Just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children...” With three participles, Paul gives three aspects of every minister’s preaching, “exhorting (urging) and encouraging (consoling) and imploring (witnessing).”

One of the duties of fathers is to exhort and educate their children, and this Paul did in Thessalonica. He provided individual and personal teaching (“each one of you”) as well as the public ministry to the church. Spiritual leaders dare not depend on their public ministry alone; their spiritual children need personal encouragement and counsel as well. Paul’s three-fold ministry as a father was to: (1) “exhort” or entreat; (2) “comfort” or encourage; and (3) “charge” or witness, testify. Paul not only taught them the Word, but he encouraged them from his own experiences in the Lord.^{liv}

2:12 - THE GOD WHO CALLS. Paul uses the present active participle (*kalountos*), meaning to keep on calling. He writes, “So that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.” No one is worthy of God’s saving grace (Rom. 3:23; 6:23, but each person who is saved by the grace of God must walk in a manner worthy of God.

HIS OWN KINGDOM AND GLORY. Robertson explains that the “Kingdom (*basileian*) here is the future consummation because of glory (*doxan*) as in 2 Thessalonians 1:5; 1 Corinthians 6:9; 15:50; Galatians 5:21; 2 Timothy 4:1, 18), but Paul uses it for the present kingdom of grace also as in

1 Corinthians 4:20; Romans 14:17; Colossians 1:13.”^{lv}

The thing to remember, whether we are thinking of the current kingdom of grace, the eternal Kingdom of God, or the future consummation, it is God's Kingdom. The kingdom belongs to Him. He calls us “into His own kingdom and glory.” We may enter by His grace, not by works, or any combination of works plus grace. “Those who submit to the rule of God and join in the fellowship of the kingdom accept a new life-style which shows God's power and rule. The early church consisted of born-again people who had not attained perfection. These ordinary people struggled to live a life pleasing to God. They were members of His kingdom.”^{lvi}

D. Paul Was Concerned for the Thessalonian Believers, 2:13-3:13.

1. He was concerned about their sufferings, 2:13-20.

2:13 - YOU RECEIVED THE WORD OF GOD. Paul wrote, “*For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.*” “The ‘Word of God’ here clearly refers to the message spoken by the missionaries. When the Thessalonians heard it they realized that it was not simply the words of man’s wisdom, but a message that had its source in **God** (cf. 1:5).”^{lvii}

Nowhere is there a more lucid affirmation in the N.T. that the apostles considered their words to be the very vehicles of the word of God. In fact, the notable contrast between the words of men and the words of God is stressed. The phrase “effectively works in you” (*energeitai*, Gk.) means “to energize.” Almost always N.T. writers use this term for some form of supernatural activity.^{lviii}

Paul did not take a text from the New Testament and preach expository sermons to the people at Thessalonica. They had Old Testament Scriptures, but the New Testament had not been written. Paul preached the Gospel of Christ to the Thessalonians (Acts 17:1-4), and they recognized the words they heard as being more than human words expressing human reason and philosophy. “The gospel message was and is God's word of salvation, working in believing hearts to create obedience to the gospel. The gospel message is now preserved in Holy Scripture. Scripture is words physically produced by humans but also miraculously inspired by God. Scripture works in the heart of believers creating their faith and leading them to obey the gospel.”^{lix}

2:14 - CHURCHES...IN JUDEA. The Scripture reads, “*For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews.*” Paul compared the problems of the Gentile Christians at Thessalonica in living among their fellow Greeks with the problems faced by the Christians in Judea who were persecuted by fellow Jews. Robertson quotes Lightfoot on the attitude of early believers toward the church in Judea:

“This passage, implying an affectionate admiration of the Jewish churches on the part of St. Paul, and thus entirely bearing out the impression produced by the narrative in the Acts, is entirely subversive of the theory maintained by some and based on a misconception of Galatians 2, and by the fiction of the Pseudo-Clementines, of the feud existing between St. Paul and the Twelve.”^{lx}

YOUR OWN COUNTRYMEN. This obviously points to Gentiles who apparently joined the Jews in Thessalonica who instigated the attacks on Paul and Silas. New converts, because of the presence of the Holy Spirit in their life and the changed in their daily life, often find themselves the objects of criticism and attack by people who do not know the Lord. Not only are these people not indwelt by the Holy Spirit, they are dominated by Satan, the Prince of the World. “Frequently when Christians suffer persecution they are tempted to think God’s blessing has departed. Paul countered this lie of Satan by reminding his readers that their experience duplicated that of their elder brothers and sisters in the faith who had become Christians in Judea.”^{lxi}

2:15 - WHO BOTH KILLED. The Jews, Paul says, both “*killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men...*” The Jews killed the Old testament prophets before the coming of the Lord who reminded them of their guilt (Matthew 23:29). Paul, (agreeing with Peter, Acts 2:23), lays the guilt of the death of Christ on the Jews. And certain Jews, actually the Judaizers, were constantly instigating attacks on Paul, as we see in Galatians.

The Thessalonians were not alone in their suffering; they had abundant and worthy company. Their persecutors had **killed the Lord Jesus Himself and the Old Testament prophets.** They **drove... out** their father in the faith, the Apostle Paul, and his fellow missionaries. Though Paul laid guilt for the death of Christ at the feet of the Jews he did not charge them alone with this crime. The Romans who were involved in Jesus’ trial and execution were also guilty (1 Cor. 2:8) as was every human being for whose sins Christ tasted death (Heb. 2:9). Most likely Paul mentioned the murder of Jesus first and his own persecutions last because in his mind the first example was much more serious.

Those who persecute believers in Christ antagonize both God and other men. Paul knew whereof he spoke, having been a persecutor of the church himself and one to whom God had revealed that he was fighting against the Lord he sought to serve (Acts 26:14-15). Those who set themselves against God’s people also set themselves against God. And they also hurt other non-Christians. The worst thing about unbelief is not that it damns the unbeliever, but that it hinders the salvation of others. Such people seek to extinguish the lamp of truth and in doing so cause others to stumble.^{lxii}

2:16 - HINDERING US. The Jews, Paul says, were hindering them “*from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved; with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins.*”

But wrath has come upon them to the utmost.” The words “hindering us” might be translated “forbidding us,” as Robertson shows:

Explanatory participle of the idea in *enantioôn*. They show their hostility to Paul at every turn. Right here in Corinth, where Paul is when he writes, they had already shown venomous hostility toward Paul as Luke makes plain (Acts 18:6ff.). They not simply oppose his work among the Jews, but also to the Gentiles (*ethnesi*, nations outside of the Abrahamic covenant as they understood it).^{lxiii}

The word Paul uses (rendered “hindering”) is a military term, describing the breaking up of bridges and roads to make an invading army's progress as slow as possible. Satan was engaged in such activity as he attempted to keep Paul away from the Thessalonians. Paul also anticipates that Satan will tempt God's people by trying to discourage them (3:5). In 3:11 Paul looks to God to clear a path through or around Satan's hindrances, thus granting him the victory of a return visit to Thessalonica.

An unbeliever who is willing to live and let live with respect to personal convictions regarding God is less dangerous than one who not only disbelieves himself but also tries to keep others from hearing the gospel. The unbelieving Jews in Thessalonica were of the latter variety.^{lxiv}

FILL UP THE MEASURE OF THEIR SINS. This stresses the fact that those who persecute the saints are sometimes allowed to continue their sinful conduct for what man would consider an indeterminate period of time. In reality, the evil nature of their actions would become a matter of record, and “God's response of judgment will unquestionably be seen as an administration of righteousness. There is a limit to God's patience, and the fact that the wrath of God is spoken of here in the present (not future) tense affirms the certainty that it is in the process of coming even now.”^{lxv}

WRATH HAS COME UPON THEM TO THE UTMOST. From the past tense in the Greek we may infer that God's wrath, in some form or another, had already begun. “Already in A.D. 48 a riot had occurred at the Passover in Jerusalem where 30,000 Jews were slain.”^{lxvi} Evil persons may heap up sins upon sins in an effort to try to prevent the preaching of the Gospel, but at some point they are going to have to face the wrath of God. There are two things to keep in mind. First, God is going to be with His servants always, and in all things, as Jesus promised in the Great Commission. Second, the persecutors will not only fail to prevent the proclamation of the Gospel, they will also face the wrath of God.

2:17 - BRETHREN. “*But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short while--in person, not in spirit--were all the more eager with great desire to see your face.*” Paul loved to call the saints at Thessalonica “brethren” - he used the word twenty-one times in his two Thessalonian epistles (Of course, this also included the sisters in Christ).

He saw himself as one of them, a part of the family. In v. 17 he says that he was

“orphaned” from them for a short time, like a child away from home. He loved them, prayed for them, and greatly desired to see them again. After all, the test of our spiritual life is not what we do when we are in church with “the family,” but how we behave away from church. Paul was not the kind of church member who “took a vacation” from the house of God.^{lxvii}

IN PERSON, NOT IN SPIRIT. His heart was with them, even though they were denied the privilege of seeing them face to face as they desired. “Heart, originally *kardia*, is the inner man, the seat of the affections and purposes, not always in contrast with intellect (*nous*).”^{lxviii} “Being taken away from you” probably refers to the suddenness of their departure (see Acts 17:10) when the Jews stirred up the people against Paul. They would have stayed longer had it not been for the persecution.

2:18 - SATAN HINDERED US. “*For we wanted to come to you--I, Paul, more than once--and yet Satan hindered us.*” As we have seen (vs. 16) the verb is used of making a cut in a road, with the idea of making the road impassable. Paul charges Satan with cutting a break on his path in an effort to make it impassable, to block his way. If Satan cannot blockade the road to prevent Christians from going where God wants them to go and doing what He wants them to do, he will try to make them take a detour, to slow them down and distract them as they march along the King’s highway.

It is interesting that on a different occasion, “the Spirit of Jesus” (Acts 16:7, RSV) prohibited, or hindered Paul’s and his associates in traveling where they had planned to go. “But in this case he states it is Satan who stopped them, either through evil men, some of whom had already driven them out of Thessalonica (Acts 17:13ff.), or else by some more direct messenger from Satan (2 Cor. 12:7).”^{lxix}

By the words, “I, Paul,” he seems to be distinguishing himself from his companions, possibly to show that those were his personal desires or plans. This may be an allusion to the time when he was in Athens alone. If so, he may mean that he had wanted to go himself, but elected to send Timothy instead. If not, he must have meant that while Timothy was visiting them, he also had a great desire to go to them.

Paul had planned several times to return to Thessalonica (vs. 18) to minister to the believers and to strengthen the church, but Satan hindered him and his companions from doing so. This likely refers to the bond posted by Jason and others (Acts 17:9, NIV), which probably included a guarantee that Paul would not return to the city. Satan knows how to hinder the work of the Lord. He tempted Jesus to sin three times and each time the temptation was directed at His ministry. Never at any time did Satan tempt Him to abandon His ministry, just alter the course. The master plan of Satan in hindering the Gospel is to simply try to persuade believers to change or delay the church’s missionary efforts.

2:19 - CROWN. “*For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming?*” The crown here was the wreath given to winners in athletic games. “Saved people are the fruit and reward of faithful evangelism. Seeing people saved is

the joy and glory of those who faithfully witness--in this life and the next.”^{lxx}

AT HIS COMING. This word translated “coming”(parousia) means simply presence in such passages as 2 Thessalonians 2:9; 1 Corinthians 16:17; 2 Corinthians 7:6f.; 10:10; Philippians 1:26; 2:12.

But here (also 1 Thessalonians 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thessalonians 2:1, 8; 1 Corinthians 15:23) we have the technical sense of the second coming of Christ. Deissmann (*Light from the Ancient East*, pp. 372ff.) notes that the word in the papyri is almost technical for the arrival of a king or ruler who expects to receive his “crown of coming.” The Thessalonians, Paul says, will be his crown, glory, joy when Jesus comes .^{lxxi}

2:20 - FOR YOU ARE OUR GLORY AND JOY. Two different commentaries I consulted carried identical comments, with only one giving credit. The only variation is that one that did not give credit did have a few words (joy, hope) in bold print. I have chosen to use the one that gives credit to another: The thought and spirit of these two verses are captured in the following comment:

He [Paul] voiced a rhetorical question to heighten the intensity of his fervor. In effect he asked what would be the greatest blessing he could possibly receive at the judgment seat of Christ. They were! They were everything that was worth anything to Paul. They were his *hope*; their development was what he lived for as a parent lives to see his children grow up to maturity, to produce and reproduce. They were his *joy*; they filled his life with sunshine as he thought of what they used to be, what they had become, and what they would be by the grace of God. They were his *crown*; they themselves were the symbol of God’s blessing on his life and ministry. They were his *glory and joy*, and not only his but also the glory and joy of his companions in labor. Paul said in essence, “When life is over and we stand in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming, you Thessalonians will be our source of glory and joy; you mean that much to us.”^{lxxii}

Paul ends each chapter of 1 Thessalonians with a reference to the return of Christ. In chapter 1, he relates Christ’s return to salvation; in chapter 2, he relates it to service.

Why was Paul able to minister faithfully and lovingly to these saints? Because he saw them in the light of Christ’s coming. He was looking forward to the glorious day when he would rejoice over them in the presence of Christ! Jesus endured the cross “for the joy that was set before Him” (Heb. 12:2); this “joy” is surely the joy of presenting the church to His Father (Jude 24). Paul endured all kinds of suffering for this same joy. Do we rejoice as we contemplate seeing Jesus one day?^{lxxiii}

2. Paul was concerned about their trials (Timothy's visit), 3:1-8.

3:1 - WHEN WE COULD ENDURE IT NO LONGER. The word for “endure” means to forbear, to conceal, to cover with silence. When the missionaries’ anxiety over their circumstances was so great that they could no longer endure it, Paul and Silas sent Timothy to help them (vs. 2). Paul knew well how Satan works to try to defeat the Lord’s ministry through the local church. Just as he tempted Jesus (Mt 4:1-11), he tempts the church (and individuals) to give up or compromise when trials come. Believers must expect to suffer because of the world’s hostility toward God and His work. The steadfast faith of their founders and teachers (Paul, Silas, and Timothy) would give strength and courage to leaders who must suffer for the faith.

WE THOUGHT IT BEST TO BE LEFT BEHIND AT ATHENS ALONE. Either Paul is using the literary plural as he does in 2:18, or Silas is with Paul, which was probably the case. If this is the case, both Timothy and Silas came to Athens with Paul (Acts 17:15f.), but Timothy was sent back to Thessalonica, and Paul would later send Silas on back to Berea (or possibly to Thessalonica). What we do know is that both Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia to join Paul in Corinth (Acts 18:5).

3:2 - WE SENT TIMOTHY. Paul always knew he could send Timothy, whom he calls “our brother and God’s fellow worker in the gospel of Christ.” Timothy was probably a teenager when he joined the missionary team of Paul and Silas on the Second Missionary Journey, after having been saved when Paul and Barnabas visited his home town on the First Missionary Journey. He began his ministry as Paul’s associate and his disciple. No one could have had a greater teacher - few have had a more demanding mentor. Paul’s estimate of Timothy is found in Phil. 2:19-24 and throughout his two epistles to Timothy. Paul remained at Athens alone, or with Silas (who would soon be sent either to Berea or Thessalonica), so that Timothy might return to Thessalonica to encourage the believers and continue the teaching Paul had begun. “If church members would ‘adopt’ new Christians, encourage them, teach them, and fellowship with them, there would be fewer spiritual casualties. The mature saints in the church must help younger Christians to grow in Christ.”^{lxxiv}

TO STRENGTHEN AND ENCOURAGE YOU AS TO YOUR FAITH. New Christians need encouragement, especially when they are in trouble. Timothy was sent to encourage the church by God’s power. “His presence strengthened the believers to share in the ministry of the gospel. The church always needs such leaders who will encourage the believers to witness for Christ.”^{lxxv}

3:3 - SO THAT NO ONE WOULD BE DISTURBED BY THESE AFFLICTIONS. He adds, “*for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this.*” We Christians are destined to subjected to trials and tribulations, but we must - and can, through the Holy Spirit - resist them. It is not our destiny to be seduced away from the faith by ungodly people would like to see us reject our faith.

The word “disturbed” (shaken,” in NKJV) means that he was concerned that they not be seduced away from the faith by the heathen of their city who were urging them to reject their faith. Believers are to expect trials and suffering because they “are destined for this.” The encouragement and comfort of a fellow Christian during a time of trials can be an especially welcomed source of

strength and encouragement (v. 2).

3:4 - WE KEPT TELLING YOU IN ADVANCE. *“For indeed when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction; and so it came to pass, as you know.”* The construction means to announce beforehand. This is not a simply a prophecy that they were going to have to suffer persecution, but an announcement beforehand that it was God’s will for them to expect it, to face it, and to endure it. They “were going to suffer affliction,” at the very least, the normal afflictions that come to the faithful believer in this life. They were certainly going to face them in a place like Thessalonica where we would expect social and economic pressure to be placed on them both by Jews who rejected Christ, and by the heathen. Paul had told them they were destined to face these afflictions (v. 3).

The Word of God is essential to the Christian (2 Thes. 2:15-17; Rom. 16:25-27; and 2 Peter 1:12). Paul reminds them that he had taught them the Word of God, even though they did not have a copy of the written Word. He had warned them that afflictions were coming, but they seemingly had forgotten what he had taught them. “There is no substitute for the Word of God. The Christian who is ignorant of the Bible is prey to every wind of doctrine and never will be established in the Lord (Eph. 4:11-16). Timothy reminded them of the Word Paul had taught them, and this encouraged and established them.”^{lxxvi}

3:5 - I ALSO SENT. *For this reason, when I could endure it no longer, I also sent to find out about your faith, for fear that the tempter might have tempted you, and our labor would be in vain.* He had sent Timothy from Athens back to Thessalonica to check on their spiritual condition. Such was his love for the church he had founded and served until Satan filled the hearts of certain unbelieving Jews and Gentiles for launch the persecution that necessitated his departure.

THE TEMPTER. As in 2:18, Paul traces events to Satan's working. Make no mistake about it, this was the work of the devil. Why is it that the world will tolerate so many different religions, but react so quickly (often violently) against Christians? The answer is simple - Jesus Christ. Specifically the Jesus Christ of Scripture. The world may tolerate a New Age “Jesus,” a cultic “Christ,” or a generic god, but when confronted with the Son of God, the world and its many religions react quickly and forcefully because Jesus is the greatest threat to the dominion of Satan. The individuals Satan uses to strike out against Christians who are filled with the Spirit of God may do so with religious zeal and without remorse because they are convinced they are doing something for their god or for the good of humanity. Take the ACLU for an example. Please take the Atheistic Civil Liberties Union!

I heard on the radio this very morning that a court has just ruled that a city in Missouri must remove the fish symbol from their official seal because the fish is a Christian symbol. The great majority of the people wanted to keep their symbol, but once again some court has overruled the majority.

Before someone protests that I am conveniently overlooking all the strife and violence committed by one Christian group against another, let me state that as a Southern Baptist with a little

knowledge of church history I am well aware of the long history of persecution of believers by fellow believers. As a Southern Baptist, I am a part of a denomination that is neither Catholic nor Protestant, even though many Baptists are unaware of that fact, and in spite of the fact that many people get their dander up when this is mentioned.

The history of early Baptists is in part a record of persecution of those believers by both Protestants and Catholics. Nobody seemed to like us! Because of this persecution, and because of strong convictions on the subject, Baptists were leaders in the struggle for the Bill of Rights, for separation of church and state - meaning the protection of the church from the state, not the other way around. That is a modern invention, and a demonic one at that.

As a Southern Baptist, I am a part of a denomination that has been accused of racism, based on the word "Southern." The word does not even denote a geographical area any more. Instead, it represents a spirit of cooperation in ministry, evangelism, missions, and education that is unparalleled in the history of Christianity.

Back to some of the wars fought between so-called Christian factions - many of those wars have been fought between people who were primarily Christian in name, ritual, ceremony. They had abandoned personal prayer and Bible study, missions, evangelism in general, and emphasis on salvation by grace through faith. In other words they were a part of Christendom, but not necessarily Christian in the Biblical sense. What we often find is that many of those warring factions of the Middle Ages and the succeeding centuries bear a greater resemblance to a political party than to a fellowship of born-again believers in Jesus Christ. The conflict between Catholics and Protestants in Ireland prove that defenders of their "faith" may manifest very little of the character and nature of Jesus Christ.

3:6 - NOW THAT TIMOTHY HAS COME. *"But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always think kindly of us, longing to see us just as we also long to see you..."* Timothy, who had been sent to Thessalonica from Athens, had rejoined Paul in Corinth, from which he is writing this letter. No mention is made of Silas, possibly because he had already come to Corinth from Berea. Paul was greatly encouraged by Timothy's report of the faith of the Thessalonian saints.

GOOD NEWS. He used the word "gospel." Both messages, the gospel Paul preached to them and the report brought by Timothy were good news.

3:7 - WE WERE COMFORTED. *"For this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction we were comforted about you through your faith."* Either the ministerial "we," or Silas had rejoined Paul before Timothy arrived in Corinth from Thessalonica. The "we" might have included Luke, the physician who often traveled with Paul. The "we" sections of Acts indicate the presence of Luke. Another possibility is that Paul had informed the saints at Corinth, asking them to pray for the Thessalonian believers. If so they would have been relieved with Timothy's good report.

Paul and his companions were relieved of their "distress and affliction" when they heard of the

faith of the Thessalonians. Why would Paul have been so distressed and afflicted over the welfare of people he had known for such a brief period? He obviously loved the people; he was their spiritual father - a term he would later use in writing to the church at Corinth in an effort to deal with divisions in that church over their loyalty to various leaders. Paul's love for the church and for the Kingdom of God was the basis of his affliction and news that they were faithful to the Lord was a great comfort to him.

3:8 - IF YOU STAND FIRM IN THE LORD. "If" does not express doubt here. It is a condition of the first class, assumed to be true. But what does he mean when he says "*for now we really live*, if you stand firm in the Lord?" (Emphasis added). It seems that he is saying that the good news of their faith and their faithfulness was like a breath of life to Paul and his friends.

3. Paul was concerned for their continued growth, 3:9-13.

3:9 - WHAT THANKS. "*For what thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account...*" When the average Christian reads this - assuming that the average Christian will read this - he or she may think Paul is overdoing this a bit. To them a casual reference to his relief in the report about their faith would have been sufficient. These clueless backsliders who have been delivered from Egypt (bondage, death) by the grace of God, but rather than live in Canaan (where God wants them - walking in the spirit) they elect to live in the wilderness (the flesh). They reject the true Bread of Heaven in favor of the manna of the wilderness which will sustain them, but do little more. In response to it they live out their fruitless lives griping (my thesaurus has bellyaching) and complaining about the pastor, money, the deacons, money, the Sunday School teacher, money, the choir, money, the nursery, money, the building and grounds, and money. God has saved them and He will keep them, but they are without real joy.

To the spiritually minded believer, the spiritual progress of other believers is a source of genuine joy. God's joy comes to us when we are faithful, but also comes to us because of other Christians and their faithfulness to our Lord. Thanksgiving ("for what thanks can we render?") is enkindled by knowledge that others have responded to God's grace, and that they remain faithful to Him. Their faithfulness in response to our ministry leads us to offer thanks to God for them and for our having been privileged to minister to them..

3:10 - PRAYING MOST EARNESTLY. He continues, "*As we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face, and may complete what is lacking in your faith?*" The word translated "most earnestly" (*huperekperissou*) might be rendered exceedingly. Paul uses "a double compound adverb, found only in 1 Thessalonians 3:10; 5:13, denoting 'out of all bounds' (overflowing). But, it is more than out of bounds (overflowing all bounds).^{lxxvii} In 5:17, Paul writes, "Pray without ceasing." Christians should pray "most earnestly" and "without ceasing." Continual, earnest prayer shows overflowing commitment to God and all things which are His. Trusting God to act in His Own time, we continue praying "most earnestly."

Paul stresses a two-fold ministry - the Word of God and prayer. Both are vital to the church. Warren Wiersbe makes a significant point:

If there is all teaching and preaching and no prayer, then the people will have light but no power. If there is all prayer but no teaching of the Word, you may have a group of enthusiasts who have more heat than light! The pastor, Sunday School teacher, missionary, or Christian worker who talks to God about his people, and then talks to his people about God, will have a balanced and established ministry. Christ's ministry consisted of both the Word and prayer (Luke 22:31-32). Samuel ministered in this way (1 Sam. 12:23, and do not forget the last clause); so did Peter and the apostles (Acts 6:4) and Paul himself (Acts 20:32).^{lxxviii}

There is no substitute for a consistent prayer life. Christians are commanded to pray for one another and for the lost. When there is a combined ministry of prayer and the Word of God, Satan is defeated and the church is strengthened.

COMPLETE WHAT IS LACKING IN YOUR FAITH. These saints in Thessalonica had been saved but a short time. They had no copy of the New Testament. They had no trained indigenous teacher - locals were all new believers. There is little wonder that their friend and founder was concerned about their need to mature in faith and grow in "the faith." Paul's concern was heightened by the satanic opposition, temptations, and discouragement already mentioned (2:18). "There will always be lacks in our faith until we reach heaven where, at last, we will be 'without blame' (v. 13)."^{lxxix}

The term translated "complete" (perfect) concerning the deficiency of their faith, is appropriate. The word is used of mending fishing nets (Mark 1:19) and of setting broken bones. Paul is concerned about strengthening the church in both doctrinal and moral truth in order to edify the members with a view toward increasing or repairing any deficiency in their faith. His concern was not so much their safety or happiness, but their faith. The word "faith" is used five times in this chapter. Satan is the enemy of our faith, and if he can persuade us to doubt God and His Word, he will rob us of the enjoyment of every blessing we have in Christ. Paul wanted them to have mature (perfected) faith (v. 10). "Faith is not a deposit that sits within the heart and never changes; it is like the grain of mustard seed that looks small, but contains life and is able to grow. Paul wanted to see these people abounding in love, established in hope, and growing in faith—faith, hope, and love!"^{lxxx}

3:11 - OUR GOD AND FATHER HIMSELF. In the original, there is one article with both substantives for one person. God is One.

AND JESUS OUR LORD. There is a separate article here with "Jesus" (the Jesus). In Titus 2:13; 2 Peter 1:1 there is only one article (not two) treating "our God and Savior Jesus Christ' as one just like "our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" in 2 Peter 1:11; 2:20; 3:18."^{lxxxi}

DIRECT OUR WAY TO YOU. “The Father and Son needed to work together to enable Paul to visit the Thessalonians. The Bible shows both activities of joint action and of separate actions by the three Persons of the Trinity.”^{lxxxiii} We should thank our Lord daily that the holy Trinity “directs our way” to remove the hindrances (2:18) Satan places in our way.

3:12 - ABOUND IN LOVE. “...*And may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also do for you.*” Paul often records his intercessory prayers for those to whom he wrote. There was a spiritual purposes in doing so. Genuine love for God and love for one another provide the incentive for intercessory prayer. Without a doubt, intercessory prayer is one of the most neglected ministries of individual believers, and subsequently of the church as a whole. If we do not love one another, we are not going pay the price required of intercessory prayer warriors - and effective intercessory prayer demands a genuine faith in God and a commitment to others. Intercessory prayer can be hard, often exhausting work.

3:13 - AT THE COMING OF OUR LORD JESUS. “*So that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.*” A major theme of both epistles to the Thessalonians is Second Coming of Jesus Christ, the hope of every believer. In the New Testament it is presented in such a way as to motivate every believer of every age to anticipate - at the very least, entertain the possibility - of His return. Strong belief in the imminent return of our Lord not only motivates the saint to be faithful to the Lord, it also provides encouragement and strength to carry on until His return.

No truth establishes the believer faster or better than this one. In the midst of testing and tribulation, these believers could assure and encourage themselves with the promise of His coming. When temptations came their way, as they did daily in those heathen cities, they could keep themselves clean by remembering that Christ might come that very day. If weary of laboring and witnessing, they could take on new strength and courage by looking for His return. No truth in the Bible has a greater effect on the believer’s heart, mind, and will than the truth of the second coming of Christ.^{lxxxiii}

IN HOLINESS. The form of the word translated “holiness” (*hagiosune*) accentuates, not an act of holiness, but the state or condition of holiness. It is God's will that the lives of all believers be characterized by Christlikeness in attitudes and actions. This is true sanctification - being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ, as we see in Romans 8. There is no incentive to holiness like longing for “The coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

SAINTS. The NIV renders it “holy ones.” Their missionary friend and brother wants to see them standing fast in holiness, growing in love for one another (vs. 12) when the Lord returns “with all the saints.” But who are the “saints?” To some, they are super Christians who have been canonized by a church or denomination. To others, saints are a special class of believers - “I’m a Christian, but I ain’t no saint.” The word means “set apart,” and denotes one who is set apart for the Lord. The saint is one who is different from other people, and that is why so many Christians do not want to be

known as saints. They do not want to stand out from the crowd. They do not want to be what God has determined that they should be. All believers are saints, whether they are comfortable with the term or not. The only question is what kind of saints they are.

But are saints the only “holy ones?” Angels may be included in the category of holy ones. When Jesus returns He will not be alone. He will be accompanied by the saints, and by “mighty angels” (2 Thess. 1:7). These “holy ones” may be angels “as in other descriptions of God coming to His people (Dt 33:2; Ps 68:17; Da 7:10; Zec 14:5; Mk 8:38; 13:27; Rev 19:14). The ‘holy ones’ may be resurrected believers (1 Th 4:14; 2 Th 1:10).”^{lxxxiv}

“With all the saints” has been interpreted in various ways. The statement reflects concerns about who will be with Jesus, and/or who will be brought together at His return commonly referred to as the rapture of the church. “Perhaps some taught that the dead in Christ would be absent from this event. Paul will answer this question when he addresses it more fully in 4:13-18. His statement is possibly a response to those who doubted there would be a resurrection and were concerned about Christian loved ones now dead.”^{lxxxv}

II. PRACTICAL EXHORTATIONS, 4:1-5:28

A. Maturity and Sanctification, 4:1-12

1. The Christian the Moral Arena, 4:1-8.

Now we move on to the last major part of this letter, dealing with the practical instructions for the young saints in Thessalonica. The key word in this section is “walk” (4:1, 12). Paul urges them to obey the Word (4:1, 10, 12, 14). The Christian’s behavior is compared to a walk for several reasons:

- (1) Walking requires life - dead people do not walk.
- (2) Walking requires growth - a little baby cannot walk.
- (3) Walking requires liberty, one who is bound cannot walk.

- (4) Walking demands light - we stumble in the dark.
- (5) Walking cannot be hidden - the activity attracts attention.
- (6) Walking implies progress toward a goal - people wonder where you are going.

Since our walk with the Lord does all these things the metaphor of walking is a valid one. Our walk demands special attention every day.

4:1 - FINALLY. *“Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more.”* The word Paul uses “finally” to begin chapter 4 - but the word is not used to announce the conclusion of the epistle. There are two more chapters to go, just as there are two chapters left in Philippians after we find “finally” in Phil. 3:1. The word simply introduces the final major section of the epistle.

WE REQUEST AND EXHORT YOU. He does not command them to obey him, he appeals to them “in the Lord Jesus” to live in a manner that would please their Savior. “This does not mean that everything about the Thessalonians’ lives was wrong. They were living in a way pleasing to God, but Paul wanted them to do even better.”^{lxxxvi}

Someone has said that everyone lives to please someone: himself, his spouse, his parents, his child, his God, or someone else. Paul focused motivation for correct living on love for God. Many people regard the Christian life as a set of rules to be obeyed, or a list of prohibitions to avoid; but Paul regarded it as the outworking of a loving desire to **please God** who had chosen him (1:4). His attitude helped prepare his readers to respond positively to his following exhortations.^{lxxxvii}

4:2 - WHAT COMMANDMENTS. *“For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.”* What commandments? If you had used this word to the devout Jew, he might have pointed to the Ten Commandments, the Mosaic Law, or to other traditions of the Jews. But while the church would have had some Jewish believers, a large number of believers there were Gentiles. The only commandments they knew were the ones given them by Paul, Silas, and Timothy while they were with them, of by Timothy on his return to their city.

Paul used the strong term “commandments” in writing to this fairly new church, knowing they would take it in the right spirit and that they would understand he was speaking with divine authority.^{lxxxviii}

He was very tactful in verse 1, but in case anyone missed the truth because of his tact, or subtlety, he uses a stronger word to emphasize the authority in the words of Jesus Christ. This epistle carried with it the full authority of God - the “thus saith the mind of God,” and not the “thus resoneth the mind of man.”

4:3 - THE WILL OF GOD. *For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality.* To every true believer, the will of God is of utmost importance, a

matter of extreme urgency. God's will should be considered in everything we do, as the acronym WWJD (What Would Jesus Do) implies.

What was the will of God for the believers at Thessalonica? First and foremost, it was their sanctification. But what is sanctification? As I expressed it in my commentary on Philippians, sanctification is not an emotional experience. It is not a feeling. It is not some second blessing. Sanctification is expressed in various ways in Scripture. In Phil. 2:5, we read, "Let this mind be in you which was in Jesus Christ." That is the beginning of sanctification. In Romans 8:29, we find, "For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son..." Sanctification is being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. When you begin to think like Jesus, you begin to act as He acted, and the more you think and act like Jesus the more you are being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. While Justification is once for all, Sanctification is continual and progressive. It is growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18).

ABSTAIN FROM SEXUAL IMMORALITY. Sexual immorality is a temptation with which all people must deal. This was especially true in a pagan society like Thessalonica. As post-Christian America continues it slide down the "slippery slope" of sexual license into quagmire of filth and indecency this command needs to be heard from every pulpit and in every household of this land.

Paul has a high view of marriage and the home. "The marriage vows in heathen cities said nothing about purity, so there was great danger of immorality in the lives of these new Christians. While love and purity certainly prevailed in many heathen homes, the general atmosphere of these city-states (before the Gospel came) was one of lust and selfishness."^{lxxxix} Christian have the responsibility of building a Christian home that will glorify God.

Various institutions want to teach sex-education classes without any reference to God or morality. Since the introduction of sex-ed classes to public school children, the number of pregnancies among teenaged girls has vaulted to unprecedented heights. A recent study in Great Britain proves the point, as reports leave no doubt that sex-ed classes have produced a shocking increase in teenage pregnancies, including many in the early teens. In America, since Rowe Vs. Wade tens of millions of unborn babies have been killed, either for the convenience of those well educated sex-ed students, or to prevent embarrassment to them and their families.

The best known high school in the world today is Columbine High School in Colorado, made famous when Americans were shocked with news of mass killings by two students. The media, liberal politicians, and social scientists immediately jumped at the opportunity to diagnose the problem (inanimate objects - guns), and prescribe a solution (get rid of handguns). The news was doctored, just as it usually is by the national media, which incidentally hates Hitler who killed fifteen million people, but never seems to be too disturbed by Communism (and Socialism, its step sister) which has killed over one hundred million people in less than a century. In the very first interview I heard, a student respond to a question about the teenagers who killed the other students. He said, we called them "trench-coat maffia gays." After that it was "trench-coat maffia," the media dropping the word "gays." The media reported that the killers asked victims if they believed in God. Internet sources

revealed that some students responded, “I believe in Jesus.” The media changed the word “Jesus” to “God.” Oh, how they hate the name of Jesus!

There is another thing we did not hear about from the national media. Some months before the killing at Columbine High School, that school was a pilot school for death-education classes. In these classes students were told about death without being told about God, or moral implications of their studies. It was only after the mass murders that permission was given to have prayer at the school. We must not divorce morality from education and we must not separate morality from God.

4:4 - HIS OWN VESSEL. *That each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor.* Commentaries do not agree on this phrase. The question is, does “vessel” refer to a man’s wife or a man’s personal life?

Those who insist it refers to the Christian’s personal life do so on the basis that the other interpretation would show Paul to have a low view of marriage. Thus, they take “vessel” to mean one’s body (see Rom. 9:22, 23; 2 Cor. 4:7), and they take “possess” to mean “control.” But the Greek word behind “possess” can hardly mean “control”; it most naturally means “acquire.” *Thus, Paul was speaking of acquiring a wife in terms of obtaining a vessel.* This terminology roughly corresponds to 1 Peter 3:7 and accords well with common Jewish phraseology (emphasis added).^{xc}

The Bible Knowledge Commentary takes the opposite position:

Paul emphasized the same truth in a positive way by expanding on this prohibition. One avoids sexual immorality by learning how to **control his own body** with its passions. Self-control in response to one’s sexual desires, Paul taught, could and must be learned. Christians are not the victims of circumstances or their fleshly passions. Sexual desire can be controlled by the Christian through God’s power.^{xci}

The point to remember is that this “vessel” has been purchased by the blood of Christ and sanctified by the Spirit (1 Cor. 6:9-11). All things must be used for the glory of God.

IN SANCTIFICATION AND HONOR. Each person is different from the next person, and temptations often come to different people in different ways - and there are many forms of temptations to commit sins of immorality. One individual may be tempted in various ways at different times. Therefore, each believer should be prepared to deal with the temptation before it comes. Joseph knew exactly what to do - he ran. Another way is to avoid places where he, or she might anticipate temptation. Avoid alcohol, drugs, pornography, “sexy” dress, and suggestive speech. These all help. “Paul did not specify how to control one’s passions. He implied that there may be several ways. But the Christian should choose a method that is both **holy** (*hagiasmoû*) **and honorable** (*timeû*).”^{xcii}

4:5 - NOT IN LUSTFUL PASSION. “In sanctification and honor” (which should characterize every believer) stands in marked contrast to “lustful passion,” which marks “*the Gentiles who do not know God.*” The modern entertainment industry has brought “lustful passion” out of the closet and

into practically every home in America.

We must remember and reckon with the fact that TV has brought all the lust and corruption and the pornography of the modern theater right into our living rooms. And many of God's people are only handling this invasion by the theater with kid gloves instead of an axe. If we do not think this is serious listen to the words of warning from Neil Postman of New York University (US News and World Report, Jan. 19, 1981). He says:

"What television does is to bring the whole culture out of the closet, because programs need a constant supply of novel information. In its quest for new and sensational ventures to hold its audience, TV must tap every existing taboo in the culture: Homosexuality, incest, divorce, promiscuity, corruption, adultery, and terrible displays of violence and sadism." -- Prairie Overcomer, June 1988.^{xciii}

In other words, television is playing to the "lustful passion" of fallen man. Civic and social entities have joined the church in asking the industry to police it self, and they have given us a rating system that regularly spews forth profanity and obscenity under cover of their own ratings. And in the home it seems that many parents are picking at the threat with tweezers rather than fighting it with the Sword. It is through God's Word that we come to understand the destructive nature of lust.

The story is told of one renowned seminary professor in his seventies walking down a city street with a young student. As an attractive, perfumed, and well-groomed lady passed by the two men, the seminary student took the characteristic masculine double take. Then, realizing his esteemed professor did not even bat an eye or acknowledge she was there, the student asked, "Sir, do you finally reach a point in your Christian life where you are no longer enticed or have problems with lust?"

The wise senior professor smiled and answered, "My boy, the flesh never gets better, it just gets deader!"

-- The Masculine Journey, Robert Hicks, (Navpress, 1993), p. 69.^{xciv}

4:6 - THAT NO MAN TRANSGRESS. *"And that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you."* In this context (vv. 3-8), "transgress" refers to sexual conduct, (immorality in general). It is sad that we have to stress all forms of immorality, thanks in part to President Bill "it depends on what your definition of sex is" Clinton, who also had trouble in a deposition with the definition of such big words as "is," and "alone." Specificity is made necessary by the moral abyss into which post-Christian America has slipped. Some of the politicians who cried out the loudest about Clinton's immorality have had their own immorality exposed, even if the exposure came from FBI files that somehow found their way to the bedroom of Mrs. Clinton.

"Defraud" means to cheat, swindle, or con another person. This violates two of the Ten Commandments; Thou shalt not steal, and Thou shalt not covet. "Brother" here may mean any other

human being (believer or unbeliever) who is a partner in illicit sex, or the target of fraud.

THE LORD IS THE AVENGER. The psalmist declares, “O Lord, God of vengeance, God of vengeance, shine forth!” (Psalm 94:1). Jeremiah 50:28 reads, “There is a sound of fugitives and refugees from the land of Babylon, To declare in Zion the vengeance of the LORD our God, Vengeance for His temple.” Paul wrote to the Romans, “Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,” says the Lord” (12:19). This theme is echoed in Hebrews 10:30: “ For we know Him who said, “VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY.” And again, “THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE.” “Just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you,” Paul writes, God is the avenger who will judge and punish all those who commit immorality and those who defraud others.

This is a solemn warning, but an admonition that is often disregarded by people who profess a knowledge of the Avenger. There is room of their heart for a “God is good, God is great” kind of god-figure, a God of forgiveness and compassion, but little room for a God of vengeance. Yet, here we have a sober warning of the judgment of God.

4:7 - CALLED. “*For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification.*” There are two points here, God’s call and the purpose of His call. “For” points to both the fact of the call and the purpose. God, Who called us to salvation, also called us to “become sanctified by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, working from inside out, from our spirit to our soul to our body (5:23).”^{xcv} Sanctification is basic to God’s call to Justification. Justification is a metaphor of the courtroom. When, by grace through faith, we are born again we are pronounced just by God. Justification is a once- for-all experience whereby we are pronounced just for all time - we receive a judicial pardon from sin; we are delivered from the eternal penalty we deserve to pay. Sanctification is a continuing relationship in which the individual continues to grow in the “grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18). Sanctification is a major theme in this epistle, as it is in other Pauline Epistles..

The reason God calls us to Sanctification, and not to “impurity” is that sexual immorality is works directly against God’s calling for the believer. Paul’s first reason for abstaining from immorality (v. 6b) is to avoid future punishment. The second reason focuses on the very purpose for which each believer is called by God to Himself.

God’s plan for a Christian includes purifying his life. Sexual immorality frustrates the purpose of God’s call. Certain pagan cults promoted unclean ceremonies, but Christ’s plans for a Christian are to clean him up. **A holy life** demonstrates God’s supernatural power at work overcoming what is natural, and it glorifies God. The Greek noun *hagiasmos* (“holiness”) occurs here for the fourth time in eight verses (3:13; 4:3-4). (The verb *hagiazōō* [“sanctify”] is used in 5:23.).^{xcvi}

4:8 - REJECTING...GOD. “*So, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.*” The emphasis of this this passage (4:3-8) is that the church avoid sexual

immorality. Immorality is like a malignant tumor which, if not removed, will metastasize and spread throughout the entire body, with death the ultimate fate. Immorality will kill a church, but sadly, a church can be dead and go on with all their meetings, singing the same hymns, listening to the same sermons, and receiving the same offerings. They may, however, change the music, and substitute activities for Sanctification. God demands holy living of His people and He gives us His Holy Spirit to facilitate holiness. Sanctification is only accomplished through the Holy Spirit, but it is assured only when we permit Him to nurture, direct, and empower us. “God gives His Spirit to all His people to help us resist sin. To choose to sin is to resist God's Spirit.”^{xcvii}

After an overview of 4:3-8, we need to look specifically now at verse 8. In this verse Paul is drawing a conclusion based on the arguments made in the previous verses. Sexual purity, as already noted, is grounded in the revelation of God concerning His future judgment of sin and His calling us to holiness.

Sexual purity is simply a practical application of basic doctrine. Paul’s attitudes toward sexual uncleanness did not arise from his background or personal preferences. They were the logical consequences of divine revelation. The Thessalonians and later readers of this epistle should realize that to reject these instructions is to reject the Person from whom they came originally, that is, God.

Lest anyone feel that God is asking more than is reasonable of weak mortals, Paul concluded this exhortation with a reminder that God has also given believers His indwelling Spirit. This Person of the Trinity is so characterized by holiness that He is called the Holy Spirit.^{xcviii}

The Holy Spirit, Who indwells every believer, will enable any Christian who submits to Him to control his own body, even in such a pagan, immoral culture as Corinth. This is still so in postmodern, post-Christian America, which began as a Christian nation, but somewhere along the way got hijacked by Satan. Paul’s exhortation is to avoid “impurity” (sexual immorality); the One Who enables us to do that is the Holy Spirit.

2. In brotherly love, 4:9-10

4:9 - LOVE ONE ANOTHER. “*Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another...*” Taught by God? How? When? John 6:45; Hebrews 8:11; 1 John 2:20, 27. Paul and his companions had taught the Thessalonian believers while they were with them, and Timothy had been sent back to continue their training. Their elected, or appointed leaders had received some training from the missionaries so that they might teach new converts. Obviously some instructions for Christians come from other believers (preachers and teachers). But other lessons are taught by God to His children

directly, things that almost intuitively seem right for a Christian to do. Loving other Christians is such a lesson. Christians quickly learn that there is a real kinship between believers, and they relate to other Christians in a way they do not relate to those outside God's family. The Thessalonians had already learned **to love each other** even though they were new Christians. Paul pointed out that God Himself had **taught** them this.^{xcix}

4:10 - YOU DO PRACTICE. Paul and his companions had taught them to love one another. Beyond that, God had taught them to love other believers (vs. 9). They were doing what they had been taught to do, and doing it in a commendable way. Paul says, "*for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more.*" They not only loved others in the church at Thessalonica, they loved the saints throughout Macedonia.

EXCEL STILL MORE. While Paul did not need to tell them to love one another, he was inspired to challenge them to do "excel still more" in their love (see vs. 1).

The evidence that they had learned the lesson of brotherly love was their deep, selfless, giving affection for Christians in others parts of their province of **Macedonia**. These were their neighbors in Philippi, Berea, and perhaps other towns where Christians lived. Paul commended believers for their love when he wrote the churches (cf. 2 Cor. 8:1-5). Yet there was still room for improvement, perhaps in the persistence and consistency of their love.^c

3. In orderly living, 4:11-12

4:11 - MAKE IT YOUR AMBITION. "*And to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you...*" Literally, he says, "aspire to lead a quiet life." The word for aspire is a translation of *philotimeomai* (Gk.), which literally is "to love honor" (used only here and in Rom. 15:20 and 2 Cor. 5:9). The problems mentioned in 2 Thess. 3:11-12 made these exhortations necessary.

TO LEAD A QUIET LIFE. Observe that Paul says the missionaries had commanded them to do four things:

1. They were to aspire to a quiet life.
2. They were to mind their own business - their own, not their neighbor's.
3. They were to work with their hands.
4. They were to "behave properly toward outsiders" (vs. 12).

First of all, they were to aspire to a peaceful life. The Christian can demonstrate his love for the brethren by making an application of these basic principles in everyday life. Love for one another is not something one turns on and off as the mood dictates. The word "quiet" is from

hesuchia , which denotes a quiet, restful life. The ambition to lead a quiet life is in direct opposition to the ambition in this world. Think of what it is to which the person of this world aspires. It usually involves a lot of noise and often a flurry of activities.(see 2 Thess. 3:11, 12). The believer should conscientiously pursue a quiet life, one as free as possible from contention and conflict, yet a life committed to serving others. This will result in a dynamic testimony to God's grace, but this should never be used as an excuse for cowardice. One is never justified, in the name of "a quiet life," in not taking a stand for the Lord. There is a difference in a quiet life and cowardice!

Pride and arrogance will destroy the believer's testimony. A sharp tongue, demanding one's rights, a bullying attitude, speaking one's mind - "I'll tell you what I think and I don't care what anybody thinks about it" - and other attitudes of this nature will greatly hinder the Lord's work. It has been demonstrated time and time again that every person who is quiet is not quiet because he has applied this principle in his daily life. Some people simply do not know what to say. As the saying goes, they not only do not know anything, they don't even suspect anything! The person who lives the quiet life is not the one who licks his finger and holds it up to see which way the wind is blowing. He is not a spineless wimp, but one who remembers that God loves the other person and commands us to love them. We must apply the Golden Rule in all relationships.

Paul was telling the Thessalonians to be less frantic, not less exuberant. A person who is constantly on the move is frequently a bother to other people as well as somewhat distracted from his own walk with God. The latter can lead to the former. But a Christian who strives to be at peace with himself and God will be a source of peace to his brethren. Such quietude constitutes a practical demonstration of love for others.^{ci}

ATTEND TO YOUR OWN BUSINESS. Or, as we say today, mind your own business. If it is not any of your business, stay out of it! The connection between minding your own business and the command to love one another is an obvious one (Prov. 25:17). This is simply a matter of following the Second Great Commandment and the Golden Rule. If you do not want others tending to your business, stay out of theirs. An attorney who was not a member of the church I served once made a comment about one of our church leaders to some members of our church, who then shared it with me. Shaking his head, the lawyer declared that nothing happened in the entire community that this man did not involve himself in one way or another. He added, "I would like to get that man on the witness stand one time before he dies."

There are church members who take their conflict with another member of their own church outside the fellowship and fight against their fellow member in the political arena, in schools, in athletic programs, and even in denominational life. I am not talking about healthy competition, either. This behavior cannot be carried on in a vacuum. The lost community and members of other churches find out about it and it hinders they Lord's work. There are believers who can give examples of church members whose efforts to hurt other members that would challenge one of Frank Peretti's New Age novels for suspense and melodrama.

WORK WITH YOUR HANDS. How does this demonstrate love for the brethren? In the first place, those who work with their own hands demonstrates love for one another by not being a burden to others. Paul, while in Thessalonica, set this example for them by working with his own hands (1 Thes. 2:9). “Evidently their expectation of the coming of Christ led some enthusiasts to stop work, thereby becoming a financial burden to others (cf. 4:12). As this subsequently got worse, Paul reproved them even more harshly (2 Thess. 3:6-12).”^{cii}

Paul tells them to aspire to a quiet life, but a too restful life can also be a problem also, and Paul guarded against that with this command to work with their hands. Some have pointed out that this verse dignifies manual labor, and that the reference suggests that many, perhaps most, in the church came out of the working class.

The Greeks deplored manual labor and relegated it to slaves as much as possible. But the Jews held it in esteem; every Jewish boy was taught a trade regardless of his family’s wealth. Work itself is a blessing, and working with one’s hands should never be despised by Christians. A man who is willing to work with his hands demonstrates his love for his brethren by being willing to humble himself to provide for his own needs so that he does not depend on others but provides for himself.^{ciii}

The Roman world considered working with one’s hands an activity suited only to slaves and those free men on the lowest rung of the social order. The Victor Bible Commentary joins the chorus that claims this verse proves the Thessalonian saints were from this lower socioeconomic bracket:

In contrast Judaism exalted working with one’s hands, and the Jewish ideal was a man who was trained in both the Scriptures and in a trade. Christianity shared this view of work, and to set an example the Apostle Paul himself followed his trade of tentmaking (leather working) whenever possible. Paul’s call to “work with your hands” strongly suggests that most Christians in Thessalonica were drawn from the lower classes (1 Cor. 1:26-31).^{civ}

Regardless of whether or not these believers were of the working class, the principle applies to both blue collar workers and white collar workers. Over a period of years popular radio talk-show host Rush Limbaugh as placed a lot of emphasis on “being all you can be.” On July 24, 1999, Limbaugh attended the induction ceremonies at Nolan Ryan, George Brett, Robin Yount, and Orlando Cepeda were inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame, all but Cepeda on their first year of eligibility. Based on his personal friendship with George Brett and the speeches by the inductees, and interviews reported by others, Limbaugh announced on Monday, July 26, that Ryan, Brett, and Yount were three men who made every effort to be all they could be. They all had certain things in common, which Ryan’s story illustrates.

When Nolan Ryan was young he discovered that he had a gift from God. He threw a baseball harder than anyone else for longer than anyone else, and consequently holds some fifty-six major league records. The point Rush was making was that recognition of that gift was followed by an

inspiration; he aspired to be all he could be, to do whatever it took to make the most of his gift. Then came the work. He worked hard to get the major leagues, and once he got there he worked hard to be the best he could be. Limbaugh stated that Ryan would pitch a complete game and then follow that with an hour on an exercise bike.

The Lord expects his people to work for a living. Christians should be the best employers, and the best employees in any business. There was a time when a lot of emphasis was placed on “the Protestant work ethic.” Christians showed up for work on time, they worked while on the job, and they worked until time to stop for the day. I drove my older son John out to a farmer’s headquarters for his first day of a summer job when he was fifteen years old. He had been mowing for a few years, often pushing a large mower over large grown-up areas. He was nearly six feet tall, with broad shoulders and muscular arms and legs. He looked like a teenager a farmer would hire and this farmer, Tom Sharplin, was a hard working man, as were his own sons, Tim and Doug.

When John got out of my car the first morning and walked over to where Tom and others were getting a tractor ready for the field, he sort of sauntered over to where they were. When I picked him up that afternoon, I gave him a rather severe lecture. I told him that I knew he could work and that he would work. As a matter of fact, I did not know many young people his age who either could or would work the way he did, but when he got out of my car he did not walk like he was ready to go to work. I explained that a farmer can watch someone walk toward him and form an opinion about what kind of hand he is going to be. So I advised him to make a favorable impression by getting out of the car and walking up to the tractor, of truck like he was ready to put in a good day’s work. From that time on, he did it and before long he was being praised for both his hard work and his attitude. When Tom was asked to be one of the speakers for Baptist Men’s Day one year, his subject was “the Protestant Work Ethic.”

4:12 - BEHAVE PROPERLY. “...*So that you will behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need.*” By “outsiders” he means non-Christians. There are good reasons for these “commands.” The believer lives his life in a world filled with lost people - lost people he is under a commission to reach for the Lord. The late Roland Q. Leavell, a former president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, called the Great Commission a “Divine Imperative.” We must keep it before us at all times. We live **in** the world, but we must not be **of** the world. The four things Paul has commanded - and that is the word he uses - will gain the respect of non-Christians and glorify God. The more faithful you are to Jesus Christ, the more critically the lost person observes you; the more faithfully you witness to him, the more sensitive he is to your behavior. Your right behavior may lead him to accept Christ, but your failure in any of the areas Paul mentions here can almost certainly turn the lost person away from the Lord. If we are really to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, we must aspire to a quiet life; mind our own business; work with our hands; and “behave properly toward outsiders.”

This is how we show our love for the lost. Love expressed in this manner is appreciated by almost everyone, including the non-Christian. Testimony of Christians before non-believers is especially important and the believer must keep it in mind at all times. What Paul is advocating here

is being an effective witness, as we might say today, where the rubber hits the road (in everyday life).

B. Teaching Concerning the Dead, 4:13-18.

4:13 - THOSE WHO ARE ASLEEP. *“But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope.”* Paul had preached the pure Gospel to the believers in Thessalonica, but he did not have an opportunity to disciple the saints as they did in Ephesus or Corinth because of the opposition of the non-believing Jews and their Gentile allies. As a result, these people had some obvious questions. They knew about the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. They had been taught that Jesus is returning for His saints. One question they were asking now was: **What happens to those who die before Jesus returns?** In other words, does the death of a believer before the Lord comes back deny him the privilege of sharing in all that is associated with His glorious return? In these verses, Paul reassures them that the dead will be raised and will, indeed have a share in His kingdom. They will miss nothing Jesus has promised them.

In 4:13-18, Paul provides us with a great written statement about the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Almost anything I may write on this passage has been written many times before, and expressed far better than I can express it. However, to say that all commentaries do not agree would be a colossal understatement. Sadly, many believers are deeply divided over various approaches to this subject, even some ministers of the Gospel disassociating themselves from those who disagree with them.

Since I am writing this for the layperson’s use, let me stress up front that I am bearing in mind several things as I write. First, there is the **fact** of the Second Coming as stated in Scripture. Second, there is the **hope** of the Second Advent. Third there is the **time** of His return, which I certainly do not know any better than Jesus did when He was on this earth. Fourth, there is the fact that **many church members have been confused by what they have heard**, either from the pulpit or from television preachers. All those who preach on TV do not have either the training or the wisdom of Charles Stanley or D. James Kennedy. As a matter of fact, there are some I simply cannot watch, especially those who have their audience all but rolling in the aisles while preaching on subjects which should be dealt with only in a sense of reverential awe before a thrice holy God.

I have had any number of people ask me the question, “Just what do we have to know about the Second Coming?” I try to ascertain just how much they do know, but to be perfectly honest, neither God’s “Plan of Salvation,” the “Roman Road” presentation has one word about the Second Coming. Does that mean that it is not important? Not at all! It does, however, mean that the new Christian is not going to have a fully developed understanding of Eschatology (the study of last things). As we grow in our understanding of God’s Word, we come to understand that our only real hope is in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and His administration of the Father’s great eternal plan for all believers. As we grow in Jesus Christ our understanding of end time events and circumstances will be expanded.

Jesus gave us the basic information we need (Matt. 24), but since he dealt with three questions, a cursory reading may leave one confused. Jesus is dealing with the destruction of Jerusalem, His return, and end times. Now, what would I recommend as we read the passage from Matthew and this passage from 1 Thessalonians? I would urge any student of the word to pay careful attention to the warning with which Jesus began that great lesson in Matthew 24 - "Let no one deceive you." Then begin your study with John 14:1-6, and any time you become confused, go back to that and begin afresh with this assurance: this much I know for sure. Then proceed from there with personal Bible study and the help of godly preachers and teachers who have demonstrated both proficiency and consistency in their application of the holy Scriptures in their own daily walk.

In answering their questions about those who die in the Lord before the return of Christ, Paul makes the following statements:

- (1) Christians should not grieve for those who die in the Lord as hopeless heathens do.
- (2) Those who die in Christ will be made alive, just as Jesus was raised from the dead.
- (3) Those who are alive at Jesus' coming will be preceded in the resurrection by the righteous dead.
- (4) The Christians who are alive at Jesus' coming will be gathered together with all the resurrected believers and will remain together forever.
- (5) Revelation of God's plan for the believer should be a great comfort to the saints who grieve for their loved ones when they die. For more on the subject, see 1 Cor. 15:20-28; 1 Thes. 2:19; 3:13; 5:23; 2 Thes. 2:1,8.

The use of the word "Asleep" (*koimomenon*) as a metaphor for death should not be construed as soul sleep. The use of the word "asleep" denotes what happens to the body at death, not what happens to the soul. More specifically, this points to the state (or condition) of the dead. In Jesus' story of the rich man and Lazarus, The rich man is already in hell and Lazarus is already in heaven. Paul makes it clear in 2 Cor. 5:8 that at the moment of death the believer ushered into the presence of God. Jesus' proclamation to the thief on the cross verifies this (Luke 23:39-43). "Paul is suggesting that death is like sleep for believers because (1) it is a temporary state, (2) it is a restful state, and (3) it is a state from which one awakes. Daniel 12:2 uses the same metaphor to speak of death and resurrection."^{CV}

The Gospel Paul preached to the saints at Thessalonica would have included some things that had already happened - the virgin birth, the perfect life, the teachings, the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. There were also some things that were to happen in the future. History is more easily verified than the future, and the prophecy of future events is far more easily distorted than recent history. That is, unless there is a concerted effort to deceive the masses by rewriting history, a practice in which Marxists specialized in the old USSR - and in the good old "U. S. of A. For example, modern history books have rewritten American history to purge it from the influence of Christianity, lest "the children" be damaged by thinking of God, even in such a diluted presentation as a passive display or the Ten Commandments. We are told that the Founders never intended the United States to be a Christian nation, but that is a blatant misrepresentation that can easily be disproved by reading the Founding Fathers. But of course, for radical feminists and feminized men,

the very use of the word father would be enough to reject anything the Founding Fathers wrote.

Prophecy of future events is not only scientifically unverifiable, it is confusing to many because it is subject to so many interpretations. Without a doubt, Paul had taught the Thessalonians about the return of Christ (Acts 17:7). What we do not know is whether some of them had misunderstood the doctrine, or if some had “willfully perverted the message, sowing fear in the people’s hearts by saying that friends and relatives who had recently died would not share in the kingdom as would those that remained alive. This is the error that Paul tries to correct here (cf. 5:10).”^{cvi}

THAT YOU WILL NOT GRIEVE. There is hope in the Lord and he wants us to realize that the hope that is in Him is found nowhere else. Tears are a gift from God, and there is a time for tears, but God does not want His children to continue in sorrow as those who have no hope of resurrection.

If there is one thing the ancient pagan world knew little of, it was hope. The highest hope to which they could cling was merely wishful thinking. Jesus brought hope to the world. Even those Old Testament saints had limited knowledge about what lies beyond, as we see in Job. All pagans lived in fear and superstition, but never in hope.

Catullus, the Roman poet, said, “When once our brief day has set, we must sleep one everlasting night.” The sepulchral inscriptions of heathen Thessalonica express the hopeless view of those who have died—as Aeschylus, the Greek tragedian, wrote, “Of one once dead there is no resurrection.” Also, whatever ideas the philosophers of that time had about the existence of the soul (or, spirit) after death, they had none whatever of the body (Acts 17:18, 20, 32).^{cvi}

The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to deal with this subject because he did not want believers to be ignorant of what happens to those who die in the Lord, and He did not want us to grieve as those who have no hope in the resurrection. Christians should understand that believers do grieve when a loved one dies, but the grief of Christians differs from that of unbelievers who have no hope.

4:14 - JESUS DIED AND ROSE AGAIN. *“For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.”* “If we believe” (literally, since we do believe) that Jesus died and rose again, then we must believe that when He returns all those who have died in the Lord will return with Him. The certainty of the believer’s resurrection is His resurrection. “Death is often likened to sleep. For the Christian, the idea of sleeping in the arms of Jesus carries a beautiful image of safety and comfort. Even greater hope comes knowing death is not the end. We have hope of resurrection in Jesus.”^{cvi}

In this passage, 4:14-18, Paul was inspired by the Holy Spirit to expand what we may glean from the Gospels about Eschatology (the doctrine of last things, or end time events). Believers who die before Christ returns will not be denied any blessing promised by the Lord. On the contrary, they will be raised first before the believers who are alive at Christ’s return are caught up to be meet Him in the air. Today, believers usually use the term rapture in referring to believers being “caught up” (vs. 17) to meet the Lord in the air when He comes for them.

The word rapture does not appear in the New Testament. The Greek word is translated *rapere* in the Latin Vulgate, which gave rise in the nineteenth century to the word “rapture” among dispensationalists. There are three different positions on the rapture: Pre-tribulation, Mid-tribulation, and Post-tribulation disciples. Pre-tribulation adherents believe the church will be caught up to be with Christ at the beginning of the seven-year tribulation period (and thus seven years before Christ returns to earth). Mid-tribulation disciples believe the rapture will occur at the end of three and one-half years, and of course, Post-tribulation disciples insist that the church will go through the Tribulation before the rapture. Others see the rapture - if they even use the term at all - as occurring simultaneously with the return of the Lord.

Some definitions germane to this study should be helpful as we study this passage. Most believers, whether they have a clearly developed understanding of Eschatology or not, will fall into one of the following categories:

(1) PREMILLENNIALISM. This view holds that Christ will return to earth to establish an earthly, millennial kingdom and reign over it from an earthly throne. Once a student of the Word identifies himself as a premillennialist, some people will want him to be more specific, usually in reference to their view on the Tribulation. All premillennialists do not agree on many issues. Most historical premillennialists believe the church will go through a literal tribulation period and that the rapture will occur at the same time that Christ comes in His glorious return.

(2) AMILLENNIALISM. Amillennialists, on the basis of their interpretation of the reign of Christ in Rev. 20, reject the idea of a literal thousand year reign by Christ on earth, in favor of an invisible kingdom of indeterminate duration. “Amillennialists believe the kingdom exists in a spiritual sense right now, and the next event on the prophetic calendar will be the return of Christ, followed immediately by final judgment” (MACARTHUR, John F., *The Second Coming*, Crossway Books, Wheaton, IL, 1999, pp. 239: 220).^{cix} Some amillennialists equate the rapture with a general resurrection and judgment without reference to a specific end time tribulation period. Other amillennialists believe the church will go through the tribulation period before being raptured. Still others reject the whole idea of a tribulation period in favor of the normal opposition to the Gospel and the occasional persecution to which Christians may be subjected. This view sees the reign of Christ described in Rev. 20 as an invisible, spiritual kingdom of indeterminate duration rather than a literal thousand years.

(3) POSTMILLENNIALISM. Generally, postmillennialists believe the church will go through the tribulation period before being raptured. Some postmillennialists see the nations turning to God in such a sweeping revival that when Jesus returns that He can simply begin His reign on earth with masses prepared for His rule. This view holds that the church through preaching (and possibly through political means) will establish the earthly kingdom of God. “Postmillennialists believe Christ will reign over a literal earthly kingdom, but most believe He will do so from a heavenly throne, after which He will return to earth and institute final judgment.”^{cx}

Early in the Twentieth Century there were many strong Bible scholars who held the postmillennial position - A. T. Robertson, L. R. Scarborough, B. H. Carroll, and W. T. Truett. Recently I attended a meeting of conservative ministers, almost all of whom would have professed to be premillennialists. One speaker made an appeal to Southern Baptists to return to their roots and then he alluded to the men mentioned above. I could not help but wonder of all those saying "Amen" realized that these men were all postmillennialists. I believe those great men were both sincere and wrong - to be more frank, sincerely wrong, at least on this issue. In spite of that, I have the deepest appreciation and respect for them. I never knew any of these grand old saints, but I look forward to visiting with them one day. I would join my brothers in Christ in saying a hardy "Amen" to the marvelous work of those great saints, even though I disagree with their position on end time events.

(4) PRETERISM. According to this view, the Tribulation prophecies of Matthew 24 were fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. They interpret Matt, 24: 34 ("This generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place") to mean that all the prophecies of the chapter were to be fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in A.D. 70.

(5) HYPER-PRETERISM. This view is sometimes called full preterism or "realized eschatology." Like the preterists, hyper-preterists build their whole case on a misinterpretation of Matt. 24. They insist that the reference to "this generation" means that "every last detail of Bible prophecy had to have been completed before the death of the people living at the time He (Jesus) spoke, and actually was fulfilled in A. D. 70, during the turmoil and political upheaval that ensued when Jerusalem was sacked by Rome and most of its inhabitants were slaughtered."^{cxii} Hyper-preterists believe that the universe in which we now live is the "new heaven and new earth" promised in passages like 2 Peter 3:13 and Revelation 21. "That mean this earth on which we now live is permanent. Sin and evil will never be finally eradicated from the God's creation. Satan has already experienced as much defeat as he will ever experience. There is no tangible reality or physical existence beyond the grave. At death the believer simply becomes an eternally disembodied spirit, passing into the presence of God on a purely spiritual plane, with no hope of any future bodily resurrection. The souls of the wicked are similarly cast out of God's presence in a disembodied state."^{cxiii} Needless to say, this view runs into serious trouble when exposed to the light of passages like 1 Thess. 4:16-17; 1 Cor. 15:22-24; 2 Peter 3:10.

(6) APOCALYPTIC VIEW. I coined this as a distinct view - you will not see it in many, if any other lists. This view was popularized by certain seminary professors, including Dr. Ray Frank Robbins who wrote a commentary of Revelations in which he sought to follow the basic principles of interpreting apocalyptic symbols and images consistently throughout revelation. I sat under Dr. Robbins as he taught an "intensive" in Revelation right after he had spent a year in England studying under William Barclay and others. He was a very interesting teacher, always thoroughly prepared, and a master of abstract thought. My problem is that all he had to say about the role of Satan in end-time events went out the window when, under straight questioning, admitted that he did not believe in Satan's existence. However great the moral lessons are that may be gleaned from Dr. Robbins' approach, the view is shipwrecked on the rocky shores of biblical truth.

Variations in interpretations arise out of the fact that the Bible does not clearly relate the catching up of living believers in sequence of time to Christ's return. Many believers, not content to watch and pray, have prepared charts and calendars in which they try to pinpoint the actual time of His return. Others have been discouraged when they could not understand those calendars and charts. The important teaching here for us is that Jesus' resurrection guarantees eternal life for all believers, both those who die and those alive when He returns. Study the Scripture prayerfully, depending upon the Holy Spirit to guide you as your understanding of this doctrine is expanded.

The rapture of the church (all true believers in Jesus) is the next great event in the redemptive plan and purpose of God. Summarizing the various aspects:

- (1) At the return of Christ for His people, those who have died in Christ will come with Him (v. 14).
- (2) Those who are still living at that time will not have the advantage over those who have already died in the Lord - answering the question which seems to have troubled the saints at Thessalonica, Paul stresses that those living at the time of the rapture will not “precede” the dead in Christ to heaven (v. 15).
- (3) Those still living at the time of Christ's return for the saints will be “caught up” to meet Jesus in the air and to be united with the saints who have preceded them in death. The word rapture “implies an immediate translation of believers, including the change of their bodies to a glorified state.”^{cxiii}

The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are among the best-attested facts of history. Since Christians know these events took place, they can be equally certain, Paul said, that the souls of believers who have died will return with Christ when He comes for His living saints. The prophecy of the Rapture is as sure to be fulfilled as the prophecies of Christ's death and resurrection.^{cxiv}

4:15 - THE WORD OF THE LORD. *“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 not precede those who have fallen asleep.”* How did Paul know this? By “Lord,” Paul means Jesus, the risen Lord. But how did Paul receive it from Him? According to the New Commentary on the Whole Bible, it came “**by [in] the [a] word of the Lord**—i.e., ‘by virtue of a direct revelation from the Lord to me.’”^{cxv} Without a doubt, it was by divine revelation. In writing to the Corinthian church he would later state that he had the gift of prophecy. Until the New Testament was completed there would be a need for someone through whom God would reveal divine truth.

UNTIL THE COMING OF THE LORD. Apparently the saints at Thessalonica believed that those who were alive at the time of Christ's coming would have precedence over those believers who had already died. “Paul corrected this. Christians of all ages will rise at Christ's return. Living Christians in every age should live in expectation of his coming (Matt. 25:13; Rom. 13:11; 1 Cor. 15:51; James 5:9; 1 Pet. 4:5, 6).”^{cxvi} According to this passage, not only will the souls of the dead in Christ return with Him (v. 14),

but their bodies will also be resurrected at His coming. The bodies of dead Christians will be resurrected immediately before living Christians are conveyed upward. Clearly Paul believed that he and his Thessalonian readers might well be **alive** when the Lord returned. He believed that the Rapture was imminent, that it could take place at any moment (cf. 1:10; 1 Cor. 7:29, “the time is short”; Phil. 4:5, “The Lord is near”). And this truth of imminency brought comfort (1 Thes. 4:18).^{cxvii}

As I asked earlier concerning the general subject of Eschatology, what do we have to know about the Rapture? To be saved, we do not have to have any understanding of the subject at all, but once we are saved it should become very important to us. That does not mean that all will agree on the subject. Nor does it mean that all believers will advance at the same rate in their understanding of the subject. But all Christians should understand one thing - our position, and our knowledge of end time events, while important, must never jeopardize relationships within the Lord’s church. Be warned: the **Rapture of the church** should never cause a **rupture in the church**, or between believers, and that does not mean that we compromise. We may simply have to disagree agreeably with those who do not understand the subject as we do. There is a second warning: There are church members who have gone to seed on the subject of the Rapture, but never seem to understand that they may themselves be the cause of a rupture in the fellowship.

What do you really need to know about the Rapture? You need to begin by accepting the fact of the Rapture, and then prayerfully study passages like this one and depend upon the Holy Spirit to be our guide and teacher as we grow in our understanding of the subject. Remember this, you may find the doctrine of Eschatology (study of end-time events) very difficult to understand. You may need to ask for help and you may have to commit a significant amount of time to study the Scripture related to these studies. But it is important to remind ourselves that there is an abundance of Scripture which is very easy for us to understand and apply in our daily life, things we are to be doing until Jesus comes to rapture His church. We must not become so distracted by the Rapture that we forget what Jesus has commanded us to do until He does return.

Every child of God is instructed to study God’s Word and apply it in his, or her daily life. This should be more than a command, it should be the desire of the heart and a commitment of the mind. One of my favorite Bible professors was Dr. E. R. Pinson at Mississippi College, who was also my college advisor, my advisor, and in time my friend. I had not seen Dr. Pinson in a long time when I saw an article in the Baptist Record of Mississippi with a picture of Dr. Pinson who had just celebrated his ninety second birthday. I called him to congratulate him. He had remained active for many years after his retirement, and I learned that at this time he was teaching a large Sunday School Class. He had just begun a study of the Book of Revelation and he talked about his study throughout the years, and the progress of his work in Eschatology. Gradually, he said, he had come to a new understanding of the subject, as he was convinced that his earlier position needed amending. Dr. Pinson said, “Johnny, last Sunday as we started the study in Revelation, for the first time in my life I announced to a class that I am a Premillennialist.”

Dr. Pinson received his promotion a short time later as the Lord called him home to his reward. For him the subject of Eschatology is no longer clouded. I admire anyone who is willing to change his mind after so many years. I admire anyone who is still searching for answers at ninety two. If he had reached a different conclusion, I would still have admired my old friend, because I would have recognized his as an honest quest for an understanding of a difficult subject. However, that does not mean that I would have agreed with him if he had come to a different conclusion.

A good friend, Dr. Bill Smith, a retired professor and active member of the Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church (Reformed) in Monroe, Louisiana, invited me to attend a noon meeting at his church one Tuesday to hear Dr. Nigel Lee, a theologian from Australia. Arriving early with my son John, we parked seconds after the car in which Dr. Lee was riding. He got out and I looked up to see the distinguished theologian from Australia standing there holding the door of my car for me. He was dressed in khaki pants, white shirt and a khaki hat, which he explained was essential in the hot sun of his homeland.

Nigel Lee was born in South Africa, became an American citizen, and then migrated Down Under. Certain things really impressed me about Dr. Lee. First, the man had gone back to South Africa for the funeral of his murdered father and while there went to the jail and led the murderer to receive Jesus Christ as Savior. He announced to the accused man that he was there because he loved him in the Lord and the man needed Jesus Christ as Savior. "But," he said to the alleged murderer, "I want you to know up front that if the evidence proves you are the one who murdered my father I will do everything in my power to see that you are convicted and that you will pay for your crime with your life." But, he added, "In the Lord I love you." He then presented God's salvation to the young black man and saw him ask the Lord to save him.

I was also impressed by the fact that Nigel Lee has earned ten doctorates, including a medical and degrees in Medicine, Law, Philosophy, and Theology. The pastor who introduced Dr. Lee told me he had a copy of his resume' which detailed his degrees and his published works. Someone there wondered how he earned all those degrees, I wonder why! Dr. Lee explained to us how the United States and the United Nations had waged a long campaign against South Africa which ended in the replacement of a Christian government with a Communist government. Contrary to popular belief in America, he said, Mandella set about to force whites out of government, out of better jobs, and out of the country. Lee marveled that so many American leaders were so concerned about injustice against blacks in South Africa, but never showed any compassion for blacks who were being slaughtered all over Africa by other blacks. He understood that the war was against God. Dr. Lee brought his speech to a close with the words, "But I am still a Postmillennialist." There were a number of Amens, and I sat there amazed, thinking, "I thought Postmillennialism was a theological dinosaur, dead for many years!" He went on to state that the Gospel was going to spread around the world, the nations would turn to God and Jesus would return. To most students of the Word today this is a very optimistic position.

A number of years ago I talked with a retired seminary professor, one of my all time favorite lecturers, about this subject. He was an Amillennialist, rejecting the whole idea of a literal thousand

year reign. To him Jesus would return for those saints who remained alive and take them home to Heaven and that would be it. How did he explain the Scripture which states that the dead in Christ shall rise first? He explained that those in his camp hold that it is possible to translate it, "The dead in Christ shall have risen first."

I am still amazed that three such outstanding Bible scholars could reach such different views. Wouldn't it be something if the Holy Spirit began to reveal the same truth to all believers?! So, what does the layperson do when he sees these various views? He could do what one man did years ago. He had been on the Pastor Search Committee that recommended me as pastor, but when I preached a series of sermons on the Letters to the Seven Churches in Asia Minor for Revelation, he called a minister friend and got him to come from Texas to hear me preach. This preacher shouted Amen to everything I said, and then went to the man's home and cut my sermon to pieces - according to the man's wife. This deacon left the church and joined a Fundamentalist church, but returned after two or three years, explaining that certain countries in Europe had not done what he expected them to do. A year or two after that he left the church again and the last time I talked with him he was a full fledged Charismatic. When I told him my mother had had surgery for a malignant brain tumor, he assured me that if you had faith you did not have to get sick. Within another two or three years he and his wife were fighting terminal battles with cancer.

During a break from this current study, my wife and I drove into Monroe where I made a number of hospital calls and she looked for some "back to school" things at the mall. As we were leaving the mall I heard someone call, "Mrs. Sanders!" I looked back and saw a teenaged boy walking toward her with a smile on his face. She has taught a lot of students in northeast Louisiana, so there was nothing surprising about this - until it dawned on me, this is Daniel Herring from Forest. His younger brother, Andrew, was right behind him. Their parents, Kenny and Donna were coming out of the door behind them. I was his family's pastor for fifteen years, and Becky had taught them and their older siblings, Meredith and Matthew in Sunday School. She had also taught them in elementary school.

Kenny's father, Pastor Jimmy Herring, is a long-time friend and Kenny's brother-in-law, James Kitchens, is now a pastor after surrendering to the call to preach only a few years ago. Both Kenny and his brother-in-law are veteran teachers and Kenny is an outstanding coach. Kenny is now a licensed Baptist preacher, but he has been a student of the Word since his youth. I mentioned this study to Kenny, touching on the various views and how adamantly many defend their position. Kenny asked the question all students of Scripture should ask: "Why did the Lord put that in the Bible?" He continued, "It seems to me that it was put there to give us hope, to encourage us." He was right. It is there to give hope, not to traumatize us or to confuse us. Please read all Scripture related to the Rapture with this in mind.

4:16 - THE LORD HIMSELF WILL DESCEND. *"For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first."* Jesus Christ now sits at the right hand of God in heaven (Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3; Rev. 1). There will be a time when He will leave this position and descend

to the earth, in fulfillment of the promise of our Lord recorded in Acts 1:9-11:

And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. They also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven (NAS).

A SHOUT. The Greek word connotes a shout of command, a war cry, or a signal shout. This time when Jesus comes, He is not coming as the Suffering Servant, but the King of Kings and Lord and Lords to begin His final battle for victory over Satan and the forces of evil.

VOICE OF THE ARCHANGEL. Only two angels are mentioned by name in the Bible, and Michael is the only one called an archangel. It is generally agreed that Gabriel, the angel of the Annunciation (Luke 1), is also an archangel. Michael is believed by some to be the archangel who will be sent to herald the return of Christ (Jude 9; Rev. 12:7). He had responsibility for guarding the people of God (Dan. 10:13). Many feel that Lucifer had been an archangel before being cast out of Heaven, a conclusion others would insist is forced. However, advocates of this view may answer that his command of the third of angels that rebelled and were cast out of Heaven supports their position.

THE TRUMPET OF GOD. A trumpet call accompanied God's appearance when his people were called to convocation (Num. 10:2, 10; 31:6). Here it will be used to call them together at Christ's return (Ps. 50:1-5; Matt. 24:31; 1 Cor. 15:52). See also, Exodus 19:16; Psalm 47:5. The trumpet is the third phenomenal signals associated with our Lord's return. There are many questions that are not answered here. One commentary asks,

Who will voice the loud shout? Will it be Jesus Himself (cf. John 11:43), or the archangel Michael (Dan. 10:13; Jude 9), or another angel? Is this a literal trumpet call, or was Paul speaking figuratively in describing the call of God by which He will announce the Advent of His Son? (cf. 1 Cor. 15:52) These three phenomena may all refer to the same thing, but probably they are three separate almost simultaneous announcements heralding Christ's return. Though one's curiosity about these aspects of the Rapture is not fully satisfied in this passage, one thing is clear: Christ's return for His saints will be announced from heaven forcefully and dramatically.^{cxviii}

THE DEAD IN CHRIST WILL RISE FIRST. Thus, Paul answers the question that was causing these Thessalonian believers some anxiety. They anticipated the imminent return of Christ to receive His church, but while they awaited His return, many of their brothers and sisters in Christ were dying. What would happen to them? Where do they fit in the Resurrection? Here Paul reveal that deceased Christians will rise before the Christians who are still alive. Some believe "Old Testament saints will evidently be raised at the end of the Great Tribulation (Dan. 12:2), for the phrase "in Christ" refers exclusively to Church-Age saints. The bodies of the dead in Christ will **rise**

before the living Christians are caught up to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thes. 4:17).^{cxix}

As previously mentioned, a retired seminary professor once told me that there are those who translate this, “The dead in Christ shall have risen first.” Robertson does not support this interpretation: “**F**irst here refers plainly to the fact that, so far from the dead in Christ having no share in the Parousia, they will rise before those still alive are changed.”^{cxx} Translators of the most popular versions, agree to the letter with the New Revised Standard Version, “the dead in Christ will rise first.” A strict interpretation, then points to:

- (1) a return of Christ in the air.
- (2) a resurrection of the dead in Christ.
- (3) a rapture of living believers.
- (4) a reunion with those who have died.

The more questions we ask, the more questions come to the mind. How, for example, will God raise the bodies of people who were buried hundreds of years ago? Who knows how many times the elements comprising those bodies have been “recycled?” What about the bodies of those Christians who have been cremated, or blown up in an explosion? What about those believers who were lost at sea, their flesh consumed by sharks? The resurrection of the dead may pose a great problem to the faith of many but it is not challenge to God. Different people have proposed different explanations (I am glad I am a student instead of an authority on the subject!).

Perhaps that is why Paul stressed that this revelation came from Jesus Christ Himself and that it is as certain of future fulfillment as Jesus’ resurrection is a fact of past history. The God who created the universe out of nothing with a word is fully able to reassemble the decayed bodies of all His saints in a moment of time (cf. 1 Cor. 15:35-58).^{cxxi}

4:17 - CAUGHT UP TOGETHER. “*Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.*” Verse 16 answers the question about the future of dead believers at the time of Christ’s return. This verse deals with what will happen to living believers (see also, 1 Cor. 15:51-52). After the bodies of deceased believers have been raised,

those who are still alive and have been left behind momentarily will be caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Again Paul, by using the word *we* (“we who are still alive and are left”; cf. 1 Thes. 4:15), put himself in the living group; he thought that Christ would probably return in his lifetime, or at least he allowed for its possibility. Only a moment will separate the resurrection of the dead and the translation of the living (1 Cor. 15:51-52).^{cxxii}

As noted in notes on verse 14, Latin the word for “caught up” is *rapturo*, from which comes the term “Rapture.” This is the Rapture of the church, when Christians are caught up to meet Christ

in the clouds (cf. Acts 1:9). Both groups of Christians, those deceased and those living at the time, will have had their bodies glorified just prior to the rapture (see 1 Cor. 15:51, 52; Phil. 3:20, 21). When we compare this with the parallel passage in 1 Corinthians 15, we see some considerable differences, which for many students of the Word affirms the distinction between the Rapture and the Second Coming.

The resurrected or translated bodies of all Christians will be united with Christ and with each other at the Rapture. From that time on and forever thereafter they will be with the Lord. The Lord will take living believers to the place He is presently preparing for them (John 14:2-3). But the place where Christians will be was not so important to Paul as the Person with whom they will be. "The entire content and worth of heaven, the entire blessedness of life eternal, is for Paul embraced in the one thought of being united with Jesus, his Savior and Lord" (Borhemann, quoted by George G. Findlay, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Thessalonians*, Cambridge: University Press, 1904, p. 103).^{cxiii}

IN THE CLOUDS. Literally, "in clouds." Jesus was taken away in a cloud at His ascension (Acts 1:9), and He will return "in clouds" (Rev. 1:7). The clouds are spoken of as God's chariots (Ps. 104:3; Dan. 7:13).

IN THE AIR. Actually, it is "into the air." Both the deceased and those living at His return will be "caught up into the region just above the earth, where the meeting (cf. Matt. 25:1, 6) shall take place between them ascending and their Lord descending toward the earth."^{cxiv}

AND SO SHALL ALWAYS BE WITH THE LORD. This is a general statement describing the believers' eternal privilege of unbroken, everlasting fellowship with Jesus Christ (see Rev. 21:3, 4; 22:3, 4). "Paul did not go over the other events foretold for the end times such as Christ's reign on earth (1 Cor. 6:2, 3) and the final judgment, because they were not really relevant to his discussion here."^{cxv}

4:18 - COMFORT ONE ANOTHER. "Therefore comfort one another with these words." Here we have one of the great distinctives of the of the Christian faith. In all the religions of the world there is no real, abiding hope, and without hope there is no true comfort. The late Dr. H. Leo Eddleman, a former president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, preached revivals in two of my former pastorates. Dr. Eddleman, a former missionary to Israel, was one of the greatest Hebrew scholars in America. I loved to hear him preach and made it a point to hear him as often as possible. I well remember his preaching from the fortieth chapter of Isaiah. Commenting on Isaiah 40:1 ("Comfort, O comfort My people," says your God") Dr. Eddleman said, "the Gospel is so designed as to comfort the afflicted, and to afflict the comfortable." I have often thought of those words as I prepared for a funeral service.

Paul's First Epistle to the Thessalonians should certainly afflict the comfortable - those who are at ease in Zion (Amos 6:1). If I were a lost person an awareness of the promised imminent return of Jesus Christ - regardless of my understanding of the order of events - would be enough to cause

me a great deal of concern. The saints at Thessalonica were grieving for their deceased loved ones because they did not understand what their position would be with reference to the rapture. Paul has answered their questions and now he encourages them to comfort one another with the words he has just written. The comfort available to Christians through hope in the resurrection stands in sharp contrast to the hopelessness of the heathen in the face of death and eternity.

C. Teaching Concerning the Day of the Lord, 5:1-11.

This final chapter gives a series of admonitions instructing believers as how to live in the light of Christ's coming. This was a great church but as we might expect, there were some definite problems in the new church. Christians were living carelessly; some were not respecting their church leaders; some were abusing the public services; and there was a general need for love and harmony among the saints. This chapter deals with these problems and points out how the local church can live in harmony and purity.

5:1 - THE TIMES AND THE EPOCHS. *“Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you.”* The word “times” denotes a general, indefinite term for chronological periods, but probably a more specific period of time than “epochs,” which, according to one source refers to “the great moving periods of God's eternal plan.”^{cxxvi}

YOU HAVE NO NEED. Why did they have no need of anything to be written to them? Either Paul had obviously taught them what they needed to know on the subject and there was no need for repetition, or He had taught them the essential and God did not choose to add any more information by means of this epistle. The main thing they needed to be reminded of was to always be ready.

5:2 - DAY OF THE LORD. *“For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night.”* They had no need of his writing any more on the subject for they knew “full well” that the Day of the Lord would come as “a thief in the night.” The word “day” as used in this context refers to a definite period of time, but not a literal 24-hour period. That day will suddenly overtake the unsaved who remain behind at the Rapture - when Jesus the Lord comes “as a thief in the night.” The day of the Lord is a future period of time in which God “will be at work in world affairs more directly and dramatically than He has been since the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a time referred to by many Old Testament prophets (e.g., Isa. 13:9-11; Joel 2:28-32; Zeph. 1:14-18; 3:14-15). As these and other Old Testament verses indicate, the day of the Lord will include both judgment and blessing.”^{cxxvii}

The return of the Lord and the future “day of the Lord” are “intertwined concepts. Both are held forth in Scripture as events that will overtake the world suddenly and without warning as the breaking in of a thief in the night.”^{cxxviii} The vast majority of people on the earth at the time will not be looking for the coming judgment and destruction. The element of surprise is consistently prophesied in connection with the coming day of the Lord. The first volume in the fictional *Left*

Behind series by LaHaye and Jenkins captures this surprise element - even if one wonders at times if the series was stretched out a bit because of the marketability of the series.

Christian bookstores and catalogs today are stocked with books on Bible prophecy, many of which have sought to capitalize on Y2K speculations. While it is good that the interest in end-time events has been heightened, believers must be on guard against approaches that may not be wholly biblical. That includes the popular *Left Behind* novels mentioned above. While I would not discourage anyone from reading those novels - I have read all of them - I would like to encourage everyone to read them with a discerning mind and spirit. These books blend popular events (news events) with biblical prophecies in a fictional format. What is wrong with that? Possibly nothing, if one is grounded in Scripture. The danger is that it encourages the reader to interpret Scripture in light of current events rather than the other way around.

But would a Christian do that? Two letters to the editor of the a daily newspaper stressed the writers' belief in theistic evolution, a totally indefensible position, both from the point of scientific evolutions and Creation scientists. They are interpreting Scripture in light of modern scientific theories. Another example of judging the Bible by something inferior to it is the dependance upon psychologists to determine what is right and wrong, what is healthy and what is not. Congress, state legislatures, and courts once looked to the Bible, but now their authority is a psychologist's opinion. As a Biblicist, I am convinced that the Bible is the infallible standard by which everything else should be, and ultimately will be judged.

AS A THIEF IN THE NIGHT. Paul uses the same image here that Jesus used in emphasizing the suddenness of his coming (Matt. 24:43; see also, 2 Pet. 3:10). Signs will precede the coming to confirm the hope of those who keep their eyes open, but the coming itself will be sudden (Matt. 24:32-36; Luke 21:25-30, 35). "The point is that this day will come unexpectedly, not necessarily that it will take place at night. Obviously it will be night in some parts of the world and daytime in other parts."^{cxix}

The Lord's coming, as far as the world is concerned, will be sudden and unexpected, like a thief in the night; but not so for the believer. We are looking for His return. Unbelievers are in the dark: their understanding is darkened (Eph. 4:18; 5:8); they love the darkness (John 3:19-21; Eph. 5:11); they are controlled by the power of darkness (Eph. 6:12); and they are headed for eternal darkness (Matt. 8:12).

But the Christian is associated with the light, for God is light, and Christ is the Light of the world (John 8:12). The Christian is a child of light (Eph. 5:8-14), though at one time he was darkness itself. The change that was wrought is described in 2 Cor. 4:1-6; Col. 1:13; and 1 Peter 2:9. Since Christians belong to the day, they should live in the light and be ready for Christ's return.^{cxx}

5:3 - THEY ARE SAYING. "While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape." The

day of the Lord will come while people are saying “Peace and safety,” not “wars and rumors of wars.” It will be as it was in the days of Noah according to Jesus:

And just as it happened in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: they were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, they were being given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. It was the same as happened in the days of Lot: they were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building; but on the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. "It will be just the same on the day that the Son of Man is revealed (Luke 17:26-30).

What a contrast there will be between watchful believers and those who are caught by surprise at the beginning of the day of God's wrath (Joel 1:15). “Since the latter belong to the sphere of darkness, a metaphor for spiritual blindness, the events of the end time are not discerned or comprehended by them. Unbelievers are spiritually insensitive to the prophetic agenda of God. In contrast, the return of Christ serves as an encouragement to believers to live holy lives (1 John 3:1-3).”^{cxxxix}

DESTRUCTION. This destruction is not total annihilation, but suffering, pain, and devastation associated with judgment. It is the “breaking up of their peace and security through the outpouring of God’s wrath on earth in the Great Tribulation.”^{cxxxix} The destruction will come upon “them” suddenly while people are going about their daily life, as LaHaye and Jenkins sought to portray it in their first book in the *Left Behind* series. “Them” would obviously be those left behind at the time of the Rapture. Paul does not include himself and his readers (or any believers) with the group who would see the day of the Lord, as he did when describing the Rapture (1 Thes. 4:15, 17).

LIKE LABOR PAINS. The destruction will come upon those left behind at the Rapture like labor pains “from which there is no escape to the woman about to give birth. The coming destruction cannot be avoided (see Amos 9:2, 3; Rev. 6:15, 16).”^{cxxxix}

The illustration of the commencement of labor pains suggests both unpredictable suddenness and great personal discomfort (cf. Matt. 24:8; Mark 13:8). The wrath of God that will have been building up over some time will suddenly break forth. The signs of its coming are discernible, even though the moment of its arrival is unpredictable. No more can the world escape the coming wrath of God, when it breaks out on the day of the Lord, than a pregnant woman can escape labor pains.^{cxxxix}

5:4 - YOU ARE NOT IN DARKNESS. “*But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief..*” Darkness is a figure of the moral state of the unbeliever who is cut off from God. These saints at Thessalonica were not “in darkness,” as were the unsaved, with reference to the day of the Lord and other end-time events because Paul had taught them about these things when he was with them. Paul’s readers, then and now, realize that there is a deeper meaning

here. “His readers were not in the same group who would be surprised by **this day**. Their sphere of life was **not in the darkness**, but in the light (cf. Col. 1:13). Instructed Christians should not be surprised by the dawning of **this day** of the Lord; they have been told it is coming. It will not take believers by surprise because they will by then be with the Lord (1 Thes. 4:13-18).”^{cxxxv}

5:5 - SONS OF LIGHT. “...*For you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness.*” Christians are “all sons of light” and the unsaved are children of darkness. Christians live in a totally different sphere of life (or spiritual realm) from non-Christians (Eph. 5:8). Christians live in Jesus Christ, the Light of the World, in Whom there is no darkness at all. That which is said of the Father applies to the Son: “This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). The “sons of the light” are also called “sons of the day.” Paul includes himself in this picture with the word “we.”

5:6 - LET US NOT SLEEP. “*So then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober.*” Sleep here is not physical sleep, nor is it a reference to death, as in 4:13-15. It denotes “spiritual laxity, which characterizes all the unsaved.”^{cxxxvi} The lost are asleep in a morally sense (as in Mark 13:36; Eph. 5:14). Christians who are looking for Christ to come will stay awake and be alert; they will not become drunken like the people of the world. Would you say the evidence in America today points to spiritual apathy or to spiritual watchfulness?

ALERT AND SOBER. The unsaved are asleep to the truth, but that should not be is not so of the Christian, who is “characterized by watchfulness and sober (*nepho*) awareness of how one should act in every circumstance, especially as he lives in the light of the Lord's imminent return.”^{cxxxvii} Christians should be watchful, soberly awaiting the Lord's return (1 Cor. 1:7; Titus 2:13; Heb. 9:28; 2 Peter 3:12) and “self-controlled (1 Thes. 5:6), maintaining self-discipline in view of the great events to come.”^{cxxxviii}

5:7 - THOSE WHO SLEEP. “*For those who sleep do their sleeping at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night.*” Of course, in the modern world with its electricity, computers, sophisticated communication systems, and transportation which gives us access to the work place, many people work at night and sleep in the day-time. But in Paul's day schedules were determined by light and darkness, day and night. “Those who sleep” here are the lost, those who have not placed their faith and trust in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. The unsaved are not alert (awake) to spiritual truth, but are asleep to the things of God and “controlled by forces outside themselves—like those who are **drunk**—which render them unable to respond as they should. These are the normal characteristics of those who live in the sphere of night,”^{cxxxix} This verse should be taken seriously. “The implication is that we as Christians should remain watchful for signs of Christ's return and act in a way that would stand unashamed in the full light of day.”^{cxl}

5:8 - BUT SINCE WE ARE OF THE DAY. Since we, as Christians, are “sons of light and sons of day” - and “not of night nor of darkness” (vs. 5), Paul says, “*let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation.*”

FAITH AND LOVE, AND . . . HOPE. No student of the New Testament can read this without thinking of two other great Pauline passages. The first is Ephesians 6:10-17 and the second is 1 Corinthians 13. These are the three most important virtues of the Christian, as we see in 1 Cor. 13. The breastplate consists of faith and love, the helmet of hope. “These two parts of armor defend the two vital parts—the heart and the head (cf. Isa. 59:17; Eph. 6:14-17). A Christian needs faith in Christ and love for the saints as a protection against the enemy’s attacks. And the hope of salvation (Rom. 13:11) guards the believer’s thoughts from the enemy’s assaults.”^{cxli} For commentary on the well equipped Christian soldier see verse by verse study by this writer one Ephesians in the Bible Notebook.

5:9 - GOD HAS NOT DESTINED US. “*For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ...*” In God’s eternal plan and purpose, born-again believers are not destined for wrath, but for salvation. The word “for” (*hoti*, “because”) points to another reason why believers should prepare themselves.

God’s intention for them is not the **wrath** that will come on the earth in the day of the Lord, but the full **salvation** that will be theirs when the Lord returns for them in the clouds. The wrath of God referred to here clearly refers to the Tribulation; the context makes this apparent. Deliverance from that wrath is God’s appointment for believers. This temporal salvation comes through the Lord Jesus Christ.^{cxlii}

WRATH. Wrath points to the anguish and tribulation associated with the Day of the Lord (v. 3), a horror from which the believer is to be delivered (1:10). Wrath is used eschatologically throughout 1 Thessalonians.

OBTAINING. The verb in Greek can be taken actively (to gain, to win, to possess) or passively (to receive). “This salvation (or, deliverance from the wrath) is obtained by believers’ acceptance of the divine appointment. The context seems to indicate that it involves man’s cooperation with the divine appointment.”^{cxliii}

SALVATION. Christians should fear neither death, the Rapture, the Day of the Lord, or the final judgment, because the Lord Jesus Christ came and died as our Savior, that we might have eternal life through faith in Him.

This verse holds hope and assurance for every believer. It is encouraging to know that we are not destined for wrath.

This text would seem to support the view that believers will be excluded from the tribulation (i.e., the "day of the Lord" or "the wrath to come"). This position is known as pretribulationism and sees the church being "raptured" or taken out of the world prior to the time of God's wrath. Thus the rapture of the church and the return of Christ to the earth are separated as to their chronology and content. Though they are

related aspects of the eschaton, they must be viewed as distinct and separate events.^{cxliv}

5:10 - WHO DIED FOR US. Our Lord Jesus Christ (vs. 9) died for us and was raised again the third day “*so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him.*” It is interesting that Paul does not elaborate on this central doctrine of the Christian faith. The answer to this mystery is that he had probably covered the doctrine of the substitutionary nature of the death of Christ when he started the church and taught them this doctrine until he was forced to leave Thessalonica.

Nowhere is the purpose of His death expressed more succinctly than in John 3:16: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” And nowhere is the significance of the Resurrection expressed more poignantly than in John 11:25-26: “Jesus said to her (Martha), “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?”

WHETHER WE ARE AWAKE OR ASLEEP. What does this mean? Could sleep here refer to physical death, or spiritual death? How can one be spiritually dead and at the same time live with Christ? Some hold that Paul means that people are either spiritually alert (watchful), or spiritually apathetic (lethargic, insensitive). Some interpret this to mean spiritual apathy because

he used the same words for “awake” (*greôgoroômen*) and “asleep” (*katheudoômen*) as he used in verse 6, where they clearly mean spiritually alert and spiritually lethargic. If so, then Paul’s point is that Christians are assured of life **together with Him**, whether they are spiritually watchful or not. That they might live with Christ was His purpose in dying for them. They *will* escape God’s wrath whether they are watchful or not (cf. 1:10).^{cxlv}

However, there is another way of looking at it. If physical death is intended, then it means that all believers will live forever with Jesus Christ whether we are alive at the time or in our graves.^{cxlvi} There is an old saying that may apply here: “I may be dogmatic about this, but I am not going to be Bull-dogmatic about it.”

WE WILL LIVE TOGETHER WITH HIM. This stress the fact that both the living and the deceased believers will be together with Jesus Christ. Throughout the Pauline Epistles the concept of life “in Christ” (“with Him” in this case) was emphasized as an essential aspect of his theology of the church. “The emphasis of these verses is on living a life with Christ which is characterized by the mutual edification of believers.”^{cxlvii} In the New Testament there is sufficient emphasis on ministering to one another for every believer to apply the principles in every day life. Consider some of the ways we may minister to one another:

- (1) Wash one another (John 13:14).
- (2) Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love (Rom. 12:10).

- (3) Give preference to one another (Rom. 12:10); (4) be of the same mind toward one another (Rom. 12:16); (5) do not judge one another (Rom. 14:13).
- (6) Receive one another (Rom. 15:7).
- (7) Admonish one another (Rom. 15:14).
- (8) Bear one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2).
- (9) Comfort and edify (build up) one another (1 Thess. 5:11).
- (10) Confess your trespasses to one another (James 5:16).
- (11) Pray for one another (James 5:16).
- (12) Be hospitable to one another without grumbling (1 Pet. 4:9).
- (13) Be submissive to one another (1 Pet. 5:5)

5:11 - THEREFORE. Building on what he has already said, Paul urged them, “*Encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.*” We have seen that believers should be alert (vs. 6), sober or self-disciplined (vs. 6, 8), and here, encourage and edify (build up) one another (v. 11). Paul had made every effort to encourage them and to build them up when he was with them, and now through this letter he seeks to build on that foundation. He exhorts them to continue to encourage one another and build up one another, just as they were currently doing.

This new information which Paul was inspired to write constituted some serious, and deep doctrinal lessons which would need continual repetition and reemphasis. “It was to be added to the body of truth they already had received, and as they were encouraging each other in their meetings and in private conversations about other revealed truth they were to include this great truth as well. Believers do not need to be hearing something new all the time, but they often do need to remind themselves of what they already know so that they do not forget it.”^{cxlviii}

While we are not given a lot of information about what happened in regular worship services in the early church, this verse gives some insight into those meetings. We know their services included prayer, hymns, worship with tithes and offerings, exhortations to the lost, baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Based on this verse it is obvious that the services also included an opportunity for instruction and for mutual edification among members. As the church moves into the Third Millennium, it should stay with the basics: worship, preaching, teaching, service, mutual encouragement and edification, especially with reference to the hope we have in the return of our Lord.

D. Instruction About Our Duties, 5:12-28.

5:12 - APPRECIATE THOSE. “*But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction...*” This is inspired Scripture, not the rambling of some modern writer trying to fill up a page or reach an assigned number of words. It is essential for Christians to respect ministers who have been called out by the Lord for specific works of ministry. Wiersbe comments:

The church family must have spiritual leadership, and this leadership is vested in the

pastor(s) and deacons. The church may establish whatever organizations it pleases (so long as these groups are organized according to biblical guidelines). The pastor, however, must lead the flock as God directs. Certainly he needs, and wants, the prayers and counsel of the people, especially the elected leaders; but all in the church must respect the leadership that God provides. Christians should: (1) accept their leaders (Eph. 4:7-11; 1 Peter 5:1-5); (2) honor their leaders, recognizing the work they do; (3) love their leaders; (4) and follow their leaders (Heb. 13:7-9, 17, 24). Whenever a church is not united, it is often because the pastor will not take the responsibility of leadership, or because the members will not permit him to lead. Keep in mind that leadership is not dictatorship. The leader sets the example, pays the price, and seeks to help others in Christian love. The dictator uses law, not love; he does not lead, he drives; and his motives are selfish, even if he thinks he is working for the good of the church.^{cxlix}

It is important for church members to respect those leaders who have been called out by their church for service in their church (deacons, teachers, church officers). These people must earn respect, honor, and love by serving the Lord in a manner consistent with the principles set forth in the Bible. These leaders, ministers and lay-workers should work for peace in the church. No lasting growth can be expected apart from the peace God gives, and only the peace He gives honors Him. A formalized ministry, complete with titles, had not yet developed in the early church. Specific titles had not been clearly defined at this stage - that would come in time. There were, however, leaders in each church and church members should respect them. Throughout the history of the church in America church leaders have generally been treated with respect and gratitude because they give themselves to labor among the congregation. There are, unfortunately, many disturbing exceptions. One of the key requirements for leadership is readiness to work for the welfare of the congregation. "The congregation as a whole, however, has the shared responsibility of admonishing the disorderly, encouraging the timid, and helping the weak in faith."^{cl}

There may be a situation in which there are open expressions of love, but with attitudes that wreak of jealousy, envy, and strive beneath the surface. A man told me he had finally gotten fed up with a couple of bickering women who were always declare their love for each other - "You know I love her, but..."; "We are the best of friends, but..." He finally declared, "You don't love her and she doesn't love you. You can't stand each other." A minister of music asked his pastor, "Do you know what is wrong with our choir? We have choir members who can't stand each other, they just barely tolerate each other." These people were, with religious intensity, violating the letter and spirit of this verse.

Leaders should understand that peace and unity are essential to the well being of the church and do everything possible to maintain it. They must also understand that peace and unity do not depend upon their organizational skills, their personality, or their work. Each is a gift from God. There is no peace based primarily upon an unspoken awareness of the need to simply avoid areas of conflict. Peace is more than the absence of conflict. Furthermore, peace is neither a feeling, or the absence of a feeling. The key to unity in a church is (1) God's love for us, (2) our love for God, (3) our love for one another, and (4) sound doctrine. Pastors and teachers must teach sound doctrine in

the church. There will be no unity apart from our agreement on those basic doctrines of the faith.

American liberalism's favorite sociologist/theologian is Tony Campolo, counselor to President Bill Clinton, author, teacher, and preacher. Campolo has refused to state that the only way to go to Heaven is through Jesus Christ. Apparently, the preacher of the Word rejects the Word. Christian leaders cannot compromise on such an important doctrine. However, they must act rather than react. The way we deal with church problem may determine the direction of their church for years to come.

LABOR AMONG YOU. Christian ministry is hard work, often accompanied by physical and mental fatigue, and not infrequently, emotional stress. Here, as elsewhere (Heb. 13:7, 17), we are urged to love and honor those leaders whom God has called to minister to us. Furthermore, the congregation is admonished to know those who labor among them, indicating a closeness of fellowship.

Since Paul used the plural **those** to describe their leaders, there was more than one such person in the Thessalonian church, as in other churches to whom Paul wrote (cf. Phil. 1:1). Paul gave three exhortations to the church regarding their proper attitude toward their leaders. First, they were to **respect** them. This term (*eidennai*) normally means "to know," but here it includes appreciating and respecting them and their work.^{cli}

5:13 - ESTEEM THEM. *"And that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another."* This is the second exhortation. The Greek is strong: Hold them in highest regard. The nature of the elders' work is worthy of esteem, love, and respect. David's attitude toward King Saul is an example for us today. He refused to raise his hand against the Lord's anointed, even when his life was at risk. Many today raise both their hand and their tongue against the Lord's anointed and feel totally justified in doing so. Fellow pastor and long time friend, Andy Myrick told me an old pastor had told him that the people who help you hang your drapes when you move in are going to be the same ones who will try to force you out when they don't get their way. Why? They esteem themselves over everyone else.

This is not to say that the church should tolerate a moral or doctrinal failure. But to react - or, over react - when there is a personality clash or power play, can cause problems for years, and in some cases for decades.

LIVE IN PEACE. This is the third exhortation to the church regarding their proper attitude toward their leaders. This "speaks of peace among the workers, the workers and church members, and the church members."^{clii} This third exhortation results from obeying the former instructions. "The idea here is to maintain rather than to initiate peace. Peaceful conditions existed in the Thessalonian church, but they had to continue. The command is imperative. Much dissension in modern churches is traceable to church members disobeying these commands."^{cliii}

5:14 - WE URGE YOU. This is not a command from Paul and his companions, but a request to the "brethren," to *"admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone."* All Christians, not just the leaders, are urged to adopt a fourfold commitment to one

another:

(1) **Admonish the unruly.** The Greek word means disorderly or idle, with idle being the idea here. These were idle members who had given up working because they expected the Lord's return soon (see 2 Thess. 3:6, 11). They expected to be supported by someone else. They needed to be warned. Sadly, a lot of idle people today need to be admonished to go to work, not because they are expecting the Lord's return, but because they are too lazy to work. There are a lot of able-bodied people who look to the government to take care of them whether they work or not. It is a shame when able-bodied men and women refuse to work as long as the government will tax working people in order to support them - and make no mistake about it, I have in mind the will nots, and not the can nots!

The point of this verse is that they were apparently idle because they were looking for the return of the Lord. Someone asked Abraham Lincoln what he would do if he knew the world would come to an end the next day. He is quoted as saying, "I would plant a tree." If Jesus comes before I die I want Him to find me going about His work.

(2) **Encourage the fainthearted.** The timid (The Greek means literally, "short of soul") need encouragement. These fainthearted people tend to become discouraged and despondent more easily than most. They need cheering up, encouraged to press on, admonished not to give up in their service for the Lord.

(3) **Help the weak.** These are the "babes" in Christ, young Christians, or ones who have not yet learned to trust the Lord as they should for their spiritual needs. "Until they do, they need strong support from other believers. Of course all Christians are weak and need the strength that comes from Christian fellowship, but the spiritually weak need it more than most."^{civ}

(4) **Be patient with everyone.** Does this one not summarize the first three? "While other Christians are the primary focus of patience in this context, this charge is general enough to include all people. This ability to help others who are in some respect not as strong as oneself requires nothing short of the love of God produced by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 13:4; Gal. 5:22)."^{civ}

5:15 - SEEK AFTER THAT WHICH IS GOOD. *"See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people."* Repaying evil with evil is retaliation, the very opposite of patience. Retaliation in any form is never an option for Christians, regardless of the motive of the offending party. Any believer who practices it is in violation of Scripture. The offended believer never has the right to repay evil with evil (Matt. 5:38-48; Rom. 12:17-21; 1 Peter 3:9).

Does this mean that evil is to be ignored? Definitely not. Appropriate action must be taken to stop, or minimize the damage done by the evil work of another. Believers must try to protect the innocent. If a child is being abused God's people must seek to protect him, but we do not do that by injuring that person for the purpose of revenge. "Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the

Lord” (Rom. 12:19).

SEEK AFTER THAT WHICH IS GOOD. Christianity is positive, not negative. Christian ethics focus on positive active (that which is good), not on evil. It is never enough to abstain from evil, as important as that is. The Christian must seek the highest good for others. That is the very heart of agape’ type love in the New Testament. We must earnestly and consistently seek the highest good for “all people.”

5:16 - REJOICE ALWAYS. This is the second shortest verse in the Greek New Testament (see John 11:35. Joy is God’s gift to His people. Christians should rejoice in the Lord (Phil. 3:1), in the Gospel (Acts 13:48), and in others' spiritual growth (3 John 4). Joy and constant prayer (vs. 17) seem to go together (Eph. 6:18; Phil. 4:4, 6).

5:17 PRAY WITHOUT CEASING. “Continual prayer is not prayer that prevails without any interruption, but prayer that continues whenever possible.”^{clvi} This verse does not mean that one is to be praying every minute - no one can do that. It does not even demand that the believer must maintain a constant attitude of prayer - almost as impossible. “The verse does insist upon an uninterrupted practice of prayer regarding all matters. As one prays in this manner, the ability to fulfill the command of v. 18 is realized.”^{clvii} Furthermore, continuous prayer involves an “attitude of openness to God in all situations and a practice of talking to God about all situations.”^{clviii}

5:18 - IN EVERYTHING GIVE THANKS. Thanksgiving “...is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.” In everything? That is what it says! “Romans 8:28 and Ephesians 5:20 teach, as this verse does, that what appears to be adverse is not really so.”^{clix} Does this mean that we are to thank God because bad things happen to us? No. But it does mean that “the Christian is charged with the giving of thanks because of his confidence in the purpose and the providence of God in any and every circumstance of life (cf. Rom 8:28-39).”^{clx}

The two previous commands deal with one’s time (“always” and “continually”); this one deals with his **circumstances**. Christians are to **give thanks** to God in every circumstance of life. The fact that God works everything together for good for those who love Him (Rom. 8:28) is the basis for this entreaty. These three exhortations in verses 16-18 are not just good advice; they are **God’s will for** every Christian. They are not the totality of God’s will, but they are a clear and important segment of it. God’s will means joy, prayer, and thanksgiving for those who are **in Christ Jesus**.^{clxi}

ILLUSTRATIONS: The following letter received by Billy Graham illustrates the spirit of thankfulness:

Dear Rev. Graham: You will probably never see this letter. I know, however, I feel compelled to write to you. I am twenty-eight years old, a victim of cerebral palsy since birth. I have never been able to use my hands. They flop about, getting in my way, breaking things, hitting people and behaving like naughty children. Everything I do is done with my feet. For example, I'm writing this with a ball-point pen between

the toes of my left foot. The right foot isn't much good for anything except turning pages and walking. But that is beside the point. The point is that for many years I have made spending change and bought most of my clothes by selling the fancy needle work that I do.

The Lord has blessed me with many wonderful friends and I have most always found ready sale from my wares, but I am slow and the little money I make is soon gone. I do tithe my earnings but I have long wanted to do more. To be able to give to your Crusade has been an unattainable goal for several years. Because of my speech defect I cannot talk to people about our wonderful Savior or be a soul winner. I felt that through you I might repay a little of my debt to Christ. I am indeed thankful. It is with the greatest of joy that I sign the enclosed \$10 check. I have high hopes that it will not be the last. -- Eleanor A. Drath as Quoted in Daily Observations, Western Recorder, Middle Town, KY, Jan 15, 1959.^{clxii}

There is thankfulness in joy and joy in thankfulness:

Kaufmann Kohler states in the Jewish Encyclopedia that no language has as many words for joy and rejoicing as does Hebrew. In the Old Testament thirteen Hebrew roots, found in twenty-seven different words, are used primarily for some aspect of joy or joyful participation in religious worship. Hebrew religious ritual demonstrates God as the source of joy. In contrast to the rituals of other faiths of the East, Israelite worship was essentially a joyous proclamation and celebration. The good Israelite regarded the act of thanking God as the supreme joy of his life. Pure joy is joy in God as both its source and object. The psalmist says, "Thou dost show me the path of life; in thy presence there is fullness of joy, in thy right hand are pleasures forevermore". (Psalm 16:11).^{clxiii}

5:19 - DO NOT QUENCH THE SPIRIT. The Holy Spirit is often likened to fire in the New Testament (Matt. 3:11; Luke 3:16; Acts 2:3). How does one quench a fire? By throwing water on it. The phrase "Do not quench the Spirit" may be rendered "stop quenching the Spirit," which seems to suggest the cessation of something which was in progress at the time.

ILLUSTRATION:

A friend of Vance Havner coined a word by combining the words squelch and quench. He used to say, "Don't 'squelch' the Spirit." Havner thought it was so descriptive that he often used it in his preaching. Havner said, "We 'squelch' the Spirit in more ways than we suspect. We do so when we stifle the desire to speak or act for the Lord. When we criticize or discourage others by an unspiritual attitude, we 'throw cold water' on their inner fire. We have the Holy Spirit as an honored Guest in every Christian gathering, and He can be grieved very easily. A frivolous attitude, a rebellious frame of mind, or a fed-up complacency will do it."^{clxiv}

The Spirit is a burning presence in the believer's life. It must not be put out. John the Baptist first associated the Spirit with fire (Luke 3:16). The fire of the Spirit was visible at Pentecost.

Fire suggests great power; the tongues of fire at Pentecost suggest speech, powerful speech. In this text Paul was thinking along the same lines. The Spirit, like fire, is not to be quenched or put out; specifically, His gifts of speech, either for prayer (v 17) or for proclamation (v 19) are to be accepted and used. They must not be neglected and silenced. The Spirit does not overwhelm the church with the gifts of speech. The church must cooperate if the gifts are to be fully used. The Spirit helps the church to pray (Ro 8:15,26-27). He gives some the gift of prophecy (1 Co 12:28-31; 14:1). In the present text, Paul simply reminded the Thessalonian church to be open to the Spirit's leadership in prayer and proclamation. But how can the church be sure that a sermon is really from God? We are to test prophetic messages. Here Paul did not specify what criteria are to be used for the testing. The criteria are found in 1 Co 12--14.^{clxv}

The Holy Spirit, the divine Author of this epistle, inspired Paul to caution believers against throwing cold water on the work of the Holy Spirit. In other words, we must not throw cold water on those who, with “extraordinary inspiration from the Spirit, stand up to speak in tongues, or reveal mysteries, or pray. Perhaps Paul was warning the Thessalonian ministers and elders, who, not receiving much respect themselves, might tend to resent the more dramatic gifts of others. Albeit, caution was needed (see 5:21).”^{clxvi} It is very important for the believer to keep this warning in mind at all times.

This caution against quenching the Holy Spirit applies to the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in one's private life as well as in the assembly of believers. The present tense of the command means that he is exhorting them to stop bringing the working of the Holy Spirit to a halt - which some were doing. It is encouraging to note that God gave them repeated opportunities to be used by His Spirit (see also 4:8). “The metaphor ‘quench’ suggests that the activity of the Spirit conveys a warmth, even a fire within a fellowship. When the Spirit's fire is not quenched, one will find a Christian, a fellowship, characterized by the positive aspects of 5:12-26.”^{clxvii}

There are two specific ways in which believers can hinder the work of the Holy Spirit. First, we quench the Holy Spirit by refusing to yield to His leadership - we do not walk in the Spirit. Second, we grieve the Holy Spirit when we sin (Eph. 4:20). God sent His Spirit to indwell believers once for all time, whether we call it the gift of the Holy Spirit, baptism of the Holy Spirit, or the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. But we need a daily filling of the Holy Spirit in order to effectively witness for Him (Acts 1:8) and serve Him.

Christians must get their theology of the Holy Spirit from the Scripture, and be very cautious about accepting extra-biblical “testimonies” about His ministry in the life of the believer. One pastor, preaching in a church where there had been some problems with a charismatic element, made the statement that he would never want to extinguish a fire the Holy Spirit started. There were several

hardy “Amen.” He quickly added, “But I will be the first in line to try to put out a wildfire!” There were no “Amen” this time.

There is grave danger in quenching the Holy Spirit, but there may be as serious a problem in attributing to the Holy Spirit behavior, and/or experiences that are not absolutely and totally in line with the New Testament. After all, the Holy Spirit is the divine Author of all Scripture and He cannot change. James wrote, “Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, **with whom there is no variation** or shifting shadow” (James 1:17). There is no variation in any member of the Trinity.

5:20 - DO NOT DESPISE PROPHETIC UTTERANCES. The gift of prophecy was the ability to receive and communicate direct revelations from God before the New Testament was completed (1 Cor. 13:8). Sometimes these revelations involved foretelling future events (Acts 11:28), but more often it was a matter of forth-telling divine truth (Acts 13:2). At that time, before the New Testament was completed there would have been questions that required answers that would only come from God. Paul wrote to the Corinthian church that he had that gift. With the completion of the New Testament Scripture, the canonization of the books of the Bible, and certainly with the publication of the Bible since the invention of the printing press the main focus of the preacher of the Gospel today is in proclaiming the Word of God.

There is a nagging question here: Why did Paul caution them not to despise prophetic utterances? Is it possible that there may have been some in the early church who were discounting the place of prophecy, or the prophetic office in the early church? “Perhaps people who had not received prophetic revelations were teaching their own views of such things as the Second Advent, with the result that prophetic revelations tended to be evaluated on superficial terms (e.g., the eloquence of the speaker) instead of on the basis of their intrinsic authority.”^{clxviii}

5:21 - EXAMINE EVERYTHING CAREFULLY. The people in Berea examined the Scriptures daily to see whether or not Paul was preaching the truth (Acts 17:11). He urges these believers in Thessalonica (with application to us today) to examine “everything carefully.” That includes the “prophetic utterances” (public preaching or proclamation of revelations from God) of verse 20. Attentive hearing (hearing with a mind and will to obey) must be “counterbalanced with a coordinate truth; ‘test all things; hold fast what is good,’ i.e., what is true. The verb ‘test’ signifies ‘to approve after testing.’” The aim then is to put into practice what God has said. It is never enough just to hear God’s word; we must act upon it (cf. James 1:22-25).^{clxix}

The warning is appropriate here because prophecy is subject to misuse. False prophets have always been a danger to God’s people. Anything God produces Satan will counterfeit, and there is no exception with prophecy. A false prophet may seek to lead the church astray, but true prophecy should never be despised, resented, or ignored. Biblical preaching is subject to examination - all we have to do is search the Scriptures to see if what we hear is biblical. Extra-biblical proclamations do not lend themselves to the same scrutiny - “God told me to say...”, or “I have a ‘word of knowledge’ from the Lord.” The one thing we can do is to be sure that what we hear is consistent with the Word

of God.

We should not discourage the full use of the gifts of the Spirit; but we should be aware that some might not be genuine and therefore should be avoided. Some members of the church are given the power to tell whether or not it was the Spirit of God speaking through a person (1 Cor. 12:10; 14:29; 1 John 4:1).^{clxx}

HOLD FAST TO THAT WHICH IS GOOD. We are to “examine everything carefully” and reject that which is false, but “hold fast to that which is good.” “Joined with the previous words, this statement means that the church should keep whatever prophecies (or other speakings) prove to be good.”^{clxxi} That which is good is that which is consistent with the Word of God. That we should retain and apply.

5:22 -ABSTAIN FROM EVERY FORM OF EVIL. Abstain from all appearance of evil. Christians must avoid those who *appear* to be Spirit-inspired prophets. “However specious the form or outward appearance of such prophets and their prophesyings, Christians are to avoid it—for the falseness is a kind or form of evil.”^{clxxii} Counterfeit teaching and living should be rejected and false prophets avoided.

Not only should pseudoprophecies be discarded but also, as Paul broadened his warning, **every kind** and form of **evil** should be avoided. What may only appear to be bad also falls under this warning. However, “while believers should abstain from actions which will knowingly offend others, it is not always possible to abstain from everything which may appear evil to a narrow and foolish judgment” (Hiebert, *The Thessalonian Epistles*, p. 249).^{clxxiii}

5:23 -MAY THE GOD OF PEACE. “*Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” The God of the Bible is “the God of peace.” Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace. Those who go to the Father through the Son will know the peace that passes all understanding. These saints at Thessalonica were enjoying the greatest peace they had ever known and God was the source of their peace.

SANCTIFY YOU ENTIRELY. The NIV has “May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through.” To sanctify means to set apart. God sets us apart for His glory and for His use when we are born again, and from that point on the Holy Spirit seeks to nurture us and develop us toward spiritual maturity. Salvation is wholly of God and Sanctification is wholly of God. We cannot produce Sanctification any more than we can produce Justification. Whereas Justification is once for all, Sanctification is continuous and progressive. “God’s sanctification is for our total being, outward and inward. He wants to make us wholly holy. Sanctification is salvation presently at work in us leading us to obey Him and preparing us for the final judgment.”^{clxxiv}

SPIRIT AND SOUL AND BODY. A human being consists of body, soul, and spirit. The body, the visible part of man, may be thought as the space suit we inhabit while on planet Earth. The soul

is the conscious part of the individual, involving the intellect, the emotions, and the volition (mind, feelings, and will). The spirit is the inner person. If God is in our spirit we have eternal life, but if He is not in our spirit, we are spiritually dead. The body is alive and the soul (mind, emotions, and will) is alive, but the real person is dead.

If the spirit is dead, the body receives its commands from the soulish part of the individual and is able to function quite well in this world - after all, the world is user friendly to those who are of the world. But when one is saved - and as he is being sanctified - God ministers to and through the spirit, which is now home to the Holy Spirit - and our regenerated, Spirit-filled spirit becomes the command center for the total person. The Holy Spirit, when permitted to do His work, will influence our spirit and, in turn our spirit influences our soul (mind, emotions, and volition) which directs the body in our daily walk with the Lord. To summarize,

The spirit enables man to contact the divine Spirit and is that part of man quickened by God's Spirit at the time of regeneration (John 3:6; Rom. 8:16). The soul of man is man's personality and inward, animating essence. Man's body, of course, is man's physical being. God works from the inside out to sanctify one's entire being.^{clxxv}

We should avoid overdoing this concept of body, mind, and spirit. Man is described in other places in the Bible as having two parts—body and spirit (James 2:26; 2 Cor. 7:1), or body and soul (Matt. 10:28). Also, man is said to have a heart, mind, conscience, and other parts.

Paul was probably using the three terms here to identify the different aspects of personhood he wished to emphasize. The *spirit* is the highest and most unique part of man that enables him to communicate with God. The *soul* is the part of man that makes him conscious of himself; it is the seat of his personality. The *body*, of course, is the physical part through which the inner person expresses himself and by which he is immediately recognized.^{clxxvi}

WITHOUT BLAME. This states the goal in God's sanctifying His children - that we might be "without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Paul's great concern was that the Thessalonian saints would be kept blameless by God in their relationships with Him in their inner personal lives, and in their social contacts with other people.

5:24 - FAITHFUL IS HE. "*Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass.*" The same God who calls the Christian will bring to completion the work He has begun in him (Phil. 1:6). He is the only One Who can perform this, and He does so through the ministry of the Holy Spirit who indwells each believer.

Theology is the study of God, yet we can neither define, not explain God. We may, however, study His attributes and as we study as many attributes of God as we can identify, we grow in our understanding of our Lord. For example, we know that God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. God is holy. God is love. And God is faithful. If He was not faithful in all things, we could not trust Him to save us and keep us.

Because God is faithful, we know we can trust Him to save us when we believe in Jesus Christ (John 3:16). We can trust Him to forgive the sins of His children when they repent: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). We can depend upon to sanctify us through the work of the Holy Spirit. “God does not save a person by grace and then leave him alone to work out his Christian growth by works (Gal. 3:3). God calls us and justifies us by grace; He sanctifies by grace too.

5:25 - BRETHREN, PRAY FOR US. Interestingly, this is the first time in the letter that the greeting “brethren” is used at the beginning of a sentence in the Greek, though the word appears 15 times all together in 1 Thessalonians. “It is emphatic in this position. The force of the present tense here is a strong ‘keep on praying.’”^{clxxvii} Paul made the same request in the epistles to the Romans, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, and in 2 Corinthians. “Interestingly, he omitted such a request in 1 Corinthians and Galatians, epistles of rebuke and censure.”^{clxxviii}

Paul urgently requests the prayers of his brethren in the church at Thessalonica. Missionaries today often tell us they appreciate the special offerings, but what they really depend on is the prayers of Christians back home as the minister on the mission field. There is no doubt that Paul sensed this same appreciation for their prayers, and that he attributed much of his success on his missionary journeys to the prayers of these Thessalonian saints, as well as believers in other places. The Apostle Paul understood both his personal insufficiency and God’s sufficiency (cf. 2 Cor. 3:5). Therefore, he requests prayer for himself and for his fellow workers.

5:26 - GREET ALL THE BRETHREN WITH A HOLY KISS. The “kiss” refers to the common greeting of the day among the Jewish people (Luke 7:45; 22:48). It was adopted by early Christians as a symbol of the special affection which should exist among believers. The emphasis, even in greetings, should be on holiness of conduct. Paul uses the phrase in Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; and 2 Cor. 13:12.

The kiss on the cheek, common in Paul’s culture, is still used as a greeting in many cultures today. In Paul’s day the men greeted other men this way, and the women did the same with other women. Such a kiss communicated personal affection, not romantic love. J. B. Phillips paraphrased this verse for 20th-century English readers: “Give a handshake all around among the brotherhood.” Today in the western culture a pat on the back, a handshake, or a hug may be used as a symbol of fellowship. My sister Linda recently returned from London and Paris with a group of her gifted students. After she hugged me, she said, “Oh, let me show you how they greet each other in Paris.” She leaned first to one side and gave a quick “smack” in the air about four to six inches from my cheek.

5:27 - HAVE THIS LETTER READ TO ALL. “*I adjure you by the Lord to have this letter read to all the brethren.*” The final exhortation in this letter urges the individual or individuals to whom it was addressed to have it read to all the brethren in the Thessalonica. Without a doubt, all of the Pauline Epistles would have been read before the entire congregation, a copy (or copies) would be

made, and then the letter would be sent on to other churches to be read and copied.

Paul's words are surprisingly strong: "I adjure you by the Lord," in effect places them under divine obligation to have the letter read aloud before the congregation. This has led some to infer that God would discipline them if they not done so. "Were there some problems in the church that Paul wanted to get at by having everyone hear his words? Or did he realize that this epistle was written under divine inspiration and was therefore spiritually valuable? Perhaps he had both motives."^{clxxix}

5:28 - THE GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST BE WITH YOU. They had been saved by the grace of God, and they were being sanctified by His Grace. The Bible teaches that "the just shall live by faith." You cannot live by faith except by the grace of God. The grace of "our Lord Jesus Christ" is the grace of God because He is one with the Father (John 1:1ff). All of Paul's epistles conclude with a benediction invoking the grace of God.

All believers have experienced the grace of God and all believers are being sanctified by His grace. Therefore, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ" is always with us. For that reason some might conclude that this is simply an epistolary benediction. More than likely, however, Paul is concerned that believers be conscious of presence of God's grace at all times, and the sufficiency of His grace in every area and every issue of the Christian life.

END NOTES

-
- i. International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, QuickVerse, Parsons Technology.
 - ii. Holman Bible Dictionary, QuickVerse, Parsons Technology.
 - iii. Holman Bible Dictionary.
 - iv. Holman Bible Dictionary.
 - v. Eason Bible Dictionary
 - vi. Warren Wiersbe.
 - vii. Holman Bible Dictionary.
 - viii. Holman Bible Dictionary.
 - ix. Sanders, Johnny L., UNDEFEATED: Finding Peace in a World Full of Trouble, Brentwood, Columbus, Ga. 1998, pp. 247.
 - x. Believers Study Bible, QuickVerse, Parsons Technology.
 - xi. Believer's Study Bible.
 - xii. Polycarp, Master Christian Library, Version 5, AGES Software, 1997.
 - xiii. Believer's Study Bible.
 - xiv. Sanders, UNDEFEATED.
 - xv. Disciples Study Bible, QuickVerse, Parsons Technology, Version 6.
 - xvi. Believer's Study Bible.
 - xvii. Ryrie Study Bible, QuickVerse, Parsons Technology.
 - xviii. Wiersbe, Warren, Expository Outlines on the New Testament QuickVerse, Parsons

Technology.

xix. Believer's Study Bible.

xx. The Victor Bible Background Commentary, New Testament, QuickVerse, Parsons.

xxi. Warren Wiersbe, Expository Outlines of the New Testament..

xxii. Believer's Study Bible.

xxiii. Disciples Study Bible.

xxiv. Kirk, Russell, Rights and Duties, Spense Publishing Company, Dallas, 1997, pp. 286, p. 68.

xxv. Kirk, p. 40.

xxvi. Kirk, P. 40.

xxvii. Kirk, p. 62.

xxviii. Sowell, Thomas, Conquest and Cultures.

xxix. Sowell, p. 80.

xxx. Kirk, p. 31.

xxxi. Broadman Press, 9/14/99.

xxxii. Victor.

xxxiii. Disciples Study Bible.

xxxiv. Believer's Study Bible.

xxxv. Wiersbe.

xxxvi. Robertson, A. T., Word Pictures in the New Testament, QuickVerse, Parsons.

xxxvii. New Commentary on the Whole Bible, QuickVerse, Parsons.

xxxviii. Robertson.

xxxix. New Commentary on the Whole Bible.

xl. Wiersbe.

-
- xli. Robertson.
 - xlii. Bible Illustrator, Draper.
 - xliii. Bible Illustrator, Hewett.
 - xliv. The Bible Knowledge Commentary.
 - xlv. The Bible Illustrator.
 - xlvi. Robertson.
 - xlvii. Ryrie Study Bible.
 - xlviii. Bible Knowledge Commentary.
 - xlix. Kirk, 71.
 - l. Believer's Study Bible.
 - li. Wiersbe.
 - lii. Ryrie Study Bible.
 - liii. Robertson.
 - liv. Wiersbe.
 - lv. Robertson.
 - lvi. Discipleship Study Bible.
 - lvii. The Bible Knowledge Commentary.
 - lviii. Believer's Study Bible.
 - lix. Disciples Study Bible.
 - lx. Robertson.
 - lxi. The Bible Knowledge Commentary.
 - lxii. The Bible Knowledge Commentary.
 - lxiii. Robertson.

-
- lxiv. The Bible Knowledge Commentary.
- lxv. Believer's Study Bible.
- lxvi. Ryrie Study Bible.
- lxvii. Wiersbe.
- lxviii. Robertson.
- lix. The New Commentary on the Whole Bible.
- lxx. Believers Study Bible.
- lxxi. Robertson.
- lxxii. The New Commentary on the Whole Bible.
- lxxiii. Wiersbe.
- lxxiv. Wiersbe.
- lxxv. Disciples Study Bible.
- lxxvi. Wiersbe.
- lxxvii. Robertson.
- lxxviii. Wiersbe.
- lxxix. Ryrie Study Bible.
- lxxx. Wiersbe.
- lxxxi. Robertson.
- lxxxii. Disciple's Study Bible.
- lxxxiii. Wiersbe.
- lxxxiv. Disciples Study Bible.
- lxxxv. Believers Study Bible.
- lxxxvi. The New Commentary on the Whole Bible.

-
- lxxxvii. The Bible Knowledge Commentary.
- lxxxviii. The New Commentary on the Whole Bible.
- lxxxix. Wiersbe.
- xc. The New Commentary on the Whole Bible.
- xc. The Bible Knowledge Commentary.
- xcii. The Bible Knowledge Commentary.
- xciii. The Bible Illustrator.
- xciv. The Bible Illustrator.
- xcv. The New Commentary on the Whole Bible.
- xcvi. The Bible Knowledge Commentary.
- xcvii. Disciples Study Bible.
- xcviii. The Bible Knowledge Commentary.
- xcix. The Bible Knowledge Commentary.
- c. The Bible Knowledge Commentary.
- ci. The Bible Knowledge Commentary.
- cii. The New Commentary on the Whole Bible.
- ciii. The Bible Knowledge Commentary.
- civ. Victor Background Commentary.
- cv. Believer's Study Bible.
- cvi. The New Commentary on the Whole Bible.
- cvii. The New Commentary on the Whole Bible.
- cviii. Disciples Study Bible.
- cix. MacArthur, John, The Second Coming, p. 200.

cx. MacArthur, p. 220.

cxi. MacArthur, p. 220.

cxii. MacArthur, p. 220.

cxiii. Believers Study Bible.

cxiv. The Bible Knowledge Commentary.

cxv. The New Commentary on the Whole Bible.

cxvi. The New Commentary on the Whole Bible.

cxvii. The Bible Knowledge Commentary.

cxviii. The Bible Knowledge Commentary.

cxix. The Bible Knowledge Commentary.

cxx. Robertson.

cxxi. The Bible Knowledge Commentary.

cxxii. The New Commentary on the Whole Bible.

cxxiii. The New Commentary on the Whole Bible.

cxxiv. The New Commentary on the Whole Bible.

cxxv. The New Commentary on the Whole Bible.

cxxvi. Believers Study Bible.

cxxvii. The Bible Knowledge Commentary.

cxxviii. Disciples Study Bible.

cxxix. The Bible Knowledge Commentary.

cxxx. The Bible Knowledge Commentary.

cxxxi. Believers Study Bible.

cxxxii. The Bible Knowledge Commentary.

cxxxiii. The New Commentary on the Whole Bible.
cxxxiv. The Bible Knowledge Commentary.

cxxxv. The Bible Knowledge Commentary.
cxxxvi. The New Commentary on the Whole Bible.
cxxxvii. Believers Study Bible.
cxxxviii. The Bible Knowledge Commentary.
cxxxix. The Bible Knowledge Commentary.
cxl. The New Commentary on the Whole Bible.
cxli. The New Commentary on the Whole Bible.
cxlii. The Bible Knowledge Commentary.
cxliii. The New Commentary on the Whole Bible.
cxliv. Believers Study Bible.
cxlv. The Bible Knowledge Commentary.
cxlvi. The New Commentary on the Whole Bible.
cxlvii. Believers Study Bible.
cxlviii. The Bible Knowledge Commentary.
cxlix. Wiersbe.

cl. Disciples Study Bible.
cli. The Bible Knowledge Commentary.
clii. The New Commentary on the Whole Bible.
cliii. The Bible Knowledge Commentary.
cliv. The Bible Knowledge Commentary.
clv. The Bible Knowledge Commentary.

-
- clvi. The New Commentary on the Whole Bible.
- clvii. Believers Study Bible.
- clviii. Disciples Study Bible
-
- clix. The New Commentary on the Whole Bible.
- clx. Believers Study Bible.
- clxi. The Bible Knowledge Commentary.
- clxii. The Bible Illustrator.
- clxiii. The Bible Illustrator.
- clxiv. The Bible Illustrator.
- clxv. Disciples Study Bible.
- clxvi. The New Commentary on the Whole Bible.
- clxvii. Believers Study Bible.
- clxviii. The Bible Knowledge Commentary.
- clxix. Believers Study Bible.
- clxx. The New Commentary on the Whole Bible.
- clxxi. The New Commentary in the Whole Bible.
- clxxii. The New Commentary on the Whole Bible.
- clxxiii. The Bible Knowledge Commentary.
- clxxiv. Disciples Study Bible.
- clxxv. The New Commentary on the Whole Bible.
- clxxvi. The Bible Knowledge Commentary.
- clxxvii. The Bible Knowledge Commentary.
- clxxviii. The New Commentary on the Whole Bible.

clxxix. The Bible Knowledge Commentary.