

1 Thessalonians

A Verse-by-Verse Commentary

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Chapter 1

Verse 1

¹Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul. The author of this epistle was the Apostle Paul, formerly Saul of Tarsus before his conversion. He was first mentioned in Acts 7:58-8:1 in relation to the murder of Dn Stephen. Saul was then a young member (he was a Pharisee) of the Sanhedrin that tried Stephen for his evangelism in Jerusalem. In that kangaroo court, Stephen though a defendant acted more as a plaintiff when he delivered a most cutting sermon against the Sanhedrin – the same Sanhedrin – that had put the Lord Jesus Christ to death (read Acts 7:51-52). That certainly raised the blood pressure of his false accusers. When the high priest and his bloodthirsty pack stoned Stephen to death, Saul was made caretaker of their clothes. Although Saul did not participate in the actual stoning of Stephen, he had consented to that heinous and criminal act and equally culpable. Saul later went on a rampage against the Jewish Christian church, and “made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison” (Acts 8:3). But by the grace of God, “Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord” was met by the Lord Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus, and there was gloriously converted by the Lord Himself (Acts 9:1-6; read Paul’s very own testimony of his conversion experience in Gal 1:11-16). The Pharisee Saul became the Apostle Paul (Acts 13:9) and became the first and greatest missionary the Church has ever seen. This same Apostle also wrote the book of Romans, 1-2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1-2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, and possibly Hebrews as well.

and Silvanus and Timothy. “Silvanus” is the Roman form of Silas’s name (cf Acts 15:22). He was with Paul during his 2nd missionary journey which saw the founding of the Thessalonian church (Acts 15:40). Timothy was Paul’s spiritual son, having been brought to Christ by Paul himself (1 Tim 1:2, Acts 13-14). Paul saw the ministerial potential of young Timothy and recruited him into his missionary team (Acts 16:1-3). Timothy had earlier been sent to minister to the Thessalonian church in Paul’s absence (1 Thess 3:2). He later returned with good news about the spiritual health of the church there (1 Thess 3:6). Silvanus and Timothy were well known in the church members in Thessalonica.

unto the church of the Thessalonians. The Apostle Paul had intended to go Asia, and eastward to preach the Word, but was redirected to Macedonia (ie, westward) by the Holy Spirit (Acts 16:6-10). After a difficult but fruitful ministry in Philippi (Acts

16:12-40), Paul visited Thessalonica (get a map and locate Thessalonica). Unlike Philippi, Thessalonica, being the capital city of Macedonia and located along the busy trade route of the Via Egnatia, had a large enough Jewish population for a synagogue (Acts 17:1). Paul spent three Sabbaths reasoning with the Jews that Jesus indeed is the Christ (Acts 17:2-3). Not a few believed – some Jews, many God-fearing Greeks, and even certain prominent women (Acts 17:4). The unbelieving Jews were extremely unhappy with the evangelistic success of Paul, and incited a group of gangsters to haul Jason and some of the other converts to court. They were accused of turning the world “upside down” (Acts 17:6). After Jason had paid the security deposit, he and the Christians were released. The dangerous situation necessitate Paul and Silas’s departure from Thessalonica by night to Berea (Acts 17:10). Despite the absence of Paul, the new believers congregated and formed a church (*ekklesia*). As the *ekklesia*, they were a called out people, separated unto God to evangelise to the world that there is but one living and true God, and that only in Jesus Christ can one find salvation.

which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ. The church is no ordinary assembly of people, but a special fellowship of God’s people saved by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. This grace is God’s unmerited favour in saving undeserving sinners like us (Eph 2:8-9), and the peace is the reconciliation with God the Father that we have received through Christ His Son (Rom 5:1).

It is interesting to note that Paul here did not mention his apostleship unlike in some of his other epistles (eg, Roman, Corinthian, Galatian, Ephesian, Colossian). This was probably because the Thessalonian church did not doubt but readily recognized Paul’s apostleship. It is also likely that unlike the Corinthian or Galatian churches, the church in Thessalonica was free from false apostles or prophets who undermined the truth that Paul preached by questioning his apostolic authority.

Verse 2

²We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers;

Paul is very thankful and keeps on thanking God for the spiritual growth of the Thessalonian church. This no doubt was in response to the encouraging report brought to him by Timothy in 3:6, “But now when Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings of your faith and charity, and that ye have good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us, as we also to see you.” What good news did Timothy exactly bring? The next verse tells: their work of faith, labour of love, and patience of hope.

Verse 3

³Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father;

Remembering without ceasing. This clause parallels the sentiments express in the previous verse where Paul said “*We give thanks to God always ...*”. Thankfulness to God is characterised by remembrance and not forgetfulness (Deut 8:10-11). Paul does

not forget the good work of God in the lives of the Thessalonian believers in imparting to them the primary virtues of faith, hope and love (1 Cor 13:13). The Colossians too were commended for exhibiting these same three Christian virtues (Col 1:4-5). It is without saying that the virtues of faith, hope and love are a must for every church that bears the name of Christ.

your work of faith. This is faith that produces work (Jas 2:18). True faith will result in a changed life of good works (Phil 2:12-13). Paul was definitely not saying that good works leads to saving faith for this would contradict his clear words of salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone in Gal 3:16 and Eph 2:8, quite apart from the works of law.

and labour of love. This is a love that prompts labour. It is a love that constrains us to serve the Lord Jesus Christ unconditionally (2 Cor 5:14). True service to the Lord should not be mercenary but filial. It is faithful service rendered to the heavenly Father out of filial love of blood bought children.

and patience of hope. This is a hope that inspires patience. The word “patience” here is the Greek *hupomone* which speaks of an indomitable spirit which will never say die or will never give up. It speaks of super endurance (cf Matt 24:13, Jas 1:2-3).

in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father. Of course, all these spiritual graces of faith, hope and love can only be manifested in a God-given life that is sourced in Christ (Col 2:7-10).

Verse 4

⁴Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.

Knowing. Paul rejoices over the knowledge he had that the saints in Thessalonica were God’s chosen ones. The word “knowing” (*eidotes*) speaks of factual knowledge. The proof of their salvation (ie, the evidence of faith, hope and love in their lives) was so clear that Paul had to conclude that they were indeed members of the family of God.

brethren beloved. The Apostle Paul addressed the believers in Thessalonica as “brethren.” Of course this does not mean that the church in Thessalonica was of the Brethren denomination. The term “brethren” or “brothers” (generically including “sisters”) refer to fellow Christians and they are dearly loved by God and all who share the same faith. Paul used it 16 times in 1 Thess (1:4; 2:1,9,14,17; 3:7; 4:1,10,13; 5:1,4,12,14,25,26,27) and 7 times in 2 Thess (1:3; 2:1,13,15; 3:1,6,13).

your election of God. The joy of salvation that Paul expresses is of course due to the fact that salvation from beginning to end is God’s work, and if God is the author and finisher of the faith of His people, none of the elect can ever lose his salvation. God’s election assures the believer that once he is saved, he will remain saved for God cannot fail. Paul knows the doctrine of election very well. The following is a synopsis of Paul’s teaching on election: (1) It is from God’s timeless past (Eph 1:4-5). (2) It can be seen in life (1 Thess 1:4). (3) It is unconditional and not due to foreseen works or foreseen faith (1 Cor 1:27, 28; 4:7; Eph 1:4; 2:8, Rom 9:16). (4) It is just and fair (Rom 9:14-15). (5) It covers not just Gentiles but also Jews (Rom 10:12-13). (6) It is unchangeable and efficacious (Rom 8:28-30, John 10:28-29). (7) It affects the manner

of life of a person (Eph 1:4). (8) It will redound to the glory of God (Eph 1:4-6). *It is important to note that it is God's election of man, and not man's election of God (John 15:16).*

Verse 5

⁵For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.

For our gospel came not unto you in word only. The gospel that Paul preached is the gospel of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ “according to the Scriptures;” the only message that can save a man from sin and eternal destruction (1 Cor 15:1-4, 1 Tim 2:5, Acts 4:12). As Christians we are responsible to preach the unadulterated gospel of Christ faithfully in obedience to Christ’s first commandment to the Church – the Great Commission of Matt 28:18-20.

but also in power. The power that converts the soul resides in the Gospel and in the God of the Gospel alone. The word “power” here is the same word used in Rom 1:16 and 1 Cor 1:18 namely, the Greek *dunamis*. This power is both destructive and constructive. It destroys sin and builds up faith. It caused the Thessalonians to burn their deadly idols to serve the living and true God (1 Thess 1:9).

and in the Holy Ghost. However, the responsibility of regenerating a sinner’s heart and converting the soul is the Holy Spirit’s (John 3:3-7, Tit 3:5). The Holy Spirit uses the word that is preached to convict the sinner of his helplessness and hopelessness without Christ, and implants the faith that he might believe (Rom 10:17, Eph 2:8-9, Phil 1:12-13).

and in much assurance. The word *plerophoria* (full assurance) is speaks of full conviction, or absolute certainty of salvation (Heb 10:22-23, Rom 4:21). The Holy Spirit within born again saints doubly assures God’s people that He who has saved them will save them to the very end.

as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. There were all kinds of false itinerant preachers in those days. There were the false evangelists (Gal 1:6-7), false apostles (2 Cor 11:13), and false teachers (1 Tim 1:6-7, 2 Pet 2:1-3). The Thessalonian Christians knew very well that Paul and his associates were not such types. Paul and his co-workers truly did their work because they truly love the Lord, His Word, and His people, and not for vainglory nor for money (cf 2 Cor 12:14-15).

Verse 6

⁶And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost:

And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord. The Thessalonians became followers of Paul because Paul followed Christ (cf 1 Cor 11:1). The word “followers” is the Greek *mimetai* where we get the English word “mimic.” They became imitators of Paul who was a walking, breathing, living model of what it means to be a follower of Christ.

having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost. They were not like the seed that is sown on stony places (Matt 13:20-21). They were very willing to endure tribulation and persecution for their faith. Despite the hardships and sufferings they faced, they were not filled with anger but with the joy that is imparted by the Holy Spirit. They truly practiced what James commanded in his epistle in 1:2-4, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into diverse temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."

Verse 7

⁷So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia.

Their good example of joyful endurance in times of persecution and hardship became known to other believers in the region of Macedonia (Northern Greece) and of Achaia (Southern Greece). Despite their poverty and want, they were not selfish but generously gave to other Christians to help them in their need (2 Cor 8:1-2).

Verse 8

⁸For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing.

The word of the Lord echoed forth not just in Macedonia and Achaia, but also the regions beyond. Since they were located along the Egnatian Highway that linked East to West, they must have been living and speaking testimonies of God's wonderful grace in their lives to travelers who came into contact with them. These visitors then carried the gospel message to their respective places, and the "good news" spread like wildfire. Their evangelistic work was so effective, and broadcast so widely that even before Paul got to preach in a place, the people there had already heard of it through the Thessalonians. They were indeed fulfilling Jesus' missions mandate as laid down in Acts 1:8. They were a missionary church.

Verse 9

⁹For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God;

For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you. It was customary for missionaries to give a report of their work (Acts 15:27), but for Paul, Silas and Timothy, they found that people were already doing this for them. Indeed, the power of the gospel was manifested in the dramatic change of lives in the people of Thessalonica who had repented from idolatry to serve the living and true God. This reveals that the Thessalonian church comprised mainly of Gentile believers, some of whom were proselytes ("devout Greeks," Acts 17:4), but the majority were heathen.

and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God. Believing in Christ demands separation, ie, to turn our backs on Satan, sin, and the world towards the living and true God and to serve Him and obey His Word. The doctrine of separation is taught throughout the Thessalonian epistles (1 Thess 1:9; 4:5,7,12;

5:5,22; 2 Thess 3:6,14). Similarly, the doctrine of association, ie, to have close fellowship and communion with God and His Word is taught throughout the Thessalonian epistles (1 Thess 1:6; 3:12; 4:1; 5:11; 2 Thess 1:11-12; 2:13-15; 3:7). (Note the order of the two adjectives “living” and “true” that are used to describe God: it is “living and true” and not as commonly heard “true and living.” The fact that He is living makes Him true. So when you use these adjectives in your prayers, remember to follow Paul, “living and true God” and not “true and living God.”)

Verse 10

¹⁰And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.

And to wait for his Son from heaven. This echoes what the angels declared to the disciples at the ascension of Christ: “Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11). The 2nd coming of Christ is a fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith. That Christ will return one day, and soon, is the blessed hope of the saints for He will consummate the redemptive mission He accomplished at His 1st coming.

whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus. The blessed hope is not a false hope. We have the sure confidence that Jesus will indeed return because He is not dead but alive for He is risen from the dead. This is a biblical and historical fact (read Paul’s defence of the resurrection in 1 Cor 15).

which delivered us from the wrath to come. Does the “wrath” here refer to a present or future wrath? Amillennialists (ie, those who do not believe that there will be a specific 7-year Tribulation period and a 1,000 year reign of Christ on earth after His return) generally explain this “wrath” in the general sense of God’s present anger against unbelievers. However, the “wrath” here is qualified by the phrase “to come.” This seems to point to a specific time of wrath that is yet future, and not now generally experienced by a sin-cursed world. Also, the word “wrath” is written with the definite article (“the”). If it was a simply a general wrath, Paul would probably have expressed it without the article. Paul did not just say that God has saved us from wrath, period, but from *the* wrath to come. This use of the article is the particularising article that points to a specific event. To link this “wrath” to a future period of unprecedented judgement is not something strange or unlikely. The word “wrath” has often been used in the NT to refer to the end-time wrath, ie, the Great Tribulation and the Great White Throne Judgement (see Matt 3:7 cf 24:21; Rev 6:16, 17; 20:11). If the end-time wrath is referred to here, then this is our blessed hope: God will rescue us “out of” (*ek*) or remove us from the world before He pours out His end-time judgement. This is the view taken by most premillennialists, and the Bible-Presbyterian Church and FEBC take a premillennial view of the 2nd coming of Christ. See my papers, “Amillennialism Examined,” *The Burning Bush* 4 (1998): 1-5, and “Three Views on the Millennium: Which?” *The Burning Bush* 5 (1999): 65-72.

Chapter 2

In this chapter, Paul gives a brief history of how the Thessalonica Church was started. It is important that the believers remember the original and true foundation of their faith that was laid at the very beginning by the Apostle. If members forget or lose sight of the pure Gospel and Word preached to them at the outset, they would be vulnerable to false teachers who will bring in damnable heresies to lure them away from their Saviour (cf Acts 20:24-35; Gal 1:11-2:21). Although there was no immediate threat, Paul thought it good to warn them first for as the saying goes, "Prevention is better than cure."

Verse 1

¹For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain:

Paul reminded his readers how the gospel that he preached had taken root and borne fruit in their lives. As God had said, "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall return unto me void, but it shall accompanish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it" (Isa 55:11).

Verse 2

²But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention.

Before going to Thessalonica, Paul was in Philippi. There he experienced persecution (Acts 16:19-24). But that did not stop him from preaching the gospel in Philippi, neither in Thessalonica though he faced the same kind of opposition (Acts 17:5-10). They could see how he was not cowered by those who threatened him bodily harm; neither was his preaching of gospel muted for he preached with equal boldness and "with much contention (*agoni*)".

Verse 3

³For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile:

For our exhortation was not of deceit. Paul's preaching was not characterised by "deceit." The word "deceit" (*planes*) has the idea of wandering out of the right path. It speaks of error. Paul did not preach any false message that would lead the people astray. He spoke the truth sincerely and honestly.

nor of uncleanness. Paul's preaching was not characterised by "uncleanness." The word "uncleanness" (*akatharsias*) speaks of filthiness in a carnal sense. It is opposite of purity. Paul's motives were pure. He did not preach the gospel with carnal motives seeking to make money out of the people. Some may preach "for filthy lucre's sake" (Tit 1:11), but not Paul.

nor in guile. Paul's preaching was not characterised by "guile." The word "guile" (*dolo*) has the idea of baiting someone into a trap. Basically, it means subtle trickery or cunning deceit (Matt 26:4, Acts 13:10, 2 Cor 12:16). 2 Tim 3:6 describes such deceitful preachers perfectly, "they creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts." Paul was not such a preacher.

Verse 4

⁴But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts.

But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel. Paul declares that it is God who has seen it fit to appoint him as an ambassador of the gospel. The word “allowed” here is from the Greek *dokimazo*, “to approve.” It has the idea of subjecting something or someone through a process of testing or proving to ascertain the quality or genuineness of a thing or person. Paul is saying that God has proved his heart and has put a seal of approval that he is indeed a genuine servant of Christ. God is the Author of his Apostleship, not man, nor himself (there are charlatans today who ordain themselves apostles). Note that Paul did not boast about his credentials, intelligence, talents, connections etc. People may be easily impressed with all these outward badges of worldly approval, but what really counts is divine approval (see Acts 9:15, 13:2; 1 Tim 1:1).

even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God. As true servants of God, they sought never to please men but only and always God. The Apostle Peter and his colleagues likewise said to the Sanhedrin when charged not to preach Christ, “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). Paul in another place said, “For do I now persuade men or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ” (Gal 1:10). When in ministry, it is always very tempting to curry the favour of the rich and the powerful. If we are to be true servants of God, we must never never do that.

which trieth our hearts. How can the people be sure that Paul is a true servant of God? Not only by the fruits of his labour (Matt 7:15-20), but also the testimony of God which is more precious because God only is able to see clearly the inner motives of a person’s heart whether good or bad (Jer 17:10, Ps 7:9, Ps 139:21-24).

Verse 5

⁵For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness; God is witness:

For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know.

Paul never used flattery to get what he wants. Flattery is exaggerated or insincere praise. It is false, dishonest, and deceitful, a transgression of the 9th commandment, “Thou shalt not bear false witness ...” (Exod 20:16). Ps 12:2-3 describes flattery well, “They speak vanity every one with his neighbour: with flattering lips and with a double heart do they speak. The LORD shall cut off all flattering lips, and the tongue that speaketh proud things.” Be careful of those who flatter you. Be careful also that you do not think more highly of yourself than you ought to think, but to appraise yourself accurately in the sight of God (Rom 12:3). Calvin said, “the false commendation and flattery of men is as deadly poison.” He also warned that “oftentimes the enemies of the truth assail us by flatteries.” Beware of flattery and flattering lips, but beware that you be not a flatterer yourself. Learn from the Proverbs (with restatements by Dr Timothy Tow in his book, *Pearls of Great Wisdom: A Study of the Book of Proverbs*, “A man that flattereth his neighbour spreadeth a net

for his feet” or “A flatterer is like a bird catcher spreading a snare” (Prov 29:5); “A lying tongue hateth those that are afflicted by it; and a flattering mouth worketh ruin” or “Lying affects those who suffer under it, and flattery destroys (Prov 26:28). “He that goeth about as a talebearer revealeth secrets: therefore meddle not with him that flattereth with his lips” or “Talebearers are flatterers who reveal others’ secrets. Keep away from them” (Prov 20:19).

nor a cloke of covetousness. Paul was never motivated by greed in his preaching. He was not the type that would preach only if there was money to be made. Itinerant philosophers and orators in those days spoke for money and gain, much like the many motivational, self-improvement, New Age speakers we have today. Paul coveted neither man’s gold nor silver. He preached freely, without charge (cf 2 Cor 4:2).

God is witness. Why should anyone take Paul’s word for it, that he was such an honest and sincere preacher of the gospel? Only God knows! And Paul invoked God’s name: He is witness! This is like taking an oath. Paul was bold enough to call upon God as his witness, and if he were lying, God will judge him.

Verse 6

⁶Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ.

Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others. This is exactly what Paul meant when he said in Gal 1:10, “For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.” As servants of God, we ought to serve “not with eye-service, as men-pleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God” (Col 3:22). The praise of God is infinitely much more valuable than the praise of men.

when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ. As an Apostle of Christ, Paul could have exercised his power and authority to demand certain things from them, but he did not. Like the Lord Jesus, he came not to be served but to serve, and to pour out his life for them (Mark 10:45). If he was checked into a one-star or no star inn, he did not insist on a 5-star accommodation. If he was just fed rice and curry, he was happy, and did not demand for a 10-course Chinese dinner. This is the kind of spirit every true missionary should have.

Verse 7

⁷But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children:

Paul was a gentle Apostle. He likened himself as “a nurse,” not in the sense of a maid, but of the mother herself who showers her baby with loving and tender care that only a mother can give (cf Gal 4:19).

Verse 8

⁸So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us.

So being affectionately desirous of you. Paul’s presentation of the gospel to them was not cold or calculative, but full of warmth and affection. The word *imeiros*

("affectionately desirous") is found only here in the NT. It speaks of a deep longing for someone or a strong craving for something. There are people who may long for someone in order to get something out of him. Paul's longing for the Thessalonians was quite different; he longed for them not because he wanted to get, but because he wanted to *give*.

we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us. Paul imparted to them these two precious gifts: (1) the gospel of God, and (2) their own souls. Indeed, if Paul had not preached to them the word, how would they have believed (Rom 10:14-15), for "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom 10:17). "How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!" (Rom 10:15b). They had not withheld anything good from them. What they had, their time, strength, talents, resources etc, they willingly shared. If necessarily, Paul and his co-workers would have gladly laid down their lives for them. Being in Christ, they had become members of the family of God and as such "dear." The bond of fellowship they had was very close and had become very strong.

Verse 9

⁹For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail: for labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God.

In order not to be a burden to the Thessalonian Church, Paul worked with his hands to earn a living so that he could minister to them without having to depend on them for a single cent. Should a minister of the gospel accept money for his services? Hendriksen summarises Paul's philosophy of ministry in relation to remuneration: (1) Titus 1:11: He definitely does not want to give any occasion for being placed in a class with 'vain talkers' who are interested in 'filthy lucre.'

(2) 1 Cor 9:6-15: He, nevertheless, emphatically asserts *the right* to receive remuneration from the church for performing spiritual work, and to receive it even from the converts themselves (see especially verse 11). Nevertheless, as far as the latter group is concerned (the converts), *he has decided not to make use of that right* (see verse 15).

(3) Acts 20:33: He will not be able to say, "I coveted no man's silver, gold, or apparel."

(4) 2 Cor 11:8: He does at times "take wages" from already established churches, while he is working in a new field.

(5) Phil 4:10-20: He accepts gifts from an already established church (Philippi).

(6) Acts 20:34, 35; 1 Thess 2:9 and 2 Thess 3:8: Most of all, he provides for his own needs (and even for the needs of others) by laboring with his own hands.

(7) Acts 18:3: He is tent-maker by trade.

(8) 1 Cor 6:12; 8:9, 13; 9:12; 10:23: The principle on which he insists again and again (applying it to various questions) is this: All things are lawful, but not all things are helpful: there are a good many things which I have a right to do, but that does not

mean that I should therefore do them! The real question is always: “What course of action will be most useful in promoting the work of the kingdom and the glory of God?”

(9) 2 Cor 11:7: Even so, in spite of this carefully worked out plan with respect to work and wages, he does not escape criticism. If he takes money, or if his enemies suspect that he does, they are ready to charge him with selfishness, greed; if he does not, they accuse him of making a show of his humility.

(10) 1 Cor 4:12; Eph 4:28; 1 Thess 2:9; 2 Thess 3:8, 10: He (and the Holy Spirit through him!) dignifies labor, and proclaims the great principle: “If any man will not work neither let him eat.”

Verse 10

¹⁰Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe:

Not only “God is witness” (v5), the Thessalonians too were witnesses of Paul’s integrity in ministry. The three adverbs “holily,” “justly,” “unblameably,” speak of how they had served the church with complete devotion and consecration within the boundaries of God’s commandments in an irreproachable or faultless manner.

Verse 11

¹¹As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children,

Paul restates verse 7. In verse 7, he compared himself with a nursing mother; here he compares himself to a loving father. A loving father will always think of doing good and giving what is best to his children (cf Matt 7:7-11).

Verse 12

¹² That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.

They are to live a life that befits one who is a child of God and a citizen of His kingdom (cf Phil 1:27). The kingdom is now here (Matt 12:28, 13:1-52, Rom 14:17, 1 Cor 4:20, Col 1:13), but at the same the kingdom is also not yet. The word “kingdom” here is preferably understood in its future sense because of the word “glory” that is connected to it (2 Thess 1:7-10). We do not see the glory of the Lord now. It is only when He comes again that His glory will be fully manifested (cf Rev 19:11-16).

Verse 13

¹³For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.

The Apostle Paul continues to thank God for the faith manifested by the Thessalonian believers. Previously in 1:2-3, he is thankful for their good fruit that is rooted in their faith, hope and love in the Lord Jesus Christ. This time, he is thankful for their obedient reception of God’s Word that has changed their lives for when

they heard Paul preached, they could see that his message did not originate with man but God. The Apostles not only wrote (2 Tim 3:16) but also *preached* under divine inspiration – the word “heard” was “in truth, the word of God.” Our principal – Dr Timothy Tow – was right to observe that the Apostles were not only infallible in their writing but also in their preaching.

Verse 14

¹⁴For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews:

Jesus said, “Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also” (John 15:20). Like the Christians elsewhere, the Thessalonian believers were not only willing to suffer persecuted, they were actually persecuted. Despite this, they remained true to their Saviour and have never denied His name. The Gentile Christians faced persecution from Gentile unbelievers as the Jewish Christians from their own unbelieving kinsmen, Paul himself, at one time, being one of the persecutors (Gal 1:13 cf Acts 9:1, 13). Concerning persecution, Calvin wrote, “No war was ever carried on so continuously and professedly against the Church, as those which occurred after the Caesars arose, and after Christ was made manifest to the world ... The wrath of Satan was excited against all God’s children on account of the manifestation of Christ.”

Verse 15

¹⁵Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men:

The fiercest persecution came from the Jews (cf Paul’s very own experiences in 2 Cor 11:24, 26). They have crucified the Lord Jesus, and killed John His herald and the OT prophets before him, and now they are persecuting His NT prophets, namely the apostles, and His NT Church. Note that this is the only place in Paul’s writings where he explicitly charged the Jews with the death of Christ. (cf 1 Cor 2:8). Of course, it is not just the Jews that are to be blamed; the whole of sinful humanity is responsible for putting Christ on the cross.

Verse 16

¹⁶Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.

The Jews were the privileged ones to receive the gospel first (Rom 1:16). But they were quick to reject it, and not only that, they compounded their sin by their relentless efforts to hinder others from receiving it. For their sins, “the wrath” is come upon them. It is the same wrath that is spoken of in 1:10. The Great Tribulation is called “the time of Jacob’s trouble” (Jer 30:7). The end-time wrath will be poured out not only upon unbelieving and impenitent Gentiles but also Jews, but there will be a remnant that will be saved (Rev 7:3-4). Why the wrath is described as “is come” though yet future is because in God’s mind the judgement is as good as has

happened because it will surely come, and none shall escape from it. Prophecy must be and will be fulfilled.

Verse 17

17But we, brethren, being taken from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavoured the more abundantly to see your face with great desire.

Owing to the persecution that Paul and his co-workers faced in Thessalonica, they had to leave the city prematurely (Acts 17:5-10). Paul described the experience as someone who has been orphaned (*aporphanisthentes*). Although he was absent in body, he was present with them in spirit. His heart eagerly desired a reunion, and he had since spared no effort to make sure that he would see them again soon. It was certainly not a case of "out of sight, out of mind."

Verse 18

18Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us.

But Satan has been putting obstacle after obstacle in preventing him from visiting Thessalonica again. In Acts 16:6-7, we find the Lord preventing Paul from going to Asia and Bithynia, redirecting him to Macedonia. Here we find Satan preventing Paul. Is there is cosmic war going on between two equal powers, viz, God and Satan? Sometimes God wins and sometimes Satan? Most certainly not! To say that God and Satan are two equal forces is a heresy known as dualism (like the Yin-Yang concept). God is all-powerful and sovereign, and He controls Satan. Satan can only oppose us as God gives him permission to do so (Job 1-2).

He is Creator, and Satan is but a creature. In this case, God permitted Satan to hinder Paul's return to Thessalonica. This was all part of God's sovereign permissive will. "Man proposes, God disposes."

Verses 19-20

19For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? 20For ye are our glory and joy.

Paul and his fellow workers loved the Thessalonians dearly. They were their pride and joy. This kind of feeling we often experience when we see a young believer holding fast to his faith despite severe persecution that has come because of it. What a great encouragement to hear words of faith like, "No matter how much I am going to suffer because of Christ, I will never deny nor forsake Him." Well, Paul saw this in the life of the Thessalonian believers. He believed his work in Thessalonica belonged to that of gold, silver and precious stones, and not wood, hay and stubble (1 Cor 3:9-14). When he stands before the *Bema* (Judgement Seat) of Christ, he would be crowned (2 Cor 5:10) for the good fruit that had sprouted from the gospel seed he had sown there. This reward he would receive at the 2nd coming (*parousia*) of Christ.

Chapter 3

Verse 1

¹Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone;

Paul's repeated attempts to return to Thessalonica were frustrated by Satan (2:18). It came to a point where he could not endure being away from the Thessalonians any longer. He then thought it good (*eudokeo*) to lose the companionship of one of his valued co-workers even though this would mean they would be considerably weakened in their efforts to evangelise a very worldly and idolatrous city as Athens.

Verse 2

²And sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellowlabourer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith:

From out of the missionary team, Paul chose the best candidate – Timothy – who is not only a brother in Christ, but also a servant (*diakonos*) of the Lord, and a precious coworker in the preaching of the gospel of Christ. Timothy would be there to help them in a twofold way: to (1) strengthen (*sterixai*) and (2) encourage (*parakalesai*) them in the faith. They truly needed to be strengthened because their faith has been sorely tested by Satan (3:5,10; 4:1,3,4-8,10; 5:23). They also needed to be encouraged to continue on in their good testimony and good work for the Lord in the midst of severe opposition and persecution (1:3-4, 6-10; 2:13-14; 3:6-8; 4:1, 9-10; 5:11).

Verses 3-4

³That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto. ⁴For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know.

Persecution is something a Christian ought to expect (Jesus spoke of it: Matt 5:10-12, 10:16-28). The Lord allows His people to undergo such afflictions to prove their faith (Jas 1:2-4). Has the gospel seed fallen on good soil or rocky soil (Matt 13:20-21). Only when the faith is subjected to such a test, can we tell.

Verse 5

⁵For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain.

Paul was worried about the faith of the Thessalonians. Which loving parent would worry about the safety of children especially when they are away from home? Timothy was sent so as to find out how their faith was standing up. And if they were about to falter, Timothy would be there to strengthen and encourage them (3:2). Paul did not wish that all the hard work put into the ministry at Thessalonica should result in a loss. Here we have the biblical example of follow-up work. The gospel ministry is not a hit-and-run ministry.

Verses 6-7

⁶But now when Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings of your faith and charity, and that ye have good remembrance of us always, desiring

greatly to see us, as we also to see you: ⁷Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith:

Timothy who had earlier been sent by Paul to minister to the Thessalonian church has returned with good news that the Thessalonian believers are standing firm in the faith. Not only were they holding up well despite the persecution, they also were thinking of Paul fondly, and very desirous to see him as well. This in turn brought much encouragement to Paul for he too faced many external afflictions.

Verse 8

⁸For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord.

Paul has been rejuvenated by the good report that the Thessalonian church is standing fast (*stekete*) in the Lord. The word *stekete* has the idea of continued steadiness and unrelenting steadfastness (cf 1 Cor 16:13, Gal 5:1, Phil 4:1).

Verses 9-10

⁹For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God; ¹⁰Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith?

Paul was filled with thanksgiving to God to know that the Thessalonian Christians were still standing firm in their faith. Paul and his partners continued to pray earnestly by night and by day (cf 2:9) that God would grant them the opportunity to visit Thessalonica again. Although the Thessalonians were firmly rooted in their faith, they needed more instruction in the Word so that they might continue to grow and mature spiritually in their faith. The word “perfect” here is *katartisai* has the idea of repairing that which is broken or sewing together that which is torn. In other words, it speaks of making someone or something whole or complete. Perhaps Paul had not enough time to teach the whole counsel of God to them (cf Acts 20:27) when he was first with them since he had to depart from the city hastily due to the persecution (Acts 17:10). He hoped very much to make up for the lack of instruction he had given them previously.

Verse 11

¹¹Now God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you.

Paul prayed that the God the Father and God the Son would “direct” (*kateuthuno*, lit “to direct down”), ie, to guide straight towards something, or to make straight the path one is taking to a certain location. By God’s directive will, Paul is hoping to visit Thessalonica again. This prayer was answered for in Acts 20:1-4, we find Paul back in Macedonia during his 3rd missionary journey (Thessalonica is mentioned in v3).

Verse 12

¹²And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you:

Paul prayed that the Lord will cause the Thessalonians to “increase and abound” in their love for one another within the church and for others without the church. The

word “abound” is *perisseusai* which has the idea of filling a cup with water till it reaches the brim and flows over. Paul exhorted them to be increasing in and overflowing with love.

Verse 13

¹³To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.

To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God. The Lord strengthens His people with His love in order that they might not “crave the *unseparated* life, the life of the world. Rather, they will tend in the direction of the wholly *separated* life, so that, trusting entirely in Christ and in his redemption and having experienced the transforming influences of his Spirit, they will be *blameless* (cf 1 Thess 2:10), in a state and condition of *holiness* (separation from sin, consecration to God), and this in the very presence of *our God and Father*, that is, before his judgement-seat (Rom 14:10)” (Hendriksen).

even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints. The “coming” here like in 2:19 is the *parousia* – the 2nd coming of Christ. Is this referring to the rapture before the tribulation or to the final return at the end of the tribulation? In the eschatological complex, it certainly refers to both. Christ has to come *for* His saints (4:15-17 cf Rev 4:1) before He can come *with* His saints (Rev 19:8,14). God sees the *parousia* from a bird’s eye view.

Chapter 4

Verse 1

¹Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more.

Essentially, Paul is telling the Thessalonians what he had told the Corinthians, “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.” They have been growing in their faith and glorifying God in their life. Paul tells them not to let this stagnate, but to increase in their true faith and in their good works for the Lord.

Verse 2

²For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus.

Paul in verse 1 told the Thessalonians “to please God.” How? Simple: Obey His commandments. The word “commandments” (*parangelias*) is a military term (cf Acts 5:28, 16:24, 1 Tim 1:15, 18). These orders or directives are from the Lord Jesus through His Apostle Paul. This of course does not mean that only the commandments of the Lord as found only in the epistles of Paul are to be obeyed. Paul had definitely in mind the commandments found throughout Scripture. Did not the Lord command His disciples to “teach all nations, ... Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Matt 28:19-20 cf Acts 20:27)? Jesus said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

Verse 3

³For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication:

It is God's will for every Christian to be sanctified, ie, to live a holy and godly life of abstinence from any kind of sexual behaviour that is sinful. Why did Paul say "fornication?" Why not some other type of sin? Now, Thessalonica being a bustling trade city was likely also a city of vice. The Thessalonian believers probably faced all kinds of temptation in this city of sex and sin. Paul felt it necessary to warn them from ever falling into such sins for it would certainly destroy their testimony before the world. Many pastors have fallen into such sins for we are all made of flesh. This of course results in a premature end of their ministry. We need to be on the guard! Read the tragic story of Rev Thomas Bird in Dave Racer's *Caged Bird* (St Paul MN: Alethos Press, 2000), FEBC Library #253.2 RAC.

Verse 4

⁴That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour;

The word "vessel" (*skeuos*) can either refer to (1) one's own body (Rom 9:22-23, 2 Cor 4:7, cf 1 Sam 21:5), or to (2) one's own wife (1 Pet 3:7). I believe the first usage is preferable. Although it is true that a husband can keep himself from sexual immorality by cultivating an intimate relationship with his wife (cf 1 Cor 7:2-5), yet the fact that Paul addressed "every one" seems to indicate that he was not just referring to married ones but also to singles as well. Surely, it is not just married ones who are prone to sexual immorality but also those who are single. The body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and we ought to keep it clean so that the Lord can use our body as an instrument of His righteousness (Rom 6:12-13, 1 Cor 6:13-19).

Verse 5

⁵Not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God:

"Concupiscence" means "a violent lustful desire," or "an inordinate sexual appetite." It describes a sex maniac or sex addict – one who thinks about sex all the time, morning, noon, and night. Such unrestrained sexual behaviour is characteristic of unbelievers. What do those who "know not God" indulge in in terms of fulfilling their carnal desires? They indulge in partying, nightclubbing, karaokeing, eating and drinking, drug taking, wife swapping, sleeping with multiple partners or same sex partners, premarital sex, etc (1 Pet 4:3-4). Christians on the other hand "have ceased from sin," and "no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh of the lusts of men, but to the will of God" (1 Pet 4:1-2).

Verse 6

⁶That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified.

The believer must keep his body in check against sexual immorality because the sin of adultery brings hurt and shame not just to one person but to two or more. If a man has premarital sex with a virgin, he defrauds her parents and her future

husband since she would be no longer chaste. If a man has an adulterous affair with a married woman, he defrauds the woman's husband to whom she should be faithful, and to their children especially when a divorce takes place.

Not only the sin of fornication, but also the sin of cheating is addressed here. Since Thessalonica was a trade hub, there are bound to be members in the church that were businessmen. Paul now tells them not to cheat anyone in anyway. Christians ought not to cheat in business or to engage in dishonest business practices. In the modern business world, it is a common practice to buy or borrow without any intention to pay. This violates the 7th commandment, "Thou shalt not steal" (Exod 20:15). Corruption, bribery, tax evasion, doctored accounts are not uncommon in the business world. Christians ought to have a much higher level of business ethics patterned after God's character in obedience to God's Word.

Although many of such sins are committed in secret, yet God knows, and "the Lord is the avenger of all such" is a warning that must not be taken lightly. Crime does not pay!

Verse 7

⁷For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.

Here again is the doctrine of separation taught. We are no longer pigs but sheep. Sheep do not behave like pigs, nor pigs like sheep.

1 Pet 2:9-12 says, "⁹But ye *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: ¹⁰Which in time past *were* not a people, but *are* now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy. ¹¹Dearly beloved, I beseech *you* as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; ¹²Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by *your* good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation."

Eph 5:8-13 says, "⁸For ye were sometimes darkness, but now *are ye* light in the Lord: walk as children of light: ⁹(For the fruit of the Spirit *is* in all goodness and righteousness and truth;) ¹⁰Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. ¹¹And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove *them*. ¹²For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret. ¹³But all things that are reprov'd are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light."

Verse 8

⁸He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit.

Those who reject these exhortations, reject not the Apostle Paul, but God. It is God who has given these commands to through the Paul. These moral standards are not too high for the Christian to attain. God has given His Spirit to empower Christians with the necessary strength and ability to live in accordance to the Scriptures (cf Rom 8:1-11, Gal 5:22-23).

Verse 9

⁹But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.

The negative command not to defraud a brother has a positive counterpart, namely, to love one's brother (*philadelphia*). Paul intimates that the Thessalonians were also showing love towards one another (cf 1:3). After warning them against cheating, he now gives credit where credit is due (Col 4:6). He commends them for their demonstration of love through the promptings of God the Spirit. This was a sincere praise for Paul abhors flattery (cf 2:5).

Verse 10

¹⁰And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more;

What is truly commendable about the Thessalonian church was that their love was not selfish but selfless. They cared not only for the believers within their own church but also the believers in all the other Macedonian churches, viz, Philippi and Berea. The Apostle Paul tells them not to stop this good work but to do more and more of such deeds of love, which they did (2 Cor 8:1-5).

Verse 11

¹¹And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you;

Love for the brethren is demonstrated in these three ways: (1) *Aspire to live quietly*. Christians ought not to be a nuisance to others. And you do this by (2) *minding your own business*. In other words, be self-supportive and self-sufficient by (3) *making an honest living*. This problem of troublesome busybodies who sponge on others is addressed by Paul in 2 Thess 3:6-15.

Verse 12

¹²That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing.

Christians, of all people, need to conduct themselves honestly or decently (*euschemonos*, lit, "in good form") in the eyes of non-believers so that Christ or the Christian way would not be discredited or shamed. To be self-supportive and self-sufficient is a noble aim. As Dr Timothy Tow says, "Self help with God's help is the best help."

Verse 13

¹³But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

One of the classic passages on the rapture (from Latin Bible which translated "caught up" in v17 as *rapturo*) is found here in 4:13-18 (the other being 1 Cor 15:51-58). The rapture is the sudden catching up of the saints to be with the Lord before the Great Tribulation begins.

The Thessalonian church has gone through great persecution and suffering. Some of their members have died on account of their faith (the word "asleep" here is a euphemism for "death," cf 1 Kgs 2:10, Mark 5:39, John 11:11). This has brought a lot of grief and pain to surviving believers. As human beings with emotions, we feel very sad when we are bereaved of our loved ones. And many a time, we keep on grieving and sorrowing as if we have lost someone forever. By our conduct, we may send out a wrong signal that Christians like the lost are a people without hope. This is not a good testimony to the world.

Verse 14

14For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

The Apostle Paul now encourages their heart and strengthens their faith with this wonderful doctrine of the church's blessed hope, which is, the power of the resurrection. ²⁰But now is Christ risen from the dead, *and* become the firstfruits of them that slept. ²¹For since by man *came* death, by man *came* also the resurrection of the dead. ²²For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. ²³But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming" (1 Cor 15:20-23). We can be very sure of this fact: Those who have died in Christ will be raised up to glory one day. Truly, death has lost its sting, and grave its victory (1 Cor 15:55)!

Verse 15

15For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

If the dead in Christ will be raised up at the "coming (*parousia*) of the Lord," how about those who are still alive when the Lord comes? The answer to this question is given by the Lord Himself (Paul is not expressing personal opinion here). First, those still alive when the Lord comes will not "pre-vent" or precede (go before) them which have already died. It is only natural and right that those who have passed away should be caught up first. When will this happen?

Verse 16

16For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

The Lord Jesus Christ Himself will descend from heaven. This descent is not completely down to earth. It will be a midway descent since it is stated in the next verse that it will be "in the clouds" and that we will "meet the Lord in the air." This initial or first phase descent will not be unannounced. The rapture of the saints is significant enough to warrant a shout, an archangel's voice, and a blast of God's trumpet. This blowing of the trumpet is probably the trumpet blown just before the start of the Great Tribulation period (Rev 4:1) although a mid-tribulational trumpet is not impossible (Rev 11:15). When this happens, the dead in Christ shall be raised up first.

Verse 17

17Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

The “live” saints will be raptured soon after “dead” saints have been “caught up.” How soon? The whole event will happen “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye” (1 Cor 15:52). It will all be over in a micro-second. The saints’ life in heaven in the very presence of God begins at this very point. Our full redemption when our physical bodies are glorified is experienced at this very juncture.

There are five views on the rapture. Which view should we take?

Pretribulation Rapture

The pretribulational rapture view believes the church will be caught up at the start of the seven-year Great Tribulation period. This Tribulation period also called Daniel’s 70th week (Dan 9:27) is described as a time of terrible judgement upon the earth by God (Matt 24:21), a time of divine wrath. It will last for seven years. In the book of Revelation God pours out His wrath at the beginning of the Great Tribulation – Rev 6:17, “For the great day of his wrath is come;” at the middle of the Great Tribulation – Rev 11:18, “thy wrath is come;” and at the end of the Great Tribulation – Rev 16:1, “the wrath of God [is] upon the earth.” Will Christians enter this period of wrath? The Apostle Paul in 1 Thess 1:10 tells us that the Lord Jesus has “delivered us from the wrath to come.” A second promise of deliverance is found in 1 Thess 5:9, “For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ.” To be raptured before this time is our blessed hope and comfort (1 Thess 2:19, 4:18, 5:11).

Midtribulational Rapture

The midtribulational rapture view believes that the church will be caught up at the middle of the seven-year Great Tribulation period. This view was taken by J O Buswell. Buswell saw the seals, trumpets, and vials of Revelation to be chronological and sequential. He believed that the seals and trumpets occur prior to the resurrection of the saints at the middle of the 7 years. He believed the seals represent a picture of a stage in the history of the redemption of the church, and the 6th seal refers to the major cosmic disturbances Jesus spoke of in his Olivet discourse (Matt 24:6-7; Mark 13:7-8; Luke 21:9-12). He also suggested that the 6 trumpets fall on the first half of the 7 years, and that the 7th will occur at the 3½ year point. He considered the vials to be the wrath of God poured out at the final half of the 7 years. Buswell thus identified the “last trump” of 1 Cor 15:52 to be the 7th and last trumpet of Rev 11:15. The rapture will happen when the 2 special witnesses are caught up after prophesying for 1,260 days (ie, 3½ years).

Three-Quarter Tribulational Rapture

This is popularly known as the pre-wrath rapture view first propounded by Marvin Rosenthal in his book – *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church* (1990). According to Rosenthal, God will pour out His wrath sometime in the middle of the second half (ie, 3rd quarter) of the seven-year Tribulation period. The rapture will thus occur at this three-quarter point at the beginning of the trumpet judgements (Rev 8:1-2). He

explains, "the Day of the Lord is the time of divine wrath. It will be recognized as about to begin by the cosmic disturbances associated with the sixth seal (Joel 2:10-11, 30-31; Rev 6:12-17; cf. Matt 24:29) and will begin with the opening of the seventh seal (Rev 8:1). The Rapture of the church will immediately precede the Day of the Lord. The Day of the Lord will begin sometime within the second half of Daniel's seventieth week."

Posttribulational Rapture

The posttribulational view says that the rapture will only occur at the end of the 7 years of Great Tribulation. This view is generally held by anti-Israel millennialists who believe that the nation of Israel has been replaced by the Church. The main problem with this view is the question of who will repopulate the earth in the millennium since all believers who have been raptured and glorified.

Partial Rapture

The partial rapture view believes the rapture will take place at different points of the 7-year Great Tribulation period depending on the spirituality of the believers. Those who are holy will be raptured at the beginning, those not so holy, in the middle, and those really unholy, at the end. This position has some similarities to the Roman Catholic view of purgatory, and of salvation by works.

Which?

As pro-Israel premillennialists, we reject views 4 & 5. Only views 1-3 are valid. We should not be too caught up with the debate on which view (ie, 1, 2, or 3) is the best. The more vital question to answer is this: "When Jesus the Messiah descends from heaven to earth that soon coming Day, where will you be? Some argue Christians will be caught up to meet Him in a Pre-Tribulation Rapture, others say no, it is a Mid-Tribulation or Pre-Wrath or even Post-Tribulation Rapture. But if you have no assurance of salvation it is like a traveler studying three or four airline flight schedules from Singapore to New York, but he has not bought his ticket. Whichever plane is leaving now, this very hour, how can you join the flight? Or to be stranded when others in your family are gone above!" (Dr Timothy Tow, *Prophescope on Israel*, 122).

Verse 18

¹⁸Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

What better doctrine comforts the heart than the doctrine of the second coming of Christ and of the future resurrection? For the word "comfort" or "encourage" see also 2:11 and 5:14.

Part of the comfort/encouragement surely must involve the promise of future rewards. There are two future judgements: (1) a blessed judgement at the Judgement Seat of Christ, and (2) a cursed judgement at the Judgement of the Great White Throne. Below is a sermon on the two judgements I preached about 10 years ago at Life BPC.

The Coming Judgement of Saints and of Sinners

(2 Cor 5:5-10, Rev 20:11-15)

Introduction

We often hear this saying, "Crime does not pay." And this is very true. Thieves, robbers, kidnappers, cheats, murderers will not escape from the long arm of the law. In the Straits Times we have a regular feature called "In the courts" which reports on the proceedings of the many trials that go on in our law courts. This is of course to remind us that crime does not pay. Severe punishment awaits those who break the law of this country. Drug trafficking gets the death sentence. Many offences receive the mandatory caning.

If we have laws in this world and consequent punishments for the violations of the those laws, what more in the life hereafter. Dear friends, the judgements that we know exists in our present world point to a great judgement in the future world. The Bible tells us that there will be two judgements in the future.

The Judgement of Sinners (Rev 20:11-15)

The first judgement is the judgement of sinners. It is called in Rev 20 as the judgement of the Great White Throne. The Bible tells us that "it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgement." There is no such thing as reincarnation, a second chance, or purgatory. This judgement is not only spoken of in Rev 20, but also Dan 7:9. Rev 20 focuses on the judgement, while Dan 7 highlights the Judge: "I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment *was* white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne *was like* the fiery flame, *and* his wheels *as* burning fire."

And who is this Judge? He is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, "For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgement unto the Son ... And hath given him authority to execute judgement also, because he is the Son of man" (John 5:22,27).

What will man be judged for? He will be judged for all the sins against his fellow man and against God. No one shall escape this judgement. John said in Rev 20:2 that he saw "the dead, small and great, stand before God." The beggar will be judged and will not escape. The beggar cannot say, "Since I had such a poor and miserable life here on earth, it is now automatically my turn to enjoy a blissful life in heaven." Neither can the tycoon say, "Since I am so rich and powerful, and I have done so many good works while I was on earth and given so much money to charity, surely I qualify to enter into heaven." This is wishful thinking. No man has ever returned from the spiritual realm to tell us what will happen, and it is vain for us to guess. If we want to know for sure what is going to happen after we die, we must go to the person who has gone before us, who is there to tell us what the spiritual world is like and what the future judgement entails. And this person is none other than the Lord Jesus Himself who died and rose again from the dead on the third day and is now in heaven not only as a Mediator but also a Judge. Every sinner whether rich or poor, king or pauper, will be judged by Him.

How will sinners be judged? The Judge will judge by the book. There are several books that will be opened. These are the books of death: (1) Book of words. Matt 12:36-37 says, "³⁶But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. ³⁷For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." And Jesus said in John 12:48, "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." So, be careful little tongue what you speak or say. Spiteful, vengeful, hateful words, vulgarities, cursings, swearings, slanders, backbitings, gossips, lies will all be recorded in this Book of words which will condemn us on judgement day.

(2) Book of works. Eccl 12:14 says, "For God shall bring every work into judgement, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." And when our works are judged, we will find that the works which we thought were good were really evil because we have fallen short of God's holy standards. "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). Our good works in the sight of God are as "filthy rags" (Isa 64), for "there is none righteous, no not one ... there is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Rom 3). Jesus said, "If you look at a woman to lust after her, you have committed adultery." "If you hate your brother, you have committed murder." Be careful little hands what you do. Be careful little feet where you go. Be careful little eyes what you see.

(3) Book of wills. This book will reveal the conscience, motives, intentions and secrets of the heart. This book records the sins of the spirit. The sins of the spirit are much more serious than the sins of the flesh. The books of words and works record the sins against man. The book of wills records the sins against God. God has revealed Himself to sinful man through His creation – "the heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork" (Ps 19:1). The beauty, design and order of this whole universe tell us that there is a living and true God who is Creator. The whole wide world is shouting at man, "I am not an accident." "I am not a product of chance." "I am created by God." But we are deaf. We willfully suppress and wickedly distort the word GOD by spelling it backwards, and make Him a DOG. Blasphemy! An unpardonable sin! Rom 1:18-2:16 issues a severe warning, ¹⁸For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; ¹⁹Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed *it* unto them. ²⁰For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: ²¹Because that, when they knew God, they glorified *him* not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. ²²Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, ²³And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. ²⁴Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: ²⁵Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. ... ²⁸And even as they did not like to retain God in

their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; ... ²⁹Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, ³⁰Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, ³¹Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: ³²Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them. ... ¹Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things. ²But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things. ³And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and do ... ¹⁶In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel."

What will be the judgement? The judgement will be hell and the lake of fire. Jesus described this place of punishment as a place where (1) the fire is not quenched, and (2) the worm dieth not. And how long will it last? It will last forever (Rev 20:10). It is a place where Satan and his demons will be, and also the Antichrist, the False Prophet, and all the finally impenitent. All of them will be cast alive into this fiery pit to be "tormented day and night forever and ever." (This certainly goes against Neo-theists like Clark Pinnock and Neo-evangelicals like John Stott who teach annihilationism and the doctrine of "No Hell.")

How can man escape this judgement? There is only one way: be found in the book of life. How can I have my name written in the book of life? Well, you cannot write it. You are sinful, wicked and corrupt. You do not qualify to write in this holy book. Only one Person can write it, and that is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. If you want your name to be written in the book of life, you must bow down to Jesus and say, "Lord Jesus, have mercy on me a sinner; save me from the wrath to come. I want to receive you as my Saviour and Lord." The Lord Jesus will not turn you away. When you humble yourself before Him, He will receive you as His son, and by His precious blood cleanse you from all your sins. He will give to you the white garment of His righteousness. Once you become a child of God, you will not face the judgement of the Great White Throne, but another judgement.

The Judgement of Saints (2 Cor 5:5-10)

This is the Bema (Judgement Seat) of Christ. Paul in 2 Cor was writing to Christians. In verses 1-9, Paul says that we will one day receive our glorified bodies. In this new body which is made for heaven, we will no longer be plagued by the infirmities of this earthly flesh. No more sickness, pain and suffering. But what we have done for the Lord on earth will be judged by Christ in heaven, "For we must all appear before the Bema of Christ."

What is this Bema of Christ? In the days of the Romans, the Bema is a judgement where rewards are given out. The Bema was a raised platform whereby a winning athlete was crowned with a wreath. Every Christian will one day stand before the judgement seat of Christ to receive "the things done in his body, according to that he

hath done, whether it be good or bad.” Those who have served the Lord faithfully with pure motives to glorify His name – those who build upon the foundation, gold, silver and precious stones – will receive prizes for their good work. Those who have served the Lord, but with impure motives – they serve out of envy and strife, they serve because they want fame, popularity, and the praise of men – these are building with wood, hay and stubble, and all their works will be burned up. They will have no reward. So, in heaven, there will be those who have, and there will be those who have not. Those who go unrewarded still have their salvation. That can never be lost because it was not their work but God’s work.

Despite the loss suffered by those who built on wood, hay and stubble, the whole occasion will be a joyous one. The judgement seat of Christ may be likened to a graduation ceremony. Graduation is a time for rejoicing. It is a happy time. Although there might be a tinge of sorrow or sadness from those who have not studied hard enough. Others who have worked hard and made a lot of sacrifices would receive special awards. I remember my graduation service when I was at Grace Theological Seminary. The names of those who graduated with honours were called out. Some graduated *cum laude* (with praise), others *magna cum laude* (with high praise), and those who top the class, *summa cum laude* (with highest praise). Just like a graduation ceremony, those who have worked diligently and faithfully will be honoured in heaven. Those who do not graduate with honours will be given time to regret. But the happy thing is they graduate with the diplomas nonetheless.

I am sure all of us want to participate in this graduation ceremony in heaven. However, we can only participate if we are now enrolled as students of the School of Christ which is the University of Life. Are you in this University? Is your name in the Register of Life? If you are not, you better apply today. You do not need your GCE “O” or “A” levels to apply. You do not need to have your BA, MA, or PhD to qualify. There is only one entry requirement – Are you a sinner? If you are a sinner, you can join this School. If you do not consider yourself a sinner, you cannot enroll. You better look for another school. Only those who will humble themselves and confess their sins to the Principal of this School who is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and accept Him as Lord and Saviour may enter this University. “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.” Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” “If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” Do not delay, believe in Christ today, and you will be saved.

Conclusion

There are 2 judgements: the blessed judgement of saints – the Bema of Christ, and a cursed judgement of sinners – the Great White Throne Judgement. It is either one or the other. Which judgement will you face?

Chapter 5

Verse 1

¹But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you.

The return of Christ is imminent – it can happen at any moment. The Lord has not made known to us the precise time of His coming. No one knows *the day and the hour* of the coming of Christ (Matt 24:36). Many have made predictions in the past but all these “prophecies” have failed, and these “prophets” are shamed. One such man was Chan Kai Lok who in a book about the Antichrist predicted that Christ would return in 1988. It did not happen, and no one would hear him anymore. Learn one important principle in biblical interpretation: When the Bible is silent we must be silent!

However, we can know how near His return is by the signs of the times (Matt 24). The “*times and the seasons*” have been made known to us. The word “times” here is *chronoi* which refers to the timetable of events, and the word, “seasons,” *kairoi*, means the appropriate or opportune moments for action (cf Gal 4:4). Just as Christ came to earth the first time in the “fullness of time,” so it will be when He comes the second time according to the divine schedule.

Three Views on the Millennium – Which?

Text: Rev 20:1-6

[A message preached at Life Bible-Presbyterian Church, Jan 10, '99.]

Introduction

The term “millennium” literally means “1,000 years.” It is a word that all Bible students, and all Christians should be familiar with. Although the term itself – “millennium” – is not found in the Bible, the concept of a 1,000-year reign of Christ certainly is. It is found in the text we have just read, in Rev 20:1-7. Six times in this passage, the phrase “a thousand years” appears. God is trying to tell us this is an important event, and we need to pay attention to it.

What is the millennium all about? This period very clearly has to do with the worldwide reign of Christ, together with His people. In verse 6 we read, “Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and *shall reign with him a thousand years.*”

There is some measure of confusion over what the millennium is all about. There are 3 main views on the millennium – postmillennialism, amillennialism, and premillennialism. Which view is correct? This morning, I would like us to examine all the 3 millennial views in the light of Scripture. I will then conclude with what is the view we as the Bible-Presbyterian Church have taken.

Postmillennialism

Postmillennialism is the view which says that Christ will come *after* the millennium. Postmillennialists have an *optimistic* view of the world. They say that the world will

become better and better, until it reaches perfection. Through human effort, the world will eventually be peaceful, harmonious, and prosperous. After the world has experienced these wonderful conditions of peace, harmony and prosperity, Jesus would return.

This view is mainly held by the *modernists* who deny the doctrine of sin, who believe that man is inherently good. Man is capable, intelligent, and good enough to create a heaven on earth, they say. Postmillennialism is also held by certain Christians called *reconstructionists*. They say that Christians should be active in politics in order to influence or reconstruct the laws of a country by making them more Christian or biblical. They believe that wicked society needs to be reconstructed by Christians. Through the preaching of the Gospel, more and more people will become Christians. So when Christians dominate the world, the world will become a better place. Christ will return after the world is set right by Christians.

Is the postmillennial view correct? What does the Bible tell us about ourselves and the world we live in? Does the Bible paint for us an optimistic or a pessimistic picture of the world and of the end times? Will the world at the end times be inhabited by mostly Christians?

The Bible tells us that man is not morally good and inherently capable of transforming the world into a better place. There are many attempts by man to live in peace with one another. But each attempt has ended in failure. The world has a history of about 6,000 years. Out of these 6,000 years, the world has known only 300 years of peace. Imagine, we have been living together for 6,000 years already, and most of the time we have been fighting one another; years of peace, only 300. In this century alone, we already have 2 world wars. When we read the newspapers, do we see that the world is becoming kinder, gentler, and more peaceful? No, we find a whole lot of fightings, riotings, killings, cheatings, thefts, rapes, murders all the time. This is because the world is inhabited by sinful men, born in sin, and bent on sinning. Man has no ability whatsoever to make this world a good place to live in. He certainly has the ability to make the world a sophisticated place (we have cars, computers, aeroplanes etc), but not necessarily a peaceful and happy place for living.

The world is not getting better and better, but from bad to worse. Jesus Himself painted a pessimistic instead of an optimistic view of the world in the last days. In Matt 24:6-8, Jesus predicted, "And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: . . . for nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows." The Apostle Paul in 2 Tim 3:1-4, "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. ²For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, ³Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, ⁴Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God." Jesus said that the last days will be like "the days of Noah" when "the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Luke 17:26 cf Gen 6:5).

Will the world be filled with Christians just before Christ returns? Jesus said, the Christian population in the world just before He returns will be relatively small. "Narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matt 7:14). True believing Christians will not be in the majority but in the minority before Christ returns.

Postmillennialists have a wrong view of the world. We reject the postmillennial view of the end times.

Amillennialism

Amillennialism literally means "no millennium." Amillennialists teach that there is *no future 1,000 year reign of Christ on earth*. The 1,000 years of Rev 20 is a not literal but *symbolical*. It is not referring to a physical but a *spiritual* reign of Christ. The reign of Christ is not an earthly but *heavenly* one. Some of them say that the millennium is right here and now. Christ is presently ruling over the whole world from heaven through the Church.

Is this correct? Are we right now living in the millennium? If so, then Satan and his demons should not be around. Rev 20:2-3 tells us that Satan will be chained up during the millennium: "And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, ³And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled." Do we see this to be the case? Is Satan today inactive? If so, then why is there so much demonic activity and deception today? And if Satan is now chained up, then the Apostle Peter would be wrong to say that Satan is now on the prowl. In 1 Pet 5:8, Peter warned, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." We are clearly not in the millennium yet.

The amillennialists say that there is no *future* rule of Christ *on earth*? Is this true? Rev 20:6 says that God's people *will* reign with Christ: "they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and *shall* reign with him a thousand years." Please note the *future tense* – "*will* reign" and "*shall* reign.". The Apostle John was talking about a future, and not a present reign.

Will this reign be in heaven or on earth? Scripture interprets Scripture. In Rev 5:10, we are told very clearly that Christ will reign *on earth*: "And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign *on the earth*." Is this the case right now? Do we see Christ *physically* on earth ruling over the whole world right now? Clearly this has not yet happened. We are still waiting for this great event to come. And it will happen when Christ returns to judge this world, put all His enemies under His feet, and rule over this whole planet for a millennium.

Another serious error that the amillennialists have made is in their view of the nation of Israel. (This error is also made by postmillennialists and historic premillennialists.) They say that God has *cast away Israel*. Israel, for her sin of rejecting her Messiah – the Lord Jesus Christ – is now *forsaken* by God and is *replaced by a new Israel – the Church*. All the promises God made to Israel is now transferred to the Church. Is this true? Did God cast away and forsake Israel? Did He withdraw all the promises He had originally made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? The answer is No.

God has not forsaken Israel. God's hand is still upon Israel to protect and preserve her. God must keep His Word. Although Israel has sinned against God by rejecting Christ, yet God will not and cannot break His Word. God will punish Israel for her sins, but God is true to His Word, and is faithful to the Covenant He had made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God says in Ps 89:3,34-6 : "I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant, . . . My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David. His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before me" (see also Jer 31:35-37).

Paul himself questioned those who said that God has cast Israel away. In Rom 11:1, Paul asked, "Hath God cast away his people?" Answer? "God forbid!" In Rom 11:25-27, Paul predicted that one day "all Israel shall be saved." The amillennialists say that this Israel is the Church. This is a manipulation of God's Word. God means what He says and says what He means. If Paul was talking about the Church instead of Israel, he would have used the term "Church." He did not. He was not referring to the Church but to Israel—God's chosen nation when he said "all Israel shall be saved."

I got my Greek students to do a word study on the term "Israel" in the NT. And the results were interesting. The word "Israel" is used 70 times in the NT and on every occasion it is used, it refers to the Jewish nation of Israel, not the Church. Israel is Israel, Church is Church. We must not confuse the two. The nation of Israel will one day be converted and will acknowledge Jesus as her Messiah. This will happen when Christ returns. Israel will be truly glorious in that day when the Lord sits on the throne of David in Jerusalem ruling over the whole world in fulfillment of all the OT prophecies concerning her. And we are seeing God's promises being kept and prophecies being fulfilled today. Look at Israel today! She is back in her land in fulfillment of Isa 11:11-12. Israel must be back in her land before the Lord can return. This is one indication that the Lord is coming back very soon. The Lord will return soon to complete the restoration of Israel.

The amillennial view of Israel is problematic and questionable. If God has truly cast away Israel for her sins, then what makes the Church so sure that she will not be cast away also? Are we not as sinful as Israel? Have we not been as disobedient? How many sins have we committed already against God during this 1st week of the new year? Should not God cast us away? God forbid! God is true to His Word, and will save us to the very end. When we sin, He will chastise us. We are still His sons and daughters. He will not and cannot cast us away. Likewise, Israel has sinned, and God will punish Israel. But Israel remains God's special and chosen nation. God will not cast her away.

There is another problem, and it has to do with the many scriptural prophecies that talk about Israel. How do the amillennialists treat these prophecies? They explain these prophecies away by saying that these prophecies are not to be taken literally but spiritually. They spiritualise away all the prophecies which deal with the nation of Israel and the 2nd coming of Christ. How do they do it? For an example, let us turn to Zech 8:21-23. Zech 8:21-23 is a prophecy that will be fulfilled in the millennium, but the amillennialists say No, it is fulfilled by Christians and by the Church. Zech 8

reads, "Thus saith the LORD of hosts; *It shall yet come to pass*, that there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities: ²¹And the inhabitants of one *city* shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the LORD, and to seek the LORD of hosts: I will go also. ²²Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem (read Church), and to pray before the LORD. ²³Thus saith the LORD of hosts; In those days *it shall come to pass*, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew (read Christian), saying, We will go with you: for we have heard *that God is with you.*" Is this how we should read this passage? If this is how we should spiritualise the Scriptures, then how about Zech 9:9 which reads, "⁹Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he *is just*, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass." This prophecy – was it not fulfilled *literally* by the Lord Jesus Christ in His triumphal entry into Jerusalem (cf Luke 19:38)? I think you see the fallacy of the amillennial interpretation of prophecy. If Zech 9 is literal, why should Zech 8 be spiritual?

How many verses will we misunderstand if we adopt this amillennial method of interpreting prophecy? Not one or two, but 4,200! There are 4,200 verses in Scripture concerning the 2nd coming of Christ. That amounts to the whole NT minus the 4 Gospels. That is a whole lot of Scripture! We thus cannot allow for this spiritualising away of Scripture to make it mean what it does not mean. God requires us to understand the OT prophecies literally. We have many prophecies in the OT on the 1st and the 2nd coming of Christ. The prophecies concerning the 1st coming of Christ were fulfilled literally. Isaiah prophesied, "Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel" (Isa 7:14). Was this not literally fulfilled? Jesus was indeed born of a virgin. Micah in chapter 5:2 prophesied that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem. Was not Jesus born in Bethlehem? Virgin means virgin, Bethlehem means Bethlehem. If all the prophecies of the OT concerning Christ's 1st coming were fulfilled literally, why do we say that the prophecies concerning His 2nd coming are fulfilled spiritually? It does not make sense. If the 1st coming prophecies are literal, then the 2nd coming prophecies must be literal as well. God means what He says, and says what He means. Israel means Israel; Zion means Zion; Jerusalem means Jerusalem.

So, we reject the amillennial view, especially its view on Israel, and its erroneous method of interpreting biblical prophecy.

Premillennialism

Premillennialism is the view which teaches that Christ will return *before* the millennium. This is the view taken by the Bible-Presbyterian Church. Christ must return to judge His enemies, restore Israel, and rule over the whole world from Jerusalem for a thousand years.

The Bible tells us that the world will get more and more wicked culminating with the evil rule of the Antichrist who will set himself up as God, and demand worship from all. During the 7-year Tribulation period, he will persecute Israel. This 7-year Tribulation period is called "the time of Jacob's Trouble" (Jer 30:7). Israel will suffer

during this period. It is “Jacob’s” trouble. Jacob is Israel, not the Church. The Church will not be present during this time, but will be raptured, snatched up in a micro-second to be with Christ in heaven (1 Thess 4:16-17). During this Tribulation period, God will pour out His wrath upon the unbelieving inhabitants of the earth. It will end with Christ returning to earth with His saints to fight the Antichrist and his armies, destroying all of them at the battle of Armageddon (Rev 16:16, 19:11-21).

Jesus will then begin His millennial reign on earth. Survivors of the Tribulation will enter the millennium. Christ will sit on the throne of David and govern the whole world from Jerusalem. Jerusalem will be the political and religious capital of the world. The earth will be rejuvenated. The land will be peaceful and productive, and the life-span of man will increase (Isa 65:20 tells us that if a man dies at a hundred years old, he dies young).

The world is looking for peace on earth. But they are looking for it in all the wrong places. Only God can give peace. We will have true peace on earth only when the Lord Jesus Christ – the Prince of peace – returns.

Conclusion

There are 3 views on the millennium – postmillennial, amillennial, and premillennial. The premillennial view is the biblically correct view. We are premillennial. What is important also is that we see a clear distinction between Israel and the Church.

I urge you to study deeply into this subject by reading our pastor’s books – *Prophescope on Israel*, his commentaries on Daniel and Revelation, his booklet – *Israel a Great Nation*; and Rev Charles Seet’s excellent essay on Premillennialism in the July ’97 issue of *The Burning Bush*. They are all available in our Bookroom.

Verse 2

²For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.

The “day of the Lord” refers to the whole period of end-time wrath upon unbelievers during the Great Tribulation of 7 years (Isa 13:9-13; Zech 14:1-5) which leads to the millennial reign of Christ on earth (Isa 12:1-6; 14:3; Zech 14:8-11) and ending with the final fiery destruction of this present heaven and earth (2 Pet 3:10, Rev 20:7-9).

The Lord will come “as a thief in the night.” This tells us that the Lord’s return will be sudden and unexpected. Hendriksen has rightly commented that the day of Christ’s return to judge this world “will seize unbelievers, catching them unprepared, just as a thief seizes the owner of the house. Believers, however, are not in darkness. They are not seized, for they are prepared.”

Verse 3

³For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.

The “peace and safety” spoken here must be understood in the light of the peace covenant signed by the Antichrist with Israel as revealed in Dan 9:27. This peace

treaty will inaugurate the Great Tribulation period which will see the final 7 years of this present wicked world's history and system. After this time, Christ will establish His millennial kingdom on earth. That this 7-year is divided into 2 equal halves is clear not in Dan 9:27 which says that the Antichrist will break the peace treaty "in the midst of the week" but also in Rev 11:2-3 which speaks of the Antichrist desecrating the temple for 42 months or 1260 days, ie, 3½ years. Thus, the false peace cum safety is only for the first half, but the second half will see the Antichrist revealing his true ambitions not only for world dominion but also worship (Rev 13). The Jews and tribulation saints at this time will be severely persecuted by the Antichrist. But God will at the same time pour out His wrath upon this wicked generation through His vial or bowl judgements (Rev 15-16).

This period is likened to a pregnant woman who suddenly goes into labour, and the labour pains will grow in intensity until the birth takes place (Matt 24:8). The tribulation of the last days once started will grow in severity until the last bowl of God's wrath has been poured out. No unbeliever will escape this period of God's destructive wrath.

Verse 4

4But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.

Christians are not in the dark concerning future events. The Bible is full of prophecies concerning the end times. It is said that a quarter of the Bible is prophetic, and that there are about 4,200 prophecies pertaining to the 2nd coming of Christ. The Lord wants us to know the future so that when He finally returns we will be ready. Thus, when we read the newspapers, we should read them with our eyes open, interpreting world events in the light of God's Word in order that we might be ever alert to anticipate His imminent return.

Verse 5

5Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.

Light symbolizes *Truth* (Ps 43:3, 2 Cor 4:2-6). Light also symbolizes *righteousness* (Eph 5:8-9, 1 John 2:10-11). These two concepts of light in terms of truth and righteousness are intrinsically connected. Without light there can be no righteousness. As Christians we are children of light because our Father in heaven is a Father of lights (Jas 1:17) and we are to reflect His light in this present world of darkness that we live in (Matt 5:14-16).

Verse 6

6Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.

There are three words of command here that are significant: "let us not sleep," "let us watch," and "(let us) be sober." When Paul tells us not to sleep, he is saying that our time here on this sin-cursed and soon-to-be-judged world is not a time of R & R (Rest & Recreation). We are in a battle, and in the midst of battle, soldiers do not and cannot sleep. You sleep, you die! We should be doctrinally and morally awake, and be aware of the spiritual dangers and apostasy that will plague the church in the

end-times. Therefore, instead of sleeping we should be watching. We must be a "Gregory!" That is the Greek word used here for "watch." As a good soldier of Christ, we must always be on our guard to protect the saints and defend the faith. To be watchful, we need to be sober. Christianity is not fun and games. We are in a spiritual war against the forces of darkness in high places (Eph 6:10-18). We need to be serious about our faith and the duty of the hour, ie, "earnestly contend for the faith once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). Jesus' parable on the wise and foolish virgins (Matt 25:1-13) illustrates this truth well. Below is my sermon on this passage preached on the eve of the new millennium, Dec 31, 1999.

Are You Y2K Ready?

Matt 25:1-13

We have less than an hour before the clock strikes 12. The year 2,000 will arrive in just a few minutes. Throughout 1999 the world has been frantically preparing for the year 2,000 – for Y2K. The #1 question asked throughout was, and even now, is "Are you Y2K ready?" Are your computers Y2K compliant? The first world countries say they are Y2K ready, but they also caution that they cannot be 100% sure that there will be no problems. There is still the big question mark of uncertainty. They say, "We are Y2K ready but ...". There is always this BUT.

I want to pose the same question to you tonight: "Are you Y2K ready?" I am not talking about your computers. I am addressing your spiritual condition. If the Lord were to come in Y2K, are you ready? Are you prepared to meet your God?

How to be ready or prepared for Y2K? The answer is in v13, "*Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.*" The key word here is "watch." Jesus commands us to "Watch!" The word "watch" here is a military word. Every soldier must be so geared up that when war comes he can be mobilised at once. Our eyes must be opened. Our minds must be alert. Our hearts must be sensitive. Our hands and feet must be ready for action at any moment. It is good that instead of going to Orchard Road for the millennium swing, you are here for watchnight service. To be watchful, we need to enter the year 2000 with a sober spirit.

The world may be partying, but let the church be praying. Why? Because Jesus said, "*for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.*" In Matt 24:36-39, the Lord says, "*But of that day and hour knoweth no man. ... But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.*" The world is now eating and drinking away to welcome the new millennium. They do not realise that God's judgment by fire can come at any time, just like in the days of Noah when the flood came suddenly and took them all away. If the Lord were to return at midnight, I do not want to be dancing away in Orchard Road. I want to be worshipping Him in church. If the rapture were to happen tonight, I want to found in His house. I want to get right with God before He returns. Dear friend, are you right with God? Are you saved? Have your sins been forgiven? Are you on your way to heaven or hell? Have you

believed in the Lord Jesus Christ? If you still have not yet believed in Jesus, I urge you to believe in Him tonight. Do not wait any longer. You have waited long enough. And God will not wait forever. He is going to judge this world. Judgment is coming. It is coming real soon. Maybe tonight. Maybe at midnight. *Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.* You can escape from the judgement to come, if you believe in Christ. Only Jesus can save you!

Are you foolish or are you wise? I am sure all of us want to be wise. If you are wise then you want to do all that is necessary to prepare for Christ's return. Let us learn a lesson of wisdom from the parable of the 10 virgins. The picture is that of a wedding. The bridegroom is coming for His bride. The bridegroom of course refers to Christ, and the bride is His church. Then there are the "virgins" or the bridesmaids. These refer to church members. The bridesmaids are to welcome the groom when he comes. It is very similar to our Chinese weddings where the bridesmaids must be alert to the arrival of the groom. When he comes, they must be ready to open the door. Only then will they get an *ang pau* from him. The groom does not reveal exactly when he will come. The bridesmaids know roughly when, but not exactly when. Although we do not know exactly when the Lord will return, the signs of the times tell us that He is coming back soon, at any moment now. That is why we must be on our toes. We must not only keep watching but also make sure we have enough oil in our lamps just in case He comes at night. He may come at midnight – a most unexpected time.

Now there are 10 virgins in this parable. They are divided into 2 groups. One group is wise, the other is foolish. The wise ones made sure they had enough oil to last throughout the night, while the foolish ones did not. So when it neared midnight, they had already run out of oil. But when they went out to buy, the groom came, and they were shut out. Only those who had oil in their lamps when the groom came participated in the marriage.

This parable is a warning. It is specifically addressed to those who call themselves Christian. There are two types of believers when the Lord Jesus returns – the wise and the foolish. Both profess to believe in Christ. Both are waiting for the coming of Christ. Both look alike outwardly. The foolish virgins are false believers. There are those who profess Christ, but do not possess Him. They think they are saved but are not. They are imitation Christians.

How do we know the foolish virgins are false believers? We know this because they did not have oil in their lamps. Oil here represents the Holy Spirit. They did not have the Spirit. Without the Spirit, there can be no genuine faith. A false faith will not endure until the end. Who will be saved at the end? Jesus said in Matt 24:13, "*he that shall endure unto the end the same shall be saved.*" True faith is an enduring faith. One aspect of true faith is its endurance. A genuine quality watch will last a lifetime, but a fake one will break down in no time.

We also know that these foolish virgins are not true believers because the Lord denied knowing them. When they cried out saying, "*Lord, Lord, open to us*" (v11), what did the Lord say? "*Verily I say unto you, I know you not*" (v12). The Lord does not know them. They are not part of His family. They do not belong to Him.

The wise virgins represent true believers who not only hear the Word of God but also obey it. They have oil in the lamps. They are indwelt by the Spirit. They possess true faith. And their faith is seen by their works. "Faith without works is dead." If you have true faith, you will act upon God's Word. The bridegroom must have told the 10 virgins, "I cannot tell you exactly when I will arrive, but be prepared and make sure you have oil in your lamps." The wise virgins are like the wise man who built his house upon the rock, but the foolish virgins are like the foolish man who built his on sand. Jesus said, "*whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man which built his house upon a rock*" or "the wise virgins who took oil in their vessels with their lamps."

Let us examine ourselves tonight, and make sure we have oil in our lamps. Let us make sure that our faith is true. Are you a backslided or a backsliding Christian? Make sure you are not one of the foolish virgins. If you still have yet to believe in Christ, believe in Him tonight. Let us all sincerely confess our sins, and believe in Christ. And with oil in our lamps, let us be alert to the Lord's coming. He may come at midnight. He wants us to be prepared. We are B-Ps. B-P stands for "Bible-Presbyterians." B-P can also stand for "Be Prepared." Every Bible-Presbyterian must be prepared for the Lord's return. The Lord may return when the clock strikes 12 in the year 2000. Or He may return very early in the new millennium. We do not know exactly when, but we know it is near. Are you Y2K ready? Let us pray.

Verse 7

7For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night.

The "night" here metaphorically refers to the realm of sin and error. Those who are without Christ will naturally behave according to their sinfully depraved condition, and will "sleep in the night" oblivious to the judgement that is to come. Likewise the drunkards who indulge in the lusts of the flesh are also "night" creatures. In their drunken stupor, they will definitely be caught unawares when the wrath of God comes.

Verse 8

8But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.

What does it mean to be sober? It means to be on high alert, to be ready for battle. As Christians, we have all been enlisted into God's army; we are all soldiers of Christ to fight a spiritual war. To fight the war effectively and successfully, it is vital for soldiers to go into battle armed and equipped with the necessary protective gear. The breastplate of faith and love is protective. We protect ourselves by trusting in God and loving others especially fellow believers. If we are to fight this battle victoriously, it is very necessary for us to have strong faith, not trusting in our strength but in the Lord's strength. As we strengthen ourselves, we need to strengthen fellow soldiers of the faith too with cords of love. No Christian fights God's battle alone. We not only have the Lord, we have one another. Satan would try to divide and conquer by creating strife and schisms within our ranks, but with the love of Christ, we can overcome these attacks. We also need the protective

helmet of salvation to guard our thoughts from Satan's fiery darts of doubt. One of Satan's tactics is confusion. We must never allow Satan to confuse us, to make us doubt our perfect Saviour and His perfect salvation taught in His perfect Gospel. Note the triune virtues of faith, hope, and love again (cf 1:3). For the complete armour of God, see Eph 6:14-17.

Verse 9

⁹For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ,

The Christian has been spared from the wrath of God to come (cf Rev 6:17, 11:18, 15:1,16). It is not the Christian's duty nor destination to face God's wrath since he has already been saved by the perfect redemptive work of Christ (Rom 5:9). It is important to know that the terms "wrath" and "salvation" here are opposites. The verse is clearly not talking about a both-and, but either-or situation. If you are under wrath, you are not saved, and if you are saved, you are not under wrath (John 3:36). This certainly argues against the posttribulational rapture view.

Verse 10

¹⁰Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.

The word, "sleep," *katheudo*, here is a different one from the one in 4:13,14,15 which is *koimao*, a euphemism for "death." Paul here is saying that whether we are watchful (*gregoreo*, cf 5:6) or not, we will be raptured when the time comes. This refutes the partial rapture theory which says that God will only rapture watchful Christians.

Practical Exhortations

1 Thess 5:11-28 finds the Apostle Paul giving practical instructions with regard to Church administration and Christian living. In this regard, I find the devotional commentary of **Matthew Henry** most helpful. His commentary on this section is reproduced in full below:

Verses 11-15

¹¹Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.

¹²And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; ¹³And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves. ¹⁴Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men. ¹⁵See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men.

In these words the apostle exhorts the Thessalonians to several duties.

I. Towards those who were nearly related one to another. Such should comfort themselves, or exhort one another, and edify one another, v. 11. 1. They must comfort or exhort themselves and one another; for the original word may be rendered both these ways. And we may observe, As those are most able and likely to comfort others who can comfort themselves, so the way to have comfort ourselves, or to administer comfort to others, is by compliance with the exhortation of the word. Note, We should not only be careful about our own comfort and welfare, but

to promote the comfort and welfare of others also. He was a Cain that said, *Am I my brother's keeper? We must bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.* 2. They must edify one another, by *following after those things whereby one may edify another*, Rom. 14:19. As Christians are lively stones built up together a spiritual house, they should endeavour to promote the good of the whole church by promoting the work of grace in one another. And it is the duty of every one of us to study that which is for the edification of those with whom we converse, *to please all men for their real profit*. We should communicate our knowledge and experiences one to another. We should join in prayer and praise one with another. We should set a good example one before another. And it is the duty of those especially who live in the same vicinity and family thus to comfort and edify one another; and this is the best neighbourhood, the best means to answer the end of society. Such as are nearly related together and have affection for one another, as they have the greatest opportunity, so they are under the greatest obligation, to do this kindness one to another. This the Thessalonians did (*which also you do*), and this is what they are exhorted to continue and increase in doing. Note, Those who do that which is good have need of further exhortations to excite them to do good, to do more good, as well as continue in doing what they do.

II. He shows them their duty towards their ministers, v. 12, 13. Though the apostle himself was driven from them, yet they had others who laboured among them, and to whom they owed these duties. The apostle here exhorts them to observe,

1. How the ministers of the gospel are described by the work of their office; and they should rather mind the work and duty they are called to than affect venerable and honourable names that they may be called by. Their work is very weighty, and very honourable and useful. (1.) Ministers must labour among their people, labour with diligence, and unto weariness (so the word in the original imports); *they must labour in the word and doctrine*, 1 Tim. 5:17. They are called labourers, and should not be loiterers. They must labour with their people, to instruct, comfort, and edify them. And, (2.) Ministers are to rule their people also, so the word is rendered, 1 Tim. 5:17. They must rule, not with rigour, but with love. They must not exercise dominion as temporal lords; but rule as spiritual guides, by setting a good example to the flock. They are over the people in the Lord, to distinguish them from civil magistrates, and to denote also that they are but ministers under Christ, appointed by him, and must rule the people by Christ's laws, and not by laws of their own. This may also intimate the end of their office and all their labour; namely, the service and honour of the Lord. (3.) They must also admonish the people, and that not only publicly, but privately, as there may be occasion. They must instruct them to do well, and should reprove when they do ill. It is their duty not only to give good counsel, but also to give admonition, to give warning to the flock of the dangers they are liable to, and reprove for negligence or what else may be amiss.

2. What the duty of the people is towards their ministers. There is a mutual duty between ministers and people. If ministers should labour among the people, then, (1.) The people must know them. As the shepherd should know his flock, so the sheep must know their shepherd. They must know his person, hear his voice, acknowledge him for their pastor, and pay due regard to his teaching, ruling, and

admonitions. (2.) They must esteem their ministers highly in love; they should greatly value the office of the ministry, honour and love the persons of their ministers, and show their esteem and affection in all proper ways, and this for their work's sake, because their business is to promote the honour of Christ and the welfare of men's souls. Note, Faithful ministers ought to be so far from being lightly esteemed because of their work that they should be highly esteemed on account of it. The work of the ministry is so far from being a disgrace to those who upon other accounts deserve esteem, that it puts an honour upon those who are faithful and diligent, to which otherwise they could lay no claim, and will procure them that esteem and love among good people which otherwise they could not expect.

III. He gives divers other exhortations touching the duty Christians owe to one another. 1. *To be at peace among themselves*, v. 13. Some understand this exhortation (according to the reading in some copies) as referring to the people's duty to their ministers, to live peaceably with them, and not raise nor promote dissensions at any time between minister and people, which will certainly prove a hindrance to the success of a minister's work and the edification of the people. This is certain, that ministers and people should avoid every thing that tends to alienate their affections one from another. And the people should be at peace among themselves, doing all they can to hinder any differences from rising or continuing among them, and using all proper means to preserve peace and harmony. 2. *To warn the unruly*, v. 14. There will be in all societies some who walk disorderly, who go out of their rank and station; and it is not only the duty of ministers, but of private Christians also, to warn and admonish them. Such should be reprov'd for their sin, warn'd of their danger, and told plainly of the injury they do their own souls, and the hurt they may do to others. Such should be put in mind of what they should do, and be reprov'd for doing otherwise. 3. *To comfort the feeble-minded*, v. 14. By these are intended the timorous and faint-hearted, or such as are dejected and of a sorrowful spirit. Some are cowardly, afraid of difficulties, and dishearten'd at the thoughts of hazards, and losses, and afflictions; now such should be encouraged; we should not despise them, but comfort them; and who knows what good a kind and comfortable word may do them? 4. *To support the weak*, v. 14. Some are not well able to perform their work, nor bear up under their burdens; we should therefore support them, help their infirmities, and lift at one end of the burden, and so help to bear it. It is the grace of God, indeed, that must strengthen and support such; but we should tell them of that grace, and endeavour to minister of that grace to them. 5. *To be patient towards all men*, v. 14. We must bear and forbear. We must be long-suffering, and suppress our anger, if it begin to rise upon the apprehension of affronts or injuries; at least we must not fail to moderate our anger: and this duty must be exercised towards all men, good and bad, high and low. We must not be high in our expectations and demands, nor harsh in our resentments, nor hard in our impositions, but endeavour to make the best we can of every thing, and think the best we can of every body. 6. *Not to render evil for evil to any man*, v. 15. This we must look to, and be very careful about, that is, we must by all means forbear to avenge ourselves. If others do us an injury, this will not justify us in returning it, in doing the same, or the like, or any other injury to them. It becomes us to forgive, as those that are, and that hope to be, forgiven of God. 7. *Ever to follow that which is good*, v. 15. In general, we must study to

do what is our duty, and pleasing to God, in all circumstances, whether men do us good turns or ill turns; whatever men do to us, we must do good to others. We must always endeavour to be beneficent and instrumental to promote the welfare of others, both among ourselves (in the first place to those that *are of the household of faith*), and then, *as we have opportunity, unto all men*, Gal. 6:10.

Verses 16-22

¹⁶Rejoice evermore. ¹⁷Pray without ceasing. ¹⁸In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. ¹⁹Quench not the Spirit. ²⁰Despise not prophesyings. ²¹Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. ²²Abstain from all appearance of evil.

Here we have divers short exhortations, that will not burden our memories, but will be of great use to direct the motions of our hearts and lives; for the duties are of great importance, and we may observe how they are connected together, and have a dependence upon one another. 1. *Rejoice evermore*, v. 16. This must be understood of spiritual joy; for we must rejoice in our creature-comforts as if we rejoiced not, and must not expect to live many years, and rejoice in them all; but, if we do rejoice in God, we may do that evermore. In him our joy will be full; and it is our fault if we have not a continual feast. If we are sorrowful upon any worldly account, yet still we may always rejoice, 2 Co. 6:10. Note, A religious life is a pleasant life, it is a life of constant joy. 2. *Pray without ceasing*, v. 17. Note, The way to rejoice evermore is to pray without ceasing. We should rejoice more if we prayed more. We should keep up stated times for prayer, and continue instant in prayer. We should pray always, and not faint: pray without weariness, and continue in prayer, till we come to that world where prayer shall be swallowed up in praise. The meaning is not that men should do nothing but pray, but that nothing else we do should hinder prayer in its proper season. Prayer will help forward and not hinder all other lawful business, and every good work. 3. *In every thing give thanks*, v. 18. If we pray without ceasing, we shall not want matter for thanksgiving *in every thing*. As we must in every thing make our requests known to God by supplications, so we must not omit thanksgiving, Phil. 4:6. We should be thankful in every condition, even in adversity as well as prosperity. It is never so bad with us but it might be worse. If we have ever so much occasion to make our humble complaints to God, we never can have any reason to complain of God, and have always much reason to praise and give thanks: the apostle says, *This is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning us, that we give thanks*, seeing God is reconciled to us in Christ Jesus; in him, through him, and for his sake, he allows us to rejoice evermore, and appoints us in every thing to give thanks. It is pleasing to God. 4. *Quench not the Spirit* (v. 19), for it is this Spirit of grace and supplication that helpeth our infirmities, that assisteth us in our prayers and thanksgivings. Christians are said to *be baptized with the Holy Ghost and with fire*. He worketh as fire, by enlightening, enlivening, and purifying the souls of men. We must be careful not to quench this holy fire. As fire is put out by withdrawing fuel, so we quench the Spirit if we do not stir up our spirits, and all that is within us, to comply with the motions of the good Spirit; and as fire is quenched by pouring water, or putting a great quantity of dirt upon it, so we must be careful not to quench the Holy Spirit by indulging carnal lusts and affections, or minding only

earthly things. 5. *Despise not prophesyings* (v. 20); for, if we neglect the means of grace, we forfeit the Spirit of grace. By *prophesyings* here we are to understand the preaching of the word, the interpreting and applying of the scriptures; and this we must not despise, but should prize and value, because it is the ordinance of God, appointed of him for our furtherance and increase in knowledge and grace, in holiness and comfort. We must not despise preaching, though it be plain, and not with enticing words of men's wisdom, and though we be told no more than what we knew before. It is useful, and many times needful, to have our minds stirred up, our affections and resolutions excited, to those things that we knew before to be our interest and our duty. 6. *Prove all things, but hold fast that which is good*, v. 21. This is a needful caution, to prove all things; for, though we must put a value on preaching, we must not take things upon trust from the preacher, but try them by the law and the testimony. We must search the scriptures, whether what they say be true or not. We must not believe every spirit, but must try the spirits. But we must not be always trying, always unsettled; no, at length we must be settled, and hold fast that which is good. When we are satisfied that any thing is right, and true, and good, we must hold it fast, and not let it go, whatever opposition or whatever persecution we meet with for the sake thereof. Note, The doctrines of human infallibility, implicit faith, and blind obedience, are not the doctrines of the Bible. Every Christian has and ought to have, the judgment of discretion, and should have *his senses exercised in discerning between good and evil*, truth and falsehood, Heb. 5:13, 14. And proving all things must be in order to holding fast that which is good. We must not always be seekers, or fluctuating in our minds, *like children tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine*. 7. *Abstain from all appearance of evil*, v. 22. This is a good means to prevent our being deceived with false doctrines, or unsettled in our faith; for our Saviour has told us (Jn. 7:17), *If a man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God*. Corrupt affections indulged in the heart, and evil practices allowed of in the life, will greatly tend to promote fatal errors in the mind; whereas purity of heart, and integrity of life, will dispose men to receive the truth in the love of it. We should therefore abstain from evil, and all appearances of evil, from sin, and that which looks like sin, leads to it, and borders upon it. He who is not shy of the appearances of sin, who shuns not the occasions of sin, and who avoids not the temptations and approaches to sin, will not long abstain from the actual commission of sin.

Verses 23-28

²³And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it. ²⁵Brethren, pray for us. ²⁶Greet all the brethren with an holy kiss. ²⁷I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren. ²⁸The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

In these words, which conclude this epistle, observe,

I. Paul's prayer for them, v. 23. He had told them, in the beginning of this epistle, that he always made mention of them in his prayers; and, now that he is writing to them, he lifts up his heart to God in prayer for them. Take notice, 1. To whom the apostle prays, namely, *The very God of peace*. He is the God of grace, and the God of peace and love. He is the author of peace and lover of concord; and by their

peaceableness and unity, from God as the author, those things would best be obtained which he prays for. 2. The things he prays for on behalf of the Thessalonians are their sanctification, that *God would sanctify them wholly*; and their preservation, that they might be *preserved blameless*. He prays that they may be wholly sanctified, that the whole man may be sanctified, and then that the whole man, spirit, soul, and body, may be preserved: or, he prays that they may be wholly sanctified, that is, more perfectly, for the best are sanctified but in part while in this world; and therefore we should pray for and press towards complete sanctification. Where the good work of grace is begun, it shall be carried on, be protected and preserved; and all those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus shall be preserved to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. And because, if God did not carry on his good work in the soul, it would miscarry, we should pray to God to perfect his work, and *preserve us blameless, free from sin and impurity, till at length we are presented faultless before the throne of his glory with exceeding joy*.

II. His comfortable assurance that God would hear his prayer: *Faithful is he who calleth you, who will also do it*, v. 24. The kindness and love of God had appeared to them in calling them to the knowledge of his truth, and the faithfulness of God was their security that they should persevere to the end; and therefore, the apostle assures them, God would do what he desired; he would effect what he had promised; he would accomplish all the good pleasure of his goodness towards them. Note, Our fidelity to God depends upon his faithfulness to us.

III. His request of their prayers: *Brethren, pray for us*, v. 25. We should pray for one another; and brethren should thus express brotherly love. This great apostle did not think it beneath him to call the Thessalonians brethren, nor to request their prayers. Ministers stand in need of their people's prayers; and the more people pray for their ministers the more good ministers may have from God, and the more benefit people may receive by their ministry.

IV. His salutation: *Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss*, v. 26. Thus the apostle sends a friendly salutation from himself, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, and would have them salute each other in their names; and thus he would have them signify their mutual love and affection to one another by the kiss of charity (1 Pt. 5:14), which is here called a holy kiss, to intimate how cautious they should be of all impurity in the use of this ceremony, then commonly practised; as it should not be a treacherous kiss like that of Judas, so not a lascivious kiss like that of the harlot, Prov. 7:13. (*Lecturer: In Far Eastern societies, a kiss would be inappropriate. In place of a kiss, a courteous handshake or bow would do.*)

V. His solemn charge for the reading of this epistle, v. 27. This is not only an exhortation, but an adjuration by the Lord. And this epistle was to be read to all the holy brethren. It is not only allowed to the common people to read the scriptures, and what none should prohibit, but it is their indispensable duty, and what they should be persuaded to do. In order to this, these holy oracles should not be kept concealed in an unknown tongue, but translated into the vulgar languages, that all men, being concerned to know the scriptures, may be able to read them, and be acquainted with them. The public reading of the law was one part of the worship of

the sabbath among the Jews in their synagogues, and the scriptures should be read in the public assemblies of Christians also.

VI. The apostolical benediction that is usual in other epistles: *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen*, v. 28. We need no more to make us happy than to know that grace which our Lord Jesus Christ has manifested, be interested in that grace which he has purchased, and partake of that grace which dwells in him as the head of the church. This is an ever-flowing and overflowing fountain of grace to supply all our wants.