

*A Layman's Look  
At  
First Thessalonians*

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# *A Layman's Look At First Thessalonians*

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## **Introduction**

First Thessalonians is perhaps the earliest of Paul's epistles, and was in its writing to Paul a three-fold message to these young Christians, probably being written shortly after his visit to the city of Thessalonica. Thessalonica itself is at the opening of the Aegean Sea to the north and the city was southward in the region of Macedonia and about fifty miles west of the city of Philippi and one hundred miles north of Athens, Greece. Considering the short duration that Paul was in this city, he gives a three-fold message of confirmation, courage and comfort. Of all the letters of Paul, this one has more sound doctrine being taught to a young congregation than all the other epistles.

The rapture of the church is given as a comfort to those who had lost loved ones and were wondering of their fate, but it is also full of the doctrine of the Second Coming of Christ, the judgment of the unbelievers and final doom of Satan. But the courage that is given far outreaches the doom and Paul continually exhorts the believers and gives his thanks for their steadfastness in the doctrine of Christ.

J. Vernon McGee left a good outline for those who wish to follow the chapters in an order. 1) The Christian's Attitude; 2) The Christian's Reward; 3) The Christian's Life; 4) The Christians' Death; 5) The Christian's Actions. All these are in relation to the return of Jesus Christ, first for the body of believers and then to set up His millennial reign and eternity.

There is also the inspiring hope, chapter one; the working hope, chapter two; the purifying hope, chapter 3:1-4:12; the comforting hope, chapter 4:13-18; the rousing hope, chapter 5.

As is the message for us today, the message of Paul to the Thessalonians was an imminent return of Christ. He could come today. Are you ready?

# Chapter One

## The Inspiring Hope

***Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ (1:1).*** As was the usual custom of Paul, he opens his letter with the usual salutation that he had with all his epistles. For this reason I do not personally believe he had written Hebrews, as there is no opening as with his other writings. In fact, if you read Second Thessalonians 3:17, you see that he stated, ***The salutation of Paul with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle: so I write.*** Nevertheless, he does have an added difference in this letter that was not in his previous and later epistles, that of Silvanus and Timotheus (Timothy), who had returned to Paul with letters from Thessalonica telling of their faithfulness in following the words that Paul had given previously when he visited them.

We will notice that peace never comes before the grace of God. Some people have the misconception that they can have peace in their hearts by doing good, giving to the poor, and any numerous other things they may do to gain favor with God, but there is no favor outside the grace of God, received only by salvation in Jesus Christ.

***We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; Remembering 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; Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God (1:2-4).*** Once before Paul mentioned the ***faith, love and ...hope***, and it was to a wayward Christian congregation in the city of Corinth. In First Corinthians 13:13, he says, ***And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.*** Those in Corinth had been a bickering group of believers, doubting Paul's authority as a minister of Christ and flaunting their "gifts" supposedly given by the Lord. But here in First Thessalonians, we see people who were constantly remembering Paul, as he was their continuing ***work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope***. This is an exemplary goal of any congregation to have, not only towards Paul but to one another also.

A scientist, who invented the heat shield surrounding our space shuttles had once made the remark that our universe is made up of a trinity, length, breadth and height. And there is in our universe time, space and matter. So it is with our lives as children of God; we have body that is self-conscious, soul that is conscious of others, and spirit, which is God-conscious. That is why the unsaved are what you would call "out of synch" with God; their soul within them is dead until it is revived by the power of the Spirit of God through faith in the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

These Christians were divinely chosen by God. Election is a theme that will be misused by many Christians, both those within the Baptist faith and those within other denominations. The Calvinists hold that since God has already chosen the Christian, then why bother witness. He knows who will be saved and who will be lost, so there is no sense in wasting your time witnessing. But they then leave out the free will of man; that

he is the ultimate one to make the decision whether or not to accept Jesus Christ into their heart as Lord and Savior. As has been stated before, election is like a doorway, where on the one side you read, "Whosoever will may come," and then once the door is opened, it reads "Chosen in Him before the foundation of the world." One evangelist puts it this way: God only knows who will and who will not be saved, but that isn't going to keep me from witnessing and reaping the benefits of the rewards for being faithful.

***For 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*** (1:5). We may be only bodies of flesh and blood, but if we come to give the Gospel to an unsaved world, we better be "prayed up" and witness only in the power of the Holy Spirit, with the assurance of God that He will not let His Word fail. It is a sad state of affairs when someone tries to witness but does it only in his own power, not that of God's guidance. As the song states it, "Without Him, I can do nothing. Without Him, I'll surely fail." But as Philippians 4:13 says, ***I can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth me***. You can say what you will about all the man-made efforts to give out the Gospel, but if it is not done before much prayer and guidance of the Lord, it is all for naught. The Bible is ***quickness*** (living) and ***powerful*** (dynamic) and ***sharper than any two-edged sword***. When you go in the power of the Holy Spirit and say, "Thus saith the Lord..." you have the Word of God to defeat the powers of Satan and all his evil emissaries. James 4:7 says, ***Resist the devil, and he will flee from you***. You can storm the gates of hell and they will fall, because you have prayer, power and persuasion of the Holy Spirit to cut through the heart of the evil soul, convict them of sin and show them their need of the Savior. He and He alone saves. We are but tools in His hand to give out the Word.

***And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost: So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia*** (1:6-7). An evangelist once was remarking on the fact of persecution given to Christians. He said, "You can have a thousand lying religions all in bed together, but bring in the Word of God and the Gospel, and they all fall out." We can depend upon persecution when we live for the Lord. In fact, it is a promise given to us in the Scripture. ***For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake; Having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me*** (Philippians 1:29-30). Jesus said it plainly, ***These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world*** (John 16:33). That is why there is so much hatred in the world today; people do not want to be told and shown that they are sinners. They choose to live in their sin, and do not want to change. And when you or I go to them, show them the Gospel and what it says about sin, unless the Spirit of God has been working in their heart, they will hate you as much as they hate the Gospel. So cheer up, friend, because you can anticipate being ridiculed, spat upon, having a door slammed in your face, and may one day even face being beaten, stoned or die for your faith in the Gospel.

But some swerve away from serving the Lord, simply because they fear they will have to suffer for the sake of Christ. Even Paul had to warn Timothy of this, when he said, ***Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his***

***prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God*** (II Timothy 1:8). If Timothy was fearful of persecution, we can anticipate the same.

An ***ensample*** according to the Word of God is something or something that can be a present or living guide for someone to follow, whereas an ***example*** was something or someone that was in the past, such as Moses and the Ten Commandments were an example given to the saints at Corinth. But sometimes the words can be used for both purposes. Whatever manner used, according to First Thessalonians, these Christians set forth the way to serve the Lord to other regions, as we see in the next verse.

***For 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*** (1:8). “Have you heard of the way the Thessalonians have been telling everyone about Jesus Christ and His power to save? I hear they have gone as far as all of Macedonia and the region of Achaia, telling the news about Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection.” What a testimony that would be for today, if those in the states surrounding yours would be able to say that about your congregation. “These people do not stop telling others about the Lord. Why I hear they even do street preaching and passing out tracts all over their state.”

There is a small church group in southern Florida that gathers people together to go to rallies in support of the unborn child, holding up banners with Bible verses on them and passing out tracts about how the Lord Jesus Christ has a special place in His heart for children, with verses like Mark 10:14, ***Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God***. They go to races in Daytona and are spit upon, ridiculed and threatened, yet have been known to have souls won to the Lord through their testimony. They have given thousands of tracts overseas in various languages, free, for those in foreign countries who have never heard the Gospel. This is the ministry that the Lord seeks from His disciples, so that our faith is spread abroad also.

***For 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*** (1:9). Here is what had happened in three short weeks of Paul’s ministry to Thessalonica. He was forced to leave town because of the hatred of the Jews toward him, yet was able to have a church group established that had believers who had been won to the Lord and given up their idolatrous practices. There are many different idols that we face today in America; there is the idol of Sunday fishing and hunting, the idol of having to give up church service because of the big football, baseball or basketball game, or just simply the idol of idleness and a great ambivalence toward anything spiritual. There is the idol of money, thinking you have to work an extra Sunday shift to get that time and one-half to have more to spend on more idolatrous toys, the big screen TV, the newer car, that boat for Sunday worship service on the lake. But a true Christian gives up these for the true God.

***And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come*** (1:10). There is a perfect three-point sermon for preachers to use today: Watch, Wait and Work. The day that Jesus Christ will return is very near. Are you watching for Him, anticipating the day you will see Him come in the Shekinah glory of Heaven? Are you waiting on the day you will be caught up to be with Him? And in the meanwhile, are you working for Him, telling others about Jesus Christ and leading souls to the Lord? That is your purpose for the Lord leaving you here, so others will learn of His saving grace.

## *Chapter Two*

### *The Working Hope*

***For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain: But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention*** (2:1-2). Once again, ***in vain*** means to be useless, empty or without any substance, like a floating soap bubble, here for a split second, shiny and brilliant, and then gone forever. No, Paul's visit to Thessalonica was not something useless, but full of the substance of what they had known, that there is a God who has an infinite love for all. And because of Paul's declaration of the Gospel to the then known world, he had been ***shamefully entreated***, not only at Philippi, but in other cities also, where he had traveled to give the Word of Christ to a dying world. Nevertheless, his zeal for the lost was such that no amount of persecution was going to have him stay the course.

The day may come when we here in America are going to have to suffer for the truth of the Scriptures, as has been evident throughout the world. I would recommend you read the book, Foxes Book Of Martyrs to get a small glimpse of the torments and tortures the saints of old had to endure, yet refused to recant their faith in the living God who came to die for them. That may come upon us here one day, and probably sooner than we anticipate. The Lord said we would suffer persecution, so let us be ready when that day arrives.

***For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile: But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts*** (2:3-4). There is nothing sadder than to be listening to a preacher who thinks he is the closest thing to an angel. There are so many conceited, arrogant ministers who think they are as good as the pope and need to have their ring finger kissed as well. Big, braggadocio men in large congregations are the ones who are ripe for temptation, as has been seen in the past, with the TV preacher who had golden faucets in his bathroom, an air conditioned dog house and other luxuries too many to be enumerated. And then there is the cathedral with crystal windows, and a man who fell into open sin. They may cry, "Something **good** is going to happen to you today," and then stand there and beg for more money, because they had a vision from God that if they didn't come up with three million dollars by a certain deadline, they were going to die at the hands of God. What arrogance. Such was not the case with the humble and meek character of the Apostle Paul. Neither he nor those who worked with him would use such deceit, uncleanness or guile.

Then you have the preacher who has no backbone but placates his crowd because they will not stand for him to reach against sin, so all you get from them is a message of "God is love." Yes, God is love, but He is also a God of wrath, jealousy and anger. The Bible tells us, ***It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*** (Hebrews 10:31). If you have been called of God to preach the Word, let Him be the one to guide you into what to preach, not your deacon board. If they threaten to dismiss you if you

keep preaching against their sins, then they do not deserve a man of God to preach of the love of God, more or less the wrath to come.

***For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness; God is witness: Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ (2:5-6).*** Who are we to please? Is it our congregation? Is it our deacon board? Or is it God Himself who we are to please? Do we seek to get more people and more money, because that is what we desire? Do we seek to gain man's glory? Greater is the burden of love for the lost than wanting to please everyone with what we say. When someone comes to you and asks what you think about dancing, can you find Scriptural evidence for your stand?

Paul had told Timothy that this was what people want, a preacher who will satisfy their "itching ears" - ***Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.*** (II Timothy 4:2-4). Man may turn away from the truth, but woe to the man of God who has been entrusted with the responsibility of preaching of the Son of God who came to die for their sins. As has been said before, "Keep on keeping on."

***But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us (2:7-8).*** We go to a hospital where there is a nurse in charge of the nursery room full of newborn babies. She moves from one to the other, making sure they are well cared for, fed and changed when they soil their diapers. But it is to her merely a job to do. But then she goes home, finds out she is going to have a baby, and nine months down the road, she is sitting in a rocking chair at night, smiling down at the little bundle in her arms, nursing it ever so gently while she hums a tune to get the baby to fall asleep. What is the difference in the two scenes? In the first, the babies are not her responsibility except as she is at work. At home, she nurses her own child. It is her pride and joy. So it was with Paul and those to whom he had won to Christ. He was their spiritual father and he wanted to bring them up ***in the nurture and admonition of the Lord*** (Ephesians 6:4). He showed a love as if they were in reality his children of his own bosom. Such is the attitude that is needed today in our pastors. They need to look on their responsibility as more than just a job, but a calling of Christ, to be the shepherd of their flock.

***For 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 (2:9).*** At one time, Paul was not only a Pharisee but also a tent maker, and as such, he used his former trade to earn his need while he went about preaching the Gospel. Later in this same letter (II Thessalonians 3:8), he said, ***Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you.*** It is a sad state of affairs when today's preachers think they have to demand a certain income, and then drop the occasional "hint" that when Christmas comes, they expect the congregation to give them a "love offering" for his service that past year. When a preacher gets upwards to \$50,000 as a salary, then he is furnished with a home to live in, insurance for himself and family, utility bills paid, as

well as other “necessities,” they need to remember how Paul lived in his missionary work towards the many cities he had traveled. He would not be held accountable for anything he earned, but used his own hands to earn his living. And then again, there are those who think that a pastor does not deserve any salary at all, and he had to labor extra hard to feed his family, and then has little time to meditate on the Word and study for his work in the ministry. And then the congregation feels he is obligated to come visit each family during the week, draining away more time for preparation of the Gospel. There has to be a balance between both, a sufficient salary so the pastor does not have to have an extra job, but not such as to make him greedy.

*Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe: As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory* (2:10-12). Once again Paul is using a metaphor to explain their purpose in the Gospel presentation; these Christians in Thessalonica were as if he were their physical, as well as spiritual father, protecting his children against harm from others, nourishing them in the Word of God with sound doctrine and charging them to *walk worthy of God*, because it was He who had chosen them to be partakers of His glory, of His kingdom and the riches of the inheritance that was awaiting them in eternity.

It was also to the saints at Ephesus that Paul wrote, *I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called* (Ephesians 4:1), and to those in Colosse, *That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God* (Colossians 1:10). The word *worthy* has the meaning of being “after a godly manner,” or to have their way of living to be such as having their sight set on the eternal kingdom that they would be ushered into at the return of Christ.

*For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe* (2:13). We do not pray as often as we should, but here we read of a man who prayed *without ceasing* for those whom he loved and had presented the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In verse five of chapter one, Paul had said, *For 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*. He now reassures them that the word preached was indeed the Word of God, and as such, if they received it indeed as the Word of God, it would work in their hearts to convict them, to convince them of the truth, and to confirm their faith in the one and true living God. Too often today you can hear people say, “Well, what he said doesn’t make sense.” That is because they do not receive it as the Word of God, if indeed the preacher is giving forth the Word of God in power. They want to excuse their sin, so do not allow the Word to penetrate into their hearts and lives. They may as well stay at home, since they have a mind that is absent anyway. “I wonder who is winning the World Series?” “I sure hope I get that promotion tomorrow.” “Will this guy ever end his sermon? He goes on and on with the same subject.” Their mind is on everything but what is being preached. Little wonder they have no zeal to distribute tracts to the lost, or you may wonder if they are even saved themselves.

***For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews: Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men: Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost*** (2:14-16). Here is another proof that there is no “universal” church. These were individual groups of believers to whom Paul had referred. So these here in Thessalonica ***became followers of the churches of God***, having received the Word of God, believed to the saving of their souls, and were now seeing the suffering others had received. If you will recall, after Paul had been forced out of Thessalonica, he went on to Berea, where those in Thessalonica who had persecuted him came and attempted to do the same in the cities where he had gone. They were not content to try and stop the Gospel in their own city, but stirred up trouble elsewhere (Acts 17:11-13). These were no better than the Pharisees and scribes in the days of Jesus, who instigated the mob to demand the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. These were the same as those who had stone, sawed asunder, burned saints at the stake, and even had Peter hanged from a cross, tradition saying it was upside down, because he did not feel he was worthy to die the same way Jesus died. But this is also what we may anticipate in our own country as we see the decadent attitude of the anti-God, pro-abortion, homosexual crowd of today. It is that which we may expect, and probably sooner than we anticipated.

***But 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*** (2:17). Just how many preachers today are allocating their time to going on road excursions, visiting other congregations and preaching, instead of taking care of their own flock? I have seen occasion where I have attempted to contact various ministers either by phone or through e-mail, only to be told they would be gone on “Preachers’ Conference,” and not return to their own church house for sometimes up to three weeks. Who may I ask is taking care of those who attend his congregation? Recall what Jesus said about the “hireling?” When wolves came in, the hireling would run and hide, rather than deal with any problem that may arise. But even Paul, when he had been taken away from these Christians, not of his own doing but probably because of yet another arrest, imprisonment or other persecution, desired to be there with them to comfort them.

***Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us*** (2:18). What was Paul’s reason? ...***Satan hindered us***. How about those wayward preachers of today? What hinders them? More than usual, it is their own personal ego, wanting to be heard (fed and rewarded with “love offerings”) and have an even greater prestige among others, than to be at home and serve his people with his messages.

Satan also hinders by other means. A preacher may have a radio station that will reach countless hundreds or even thousands, and then some ungodly businessman will buy the station and remove all semblance of “religious” programs. Or Satan will cause the preacher to stumble into sin, ruin his testimony (some would say reputation, but it is more what he stood for that is ruined), and forced out of the ministry. I recall a very strong church group in the city where I was living at the time I was going to college. The minister built up the church from a meager group to over a thousand in very little time, and then he was ruined because of falling into gross sin with a woman who was not his

own. This forced him to resign and the church group nearly fell apart. Then another minister came in, built the church up again to nearly 1500, and then had to quit because of heart problems. Satan will use any method he can to undermine the work of God.

***For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy (2:19-20).*** But Paul's joy was in seeing the growth of every saint to whom he had the chance of greeting, exhorting and ministering the Word of God. He looked forward to the day he was to see them at Christ's return for his chosen. This is the challenge that every preacher of the Word, every teacher of a Sunday school, every student studying for the ministry and every missionary on the foreign field, to one day as he or she stands in the presence of the Savior, sees his own reward there to greet him; those to whom he had the opportunity to preach the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I wonder how many will be in Heaven to come up to me and I recognize them as someone I had won to the Lord through my testimony or my witnessing to them from the Word of God? I often wondered about the rewards the Lord will give us for diligently serving Him here on earth. I then would wonder what would happen if such a person was to fall into sin. Would they lose those rewards? And then I thought that, even if they did, they would have some there to come up to them and say, "Thank you for showing me my need for the Savior. Because of you, I'm now in Heaven and not in eternal punishment." To me, that would be quite a reward.

My friend, how many rewards are being laid up for you in Heaven? I think of the song that I used to sing all the time:

I wonder, have I done my best for Jesus,  
Who died upon the cruel tree?  
To think of His great sacrifice at Calv'ry  
I know my Lord expects the best from me.

How many are the lost that I have lifted?  
Ho many are the chained I've helped to free?  
I wonder, have I done my best for Jesus,  
When He has done so much for me?

I think about the book of Revelation, where it says ***God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes*** (Revelation 7:14; 21:4). How many tears are being shed because of lax in witnessing to Him here while we have time? How many tears will be shed because we see friends and loved ones being hurled into the abyss of the Lake of Fire? We are the only witnesses God has to take His Word to a dying world. Are you serving Him with all your heart and soul?

## Chapter Three

### *The Purifying Hope*

*Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone; And 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: That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto* (3:1-3). Once more Paul reminds the Thessalonians of the dangers they face, and will face, because of the hatred of those who do not believe the Gospel. So to comfort their hearts concerning his own persecutions, he sends to them a young preacher, Timothy. Here is a young man who evidently had a godly mother and grandmother, and a Greek father. Nothing much is said about his father, but we read in Second Timothy 1:5, *When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also.* He either was won to Christ by them or Paul, since Paul in another place calls him *my son*.

*That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto.* Paul now attributes the persecutions, not only to himself, but also to these in Thessalonica. No matter where you may go, there will be those who do not want the Gospel preached to the unsaved and dying world. They will do their best to thwart every effort on your part, just as in Acts 13:10, when Elymus the sorcerer sought to keep the deputy of the city from listening to Paul, he had to be confronted by Paul. We read of Paul's reply; *O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?* We are like a round peg trying to fit into a square hole. In the world, we just don't fit in properly, so they will do everything they can to hinder our testimony. We see that today in our own country, where it is becoming harder and harder to preach the Gospel without having some sect or ungodly organization seeking to silence us. We see police coming and arresting street preachers and others who witness against the sin of their city. It is now a "hate crime" to speak against the abomination of homosexuality or murder of the innocent unborn. Christian literature is not allowed in public places, but Playboy, Hustler and other such magazines are permitted. Try to tell someone of the Gospel and you will be hindered, but those same people will stand and laugh at off the wall jokes all day, and that is okay. Friend, we have been appointed unto persecutions and trials, and they will be coming our way.

*For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know* (3:4). Quite frequently, Paul uses the phrase *ye know*. It is a constant reminder to them of what they would have to endure for the sake of the Gospel (1:5; 2:2, 5, 11; 3:4; 4:2 and II Th. 2:6). It is good to be reminded of what we might be facing in the near future. Tribulations, trials and testing are part and parcel to the Christian life. Expect it to come, and sooner than you may anticipate.

*For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain* (3:5). It was

for this reason Paul was not only writing this letter, but had sent others to see if Satan had a stronghold on their area, as well as he had on others. We have a very intelligent and strong adversary, and we need to know that in our own power we can do nothing. What will you do if when you are your congregation, some terrorists break in and demand you to recant your faith or die? Many over in other countries have been slaughtered because they refuse to deny their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. What will you do?

***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: Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith: For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord*** (3:6-8). Here again is another time when Paul brings to their *remembrance* of those who had labored in the Gospel for their sakes. Do you recall the moment that you accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord? Do you remember who it was who spoke the Word of God to you, so that your heart was pricked with guilt and you knew your need of the Savior?

***For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord.*** To “live” is to enjoy life to the fullest, but it also means to know things of this world that will hinder the happy life in the Lord. Therefore, to ***stand fast*** is a continual action of the present, knowing that in doing so, you and I will reap the reward in glory, when we appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ, not to be punished, but to receive reward for our service to the Lord. It would then behoove us to do our best to serve Him with an honest, humble and eager heart, not just for the reward, but that we might have something to cast back at His feet to honor Him for all He had done for us.

***For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God; Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith?*** (3:9-10). This is not what you would call a question that needed an answer. Being rhetorical in many of his epistles, he suggested that they did not have to doubt his sincerity when it came to his care for them, his prayer for them and his desire to see them grow in the knowledge of the Word of God. Paul’s labor there in Thessalonica had been interrupted after a short three weeks giving them the Gospel, and he greatly desired to return there to give more of the Gospel and the tenets of the faith, so that they would have a greater knowledge of the doctrine of God.

***Now God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you. And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints*** (3:11-13). Paul anticipated being released from prison so that he might once again be permitted by the Holy Spirit to go to them, to increase their love one for another and for his ministers in the faith. He ends this chapter by again challenging them in their growth ***in holiness before God*** (here is most likely the Holy Spirit being mentioned), ***even our Father...and ...at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints***. Here again we have the trinity; the Holy Spirit, the Father and the Son. And of course, when Jesus returns, those who have gone one before will return with him, reunited with their physical, resurrected bodies and then we shall all be then transported out of this sinful world to bow before Him at the Βῆμα Seat of Christ.

## *Chapter Four*

### *The Purifying and Comforting Hope*

***Furthermore 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. For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus*** (4:1-2). To ***abound*** (Greek: περισσευω) give the attitude of someone jumping up and down for extreme joy. It would give you the idea of an entire team, running on the field when someone has hit a grand slam in the bottom of the ninth inning to win an important game, or someone who tosses a basketball from mid-court and it swishes through the basket goal at the final buzzer, giving the home team the win. Everyone is jumping up and down, extremely excited and overjoyed. So is the joy Paul sought for these saints to have in their walk and talk with God. We should be overjoyed when we hear of a soul coming to the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. After all, doesn't the Bible say in Luke 15:10, ***Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.*** I can imagine the saints in heaven, as they hear report of some loved one who accepts Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, with great singing and praising of our Lord, knowing one more soul had been snatched from the pit of Hell, and Satan has suffered another defeat.

***For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour; Not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God: That 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*** (4:3-6). Sanctification signifies purity, holiness, and cleanliness of body, soul and spirit. To be such a person requires purity of habits, thoughts and mannerisms; keeping one's body from promiscuousness. Paul has now changed his letter to give instructions to these in Thessalonica concerning their attitude towards the opposite sex, particularly being truthful and righteous to their own marriage partner, honoring them as a ***chosen vessel*** (Acts 9:15), that which belongs to God (I Corinthians 6:19) and is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Neither should a Christian seek to ***defraud his brother in any manner***, or in other words, seek to gain by taking advantage of another person. If you have something that someone else would like to buy from you, and it cost you ten dollars, don't seek to sell it for more than it is worth. To do so is seeking to gain the anger of the Lord. Be sure He will cause you to lose in the long run. A lot of businesses ought to take thought to this, when they mark up the cost of items, just because they see they can take advantage of a need. For instance, a news report makes mention of a shortage of gas, so that very day, every gas station in town will raise the price of their gas, whether or not they are told to do so.

***For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness*** (4:7). Your body, as mentioned, does not belong to you. You are the ***temple*** of the living God. As it reads in First Corinthians 3:16-17, ***Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God***

*destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are, and as it states in First Corinthians 6:18-19, Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? To defile is to shrivel or wither, i.e. to spoil (by any process) or (generally) to ruin (especially figuratively, by moral influences, to deprave):--corrupt (self), defile, destroy. Sinning against the temple of God is to grieve the Holy Spirit, and more importantly, to bring shame to the name of Christ Jesus. The world loves nothing better than to laugh when they hear of some pastor (or any servant of God, for that matter) who has fallen into sin that defiles the body.*

*He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit (4:8). To despise is to utterly reject; to have a total disdain for someone or something. In this sense, to sin against the body is a sin against God. We read in Galatians that the child of God is not to indulge in the sins of the flesh, because it is against the Holy Spirit which indwells the believer. To continually live in sin is a sure sign that such a person is **not** a child of God, and we know that someone who is not a child of God has a hatred for anything holy, especially the Holy Spirit who is sent into the world to convict of sin. And it is only the indwelling of the Spirit of God which gives us the power to live a godly and holy life.*

*But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another (4:9). We have two uses for the word love here, the first, **brotherly love**, is the word φιλαδελφία, which is a kindly, affectionate feeling towards others. The second, **to love one another**, is the word ἀγαπή, the kind of love God had for us in sending His only begotten Son into the world to die in our place. We should have such a love for other brethren in Christ the same way. I should wonder if we are not to have such a love for the lost in like manner, willing to go even at the expense and danger to our own lives to tell them of the love of Christ for their souls. Just as it says in Galatians, **...the fruit of the Spirit is love...** That is the opposite of the world that only wishes us harm and destruction. We cause irritation because of our attitude of wanting nothing but the best for them, and desiring that they come to Christ, allow the Holy Spirit to live in their hearts and then dedicate their lives to winning others also.*

*And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more; And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you; That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing (4:10-12). The region of Macedonia had already heard of their faith in Christ and willingness to suffer shame for the cause of salvation, but Paul's desire was to see them grow even more. Then he makes a statement that would seem out of place for his demeanor. "Mind your own business," seems to be the admonition, but in actuality, it is a call for them to continue their jobs as diligently as possible, live honestly in the sight of the lost and provide for their own household, so there would be no lack in food, shelter and protection of their loved ones.*

To **walk honestly** is to not defraud others, and respect them, so that they may see we not only believe in Christ, but live the Christ-like life also, gaining their respect, even in the midst of their hatred of the Gospel.

There are people out in the world (even Christians, I'm sorry to say) who will stop at nothing to take advantage of another, especially the elderly. They will use ways to cheat them out of their livelihood, get them to sign their wills over to their organizations and then hand you a handkerchief supposedly to bring you "fortune" from God. I would have you to remember that "fortune" is a demonic term, right along with "luck," which is from the root word Satan. Be honest, talk honestly and walk honestly, so that not only the world will praise what you are doing, but God will also reward you for your walk with Him.

***But 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. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For 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. For 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: Then 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. Wherefore comfort one another with these words*** (4:13-18). Paul now shifts course once more, and seeks to comfort those who had lost loved ones who had come to Christ. They evidently were wondering if they would be in Heaven, and this section describes to them the truth of not only theirs, but of those loved ones who had passed on into eternity. This is the comforting hope that we all have in Christ, knowing that one day we shall see Him coming in the clouds of Heaven to take with Him all that had received Him as Lord and Savior.

I can recall as a child, every time it was cloudy, I thought it means that such a day Jesus could return, and to be honest (not being saved at that time), I didn't want Him to return. I think the clouds spoken of in Revelation are the myriads of saints following Him, returning to be reunited with their bodies and then ushered once more into Heaven. And the clouds of Revelation 1:7 (***Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen***) may also be His Shekinah glory that was evident in the Old Testament, when He went before the nation of Israel into the Promised Land of Israel. It doesn't say He comes "in" clouds, but "with" clouds, so this may be His return to set up His earthly kingdom, since the earth ***wails because of him***. Those who did not receive Him as Lord and Savior are going to look up one day, after the tribulation, see Him descending and seek to hide, knowing their day has come.

Here in First Thessalonians, we see a comfort, concerning the deceased. We see the coming of the Lord for those still alive, right before the tribulation begins, and we see the final call of all, both dead and alive. Someone once asked why the ***dead in Christ shall rise first***, and they were told it was because they had six feet further to go than those alive. Whatever the cause, it will be a time of great rejoicing as we pass out of this life into eternal life, kneel before Him at the Judgment Seat to receive our rewards, and then probably will sit back and watch the tribulation unfold. What a comfort that will be, to know we do not have to suffer the agony of the plagues that will come down upon all the unbelievers.

My friend, are you ready? If Jesus should come today, would you be called with other saved loved ones? Or would you be left behind, to suffer the agony of all that will

be brought upon the lost? I truth that you have acknowledged that you are a sinner, deserving of God's wrath, then realizing that God in Christ took your wrath for you on the cross of Calvary, died, was buried three days and three nights, but rose triumphantly from the grave, now ever in the presence of Almighty God the Father, ready to intercede for you when you call upon Him and receive Him into your heart as both Lord and Savior.

## *Chapter Five*

### *A Rousing Hope*

***But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night*** (5:1-2). Those who are believers are not to be looking for ***times and the seasons***, but for a person. It is not for us to know when Christ will return, just to know that he WILL return, first to take home those who are born again, both dead and living, and then to return at the culmination of the tribulation period to set up His millennial kingdom. To try and set a times sequence is futile, as has been seen previously. It was back in 1988 that there was a man who had written a book, using a numerical sequence of events, to say that it was in September of that year that Jesus was going to return at the rapture. Of course, that time came and went, and so did he. So humiliated by the attention given to him for his wrong prediction, he boarded up his house and went into seclusion, to keep from having to give answer for his “prophecy.”

I remember walking into an evening service at the place I used to go in Kansas City, Kansas, and having to go into the office, there was a man on the phone and he was talking to someone else about the Lord’s return. He said, “I know the Bible says we are not to know the day nor the hour, but it doesn’t say anything about the **year**.” He had obviously thought that the year had come and we were going to be called home. Again, that **year** has long ago passed and at this writing, the Lord still has not returned. All we are asked to do is wait, watch, and **work**. That point will be dealt with later. We are to keep looking up and anticipating that the Lord may come today.

In the Bible days, when marauders would come upon a city to pillage, it would not be in total silence, until they approached, but they would enter into a home with loud noises, stunning the sleepers into total confusion. And then they would take what they wanted, while the household was shocked into being able to do nothing to defend their property or family. So it will be with the Lord. He is not coming back stealthily, but it will be with a shout of victory.

***For 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. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief*** (5:3-5). All we hear today from all over the world is a cry for peace. Nations rise up against other nations. There is terrorism in almost every corner of the planet; suicide bombers taking their own lives, thinking they will be rewarded in their own private heaven for killing others. What a shock they are in for when after death they open their eyes to the reality of hell.

There has been an attempt to attain peace in Israel ever since God’s land has been given back to the nation, but the insurgents who call themselves “Palestinians” insist that it belongs to them. Every time a portion of the land is optioned away from God’s chosen people, the nation of Israel, there is wrath from Almighty God because of it. In 1991, our president pushed for his land-for-peace plan by forcing Israel to give away land. The very next day, there was the *Perfect Storm*, where one hundred foot waves pounded the

coastlands of New England, even damaging the president's own home. In August 2005, there was pressure again for Israel to evacuate Gaza, where Israeli families lost all they owned and were forced to even dig up their dead and relocate them. Was God pleased? The very next day, 8/29/2005, tropical depression *Hurricane Katrina* hit New Orleans, with over two hundred billion dollars in damage and one million people forced from their homes. I could go on and on about God's wrath when others mess with Israel and their land. August 23, 1992, more talks for Israel to surrender land for "peace." Within twenty-four hours, *Hurricane Andrew*, a 30-mile wide tornado slammed our coastland, with thirty billion dollars damage. From April to September, 1993, Israel and the "PLO" work on and sign a compromise "peace" agreement in Washington, D. C. During that time our country is hit with the most devastating and widespread flooding in our history. My wife and I lost a child due to that flooding. And then there was November 7-12, 2002, during Ramadan, our president hosted a dinner to honor Islam and the "revelation of God's Word in the holy Koran." What a slap and spit into the face of Almighty God! Its effect – more than eighty-eight out-of-season tornadoes hit seven states. I wonder if anyone sees a pattern here? The message? Don't mess with God's people or God's land.

The term *that day* is of three-fold importance. First, the beginning of *that day* is the culmination of the Christian's time on earth; what is called the rapture, when Jesus Christ returns, not to earth, but in the air, to call home those who have trusted in Him for salvation. It is then that we who are alive will be caught up with those who have gone on before us in death, being risen from the dead to ascend into Heaven and eternity. Second, *that day* is the beginning of the dreadful and horrible time called the tribulation, which is broken up into two parts; the first three and one-half years of time when the "beast" of Revelation, which we call the anti-Christ, will rule over the earth. People will revere him as a god and he will deceive many, until he demands worship and his name emblazoned in the foreheads or back of the hand. To refuse will mean death, and then the beginning of the torment of God's chosen nation, the people of Israel, who will run and hide for their lives. The second part of the seven years will be total devastation to the unsaved; plagues that God Himself sends to earth; hail, scorching heat, seas and rivers turned to blood, pitch blackness; and in all the plagues, men and women will curse God and still refuse to believe Jesus Christ is the Messiah, except for the nation of Israel, who will then realize that Jesus Christ is Lord. Then thirdly, after the tribulation, Jesus Christ will return *with the clouds* to set up His millennial reign, when Satan, the beast and the false prophet will be cast into the abyss of darkness for a thousand years, only to be released one more time to deceive the whole world of those who were alive when the millennial reign of Christ began. Finally, there will be eternity, after the dead will be judged for their works; not for salvation, but for degree of punishment they will endure for all of eternity.

***But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness (5:4-5).*** Why won't *that day overtake* us? We will not be here, but will be enjoying the blessings of the beginning of our eternity during that terrible time of the tribulation. We will be given our rewards for service to the Lord, and have the joy of casting our crowns at the feet of Jesus. Jesus doesn't come as a thief for Christians. It will be a time of great light, not darkness. But woe to those who are left here on earth to go through the tribulation.

***Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night (5:6-7).*** I think I have mentioned this before, but it needs to be repeated. There was a pastor who had a young son, barely in his teens, who was intrigued by his father's sermons on sin. He asked his Dad to explain them more thoroughly, and his Dad got up, grabbed his coat and told his son to do the same. They went out to the car, got in and drove to the worse streets in their town, where all the bars were located. They got out of the car and walked to the door of one of the bars, opened the door and went in, standing at the entrance. After a brief time, the pastor turned around and ushered his son back out the door and to the car. After they got in and drove off, they sat in silence for a few blocks and the young son spoke up. "Dad," he asked, "Why was it so dark in there?" His father looked at him and replied, "Son, it is because the Bible says, ***And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved*** (John 3:19-20). Men and their sin are like cockroaches; when a light is turned on, they scatter in all directions to hide from the light. They love to revel in their sin, and the light of the Gospel exposes their evil.

***But 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 (5:8).*** Faith and love come from the heart. The Bible tells us that it is from the heart that man believes unto salvation (Romans 10:9-10). It is the heart where Christ dwells by faith (Ephesians 3:16). Do you know there is no place in the Bible that tells us we must ask Jesus to come into our "life?" But over and over again, it is a heart decision that gives us salvation. And knowledge of our faith in Christ gives us the intellectual "hope" for our eternity; it is not a hope of anticipation, but an earnest assuredness that what Christ said He would do, He **will** do.

***For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him (5:9-10).*** It is interesting to know that the Greek word for ***wrath*** is from where we get the word ***orgy***. It speaks of properly, desire (as a reaching forth or excitement of the mind), i.e. (by analogy), violent passion (ire, or (justifiable) abhorrence); by implication punishment: anger, indignation, vengeance, or wrath. But it is in the book of Revelation that the word is changed to ***ψυμοσ*** (thumo), which speaks of the fierce anger of God toward the unrepentant sinner. It shows us here that we will not go through any of the tribulation period, because as saints of God, we are not to experience any of this dreaded horror that comes upon those who refused Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. This is a time of judgment, and the many believers throughout this world are not appointed to this calamity.

Here is the blessed hope for the Christian, ***that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.*** When a loved one dies and is laid in the grave, if they were a believer in Jesus Christ, that is not their end. Jesus calls it being asleep (Matthew 9:24; Mark 5:39; Luke 8:52; John 11:11). So I shall see my sons who have died, because they laid their ***hope*** in Christ at an early age. It means I will see my father and mother, my grandparents on both sides of my family, and a host of other relatives who have been saved and gone on into glory. It also means there are those who did not know Christ and will lie dead in the grave, as their soul is eternally dead in eternity, waiting the day when they will stand before Almighty God, not as their Heavenly Father, but as their Judge,

who will condemn them to an eternal lake of fire, forever to feel the torment of being alone, in pitch darkness, without rest for the soles of their feet, dying and never to die, but to burn in incessant flames throughout the eons of time. Horrible is the thought that so many we know, to whom we have not witnessed, will stand in judgment of our failing to warn them of that wrath to come.

***Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do*** (5:11). In concluding the previous chapter, Paul stated, ***Wherefore comfort one another with these words*** (4:18). Here, once more, he wishes to comfort their hearts concerning their loved ones who had preceded them in death, that one day, they would see them again. How dreadful it must be with the lost world when they have someone who dies, not knowing if they will ever see them again. It would be a great burden on the heart if someone who is saved has a loved one who was lost and died, knowing that the lost one will be in eternity in the lake of fire, while those saved enjoy the bliss of being in the presence of Jesus Christ. But when someone is saved and dies, it is a great comfort to know they will be seen again.

***And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves*** (5:12-13). It is a great work and responsibility for overseers of the flock, and as such, it is the congregation's duty, not to just respond to the messages given, but to honor the pastors for preaching the Word every time the door is open. To ***esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake*** is to recognize the great burden they have, not only to prepare every day for the message to be given, but to uphold the members in prayer. Hebrews 11:17 tells us, ***Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.*** One day they will stand before God Almighty and have to explain why there may have been those who came to the services that did not receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. They will have to give reason for some failures, as well as for their victories.

The story is told that the night of the great Chicago fire, Dwight L. Moody had been preaching, and at the end of the sermon, he did not give an invitation. Then after so many had died because of the fire, he vowed to never again have a service where he did not give the opportunity to anyone who might want to be saved. Whether or not he had any there who died in the fire, it burdened him so that he would not want to have to stand and give account to the Lord for failing to have the invitation.

***Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men*** (5:14). Paul now begins a series of instructions concerning the Christian life and how to be an example to those that will be observing your manner of living. There should be a distinct change in how any believer lives, once they become a child of God. Despite the statements of the unsaved that we should not "judge, lest ye be judged," the Lord demands that we ***rebuke, refute and exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine*** (II Timothy 4:2). When we confront a wayward brother who is bringing shame to the name of the Lord, it is our duty to correct them, with love, and show them that their mannerisms and character is not according to that which honors Christ Jesus. Those who are ***feebleminded*** are those who are weak in the faith and fall away easily from following the tenets of the Gospel of Christ. And this

is also so with *the weak*, those who not only are inflicted with disease of the body, but of the soul and spirit. We are to help them to grow spiritually stronger in the faith and to be consistent with their walk with God. And then there is patience that is needed to *all men*, not only the saved, but also the lost. We tend to get in a hurry for someone to accept the Lord as Savior and not allow God to work in His timetable. Some people are ready right now to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, while others take some time. I remember of one lady who had witnessed and prayed for her husband for over a year before he one day decided he needed to be saved, and became a strong witness for Christ. Sometimes it may take a death in a family before one sees the need to be saved. My grandmother had been a Christian for long before I was born, but my grandfather cursed, smoked and would have nothing to do with Christianity. After she died, an elderly minister went to visit him one time and asked when he was going to ask Jesus Christ to save him. He said, "My wife Maude had been saved for many years, and I sure would love to see her again, and I know it would grieve her if I went to Hell." And he bowed his head, at age eighty-one, and accepted Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. He went to church, was baptized to show his faith in Christ, and never missed a Sunday in church until he finally died and went to be with the Lord. So it just shows that we need patience when witnessing to the lost, as well as exhorting the Christian.

*See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men* (5:15). In Romans 12:18, when speaking of the evil intentions of others, especially those who are ungodly, Paul had stated, *If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men*. Some people just will not allow you to try to get along with them. They are like a person who has something negative to say towards anything you might mention, or that cantankerous person who is always right. It is like the fellow at work who always thought he was better than anyone else and could do anything they could. He was arguing with one guy and said, "There is nothing that you do that I can't do better," to which the other fellow, exasperated at his boasting all the time, said, "All right. Let's put your argument to the test. I'll bet you one week's pay I can do something you cannot do." The other fellow said, "You're on." So the other fellow said, "I can take and haul something over to that other building that you can't bring back." The braggart was ready to take up the argument, so agreed to the bet, to which the one fellow walked over, grabbed a wheelbarrow, brought it back to where the braggart was standing and said, "All right, get in." So ended the argument. But we are to attempt to do good, not only to the Christian, but to all.

*Rejoice evermore* (5:16). A pastor was asking young people if they could quote the shortest verse in the Bible, to which all the hands went up eagerly. He asked for a volunteer and a young boy rose to his feet and said, "Jesus wept." The pastor said, "No, you are wrong." They all sat stunned and he smiled and said, "Actually, if you take the Greek characters of the Scripture, First Thessalonians 5:16 is the shortest verse, because it has less letters than "Jesus wept." Needless to say, no matter the circumstance, no matter what thing comes in your way, no matter what someone else might do to upset you, or no matter the worry that might come into your life, you are to rejoice. There is one verse in the Scripture that begins and ends with an action verb, and that is Philippians 4:4, *Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice*. That might sometimes seem to be difficult when the world is tumbling down around you. It seems hard to pray and thank the Lord for that flat tire when you are late already for a meeting with someone

else. Or it may be difficult when bills come piling up and you seemingly have no way to meet the expenses. Part of these may be our own fault. Check the tires and make sure they have sufficient tread before you start on a journey, and don't take on more expenses if you don't have sufficient to meet the price. As one preacher said, "Sometimes when our out go exceeds our income, then our upkeep becomes our downfall." But in all, remember to rejoice in the Lord.

**Pray without ceasing** (5:17). Someone might ask if it is possible to be able to continually be praying, all day, all the time, and I don't think it means to be staying on our knees all the time, but to be in an attitude of prayer, so that if the Lord prompts the memory of someone and lays that person on your heart, you can take them before the throne of grace and ask God for sustenance and guidance for that person.

I recall a missionary from Africa telling the story of a time when he and his loved ones were in jeopardy for their lives and had to run into the grain fields to try and hide from those who wanted to kill them. As they lay there on the ground, they could hear the footsteps of the savages walking in the field, tramping down the grain, but could not find them, so gave up the hunt. When this was told to the congregation where they had been speaking, afterwards a woman approached the man and told him that late one night, she woke with a heavy burden on her heart for him and his family. When she mentioned the time, it was found out that this was the exact time that they were being hunted, over twelve hours difference in time, but nighttime for the woman and daylight for them. So you see, we never know when God may lay a burden on your heart, so as Paul stated, **Pray without ceasing**. This means that you and I should pray regularly and be in a constant attitude of prayer.

**In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you** (5:18). This verse goes hand-in-hand with verse sixteen. Not only are we to be always rejoicing, but also to be in the constant attitude of thanks to God, no matter what may be the circumstance that comes into our lives. This reminds me of the joy expressed in the book of Philippians by Paul, when he mentioned the four areas that Satan will try to rob us of our joy: 1). through circumstances, in which God gives us singleness of mind; 2) through others, where God gives us a submissive mind; 3) through things, where God gives us a sincere mind; and 4) through worry, where God gives us a secure mind. If we And if we heed Paul's exhortation, **...be followers together of me; and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an example...** (Philippians 3:17), we will have and live a victorious, Spirit-filled life of Philippians 1:11 and Galatians 5:22-25.

**Quench not the Spirit** (5:19). In Ephesians 4:30, we are told, **And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption**. The Greek word for **quench** has the literally meaning of extinguishing, as if in dampening out a fire. The word **grieve** has the meaning of heaviness of heart, such as when the one you love the most decides they want nothing to do with you anymore. We can think of the grief that the Lord Jesus Christ suffered in the garden of Gethsemane, when the book of Luke says he sweat as it were great drops of blood. A physician would tell you such a sight means the heart has literally been broken in two. Perhaps this is why Jesus cried, **Let this cup pass from me**, and Hebrews telling us his anguish was such that he feared (Hebrews 5:7). Such is the anguish we place upon the Spirit of God which indwells us, when we choose to live in sin. To quench the Spirit of God means to dampen the fire of God within you and not allow it to burn in the hearts of others.

***Despise not prophesyings*** (5:20). Today we have a lot of people who look down on the Word of God and fail to heed the warnings give us by pastors and missionaries to the dangers awaiting us. Young people can sit in a service and pass notes back and forth, or sit there with their phones a text messages while the preacher is trying to tell them that they need to repent and believe the Gospel. Or they will take a book along with them and sit there and read the book the whole time, failing to give you the slightest hint of what was said in the sermon. Be aware that some day such an attitude will be brought back to their attention when they stand before God to give an account for what they did with their lives.

***Prove all things; hold fast that which is good*** (5:21). There are two words used in the Greek that need to be explained; one is δοκιμαζω, which means to test with a point of proof of its being correct or to test of its worthiness; the other is περιαζω, which means to show something to be wrong and disapproving. It is like it says in James 1:22-3, ***My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.*** The *temptations* are brought our way to test and see if our faith is true. ***Prove all things...*** To put it bluntly, don't be taken for a sucker. If it sounds too good to be true, most likely it isn't. It reminds me of the country barker who is standing on the back of his wagon full of "elixirs" to cure all kinds of ailments, from lumbago to gout. And all it turns out to be is a cheap brand of liquor that makes one feel good temporarily, until they wake up in the morning with a hangover from the night before, and the salesman is long gone to another city to find some other suckers. Make sure it is tested and found worthy. That is what the folks in Berea did when they heard the Gospel. They looked into the Scripture to find if it was true. That is where the correct answer will be found.

***Abstain from all appearance of evil*** (5:22). To abstain has in mind getting sway from something as far as you can to keep from being caught up in its deception. That is what Joseph did when Potiphar's wife tried to get him into a licentious affair. He left in such a hurry that he left his outer robe behind. This is the answer to questionable past times. "If in doubt, leave it out." As the book, In His Steps had for a theme, "What would Jesus do?" if He would not do what you are thinking of, then don't you do it either. If it will not bring honor and glory to the name of Christ, then it is not worth you doing.

***And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*** (5:23). If there is any one verse that shows man as a triune being, this would be the verse. I recall attending a college where they taught man as a trichotomy, and that the soul and spirit were one in the same. But if you take the three integral parts, you will see that man is indeed a trinity, just as is the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Our body is self-conscious, aware of things that affect us; pain, thirst, smell, taste, hearing, seeing. The soul is aware of others around us, those to whom we contact day-by-day. And the spirit is God conscious, the part of us that is aware of our need for a Savior. And those without the Lord as Savior are not experiencing what God has for them, with the soul being thwarted by sin and the devil.

To be ***wholly*** does not mean perfection, but maturity, being grown in our spirit and allowing God to control our life. In that way, we will be ***blameless*** before Him when He returns to take us home.

***Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it*** (5:24). Faith is just believing, what God say, He will do. You can depend upon Him, when everyone else around you fails. “Jesus never fails. Jesus never fails. Heaven and earth may pass away, but Jesus never fails.” I wonder how often we sing a song or chorus and never take seriously what we are singing. After awhile, the words just become jumbled and seemingly have no meaning. But one thing is sure, what He says, He will do.

***Brethren, pray for us. Greet all the brethren with an holy kiss*** (5:25-26). Always concerned that he has the power of God with him, Paul once more calls upon the saints in Thessalonica to remember to pray for him and those with him in the ministry, as well as those with him at that time in a Roman dungeon. Then he calls upon them to be sure to greet one another with a “holy handshake.” The Eastern custom was a kiss on each cheek as a greeting of one another. Where we shake hands, they embrace each other as a sign of trust.

***I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen*** (5:27-28). Then to end his epistle, Paul reminds them to be sure to share their letter with other Christians throughout the region of Macedonia. This is the reason we have the Canon of the Scriptures today, because each congregation would take the letter and share it, while they would have the opportunity to read letters that were sent to them. Not all of these made it into the Word of God, but just those that the Lord chose to be what we have today as the inspired, inerrant Word of God.

Just as he had opened his epistle, so he closes, calling upon the grace of God to be with them always. I was speaking to a preacher of a nominal “church” the other day, and they had a young child, so I asked the girl’s name, and they said it was Grace. I smiled and said, “God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense,” and he had never heard the phrase used before. As a preacher, he had little knowledge concerning what Paul had written in this epistle of the rapture, the anti-Christ, the tribulation and millennium. I was wondering just what he preached to his congregation. I am so glad that I know about the grace of God, that He is coming for me, and that I will not be one to go through the tribulation. It is sad to think so many will. How about you, my friend? Where will you spend your eternity? Everlasting life can be yours, today. Just remember that you are a sinner (Romans 3:23), that there is a penalty to be paid for your sin (Romans 6:23), that there was someone, the Lord Jesus Christ, the God of glory, who came to this earth, died on the cross of Calvary and shed His blood to bring you forgiveness, if you will just confess to Him that you acknowledge, not just with the head, but the heart, that He died for you, that He rose again and today is seated on the right hand of the Father (Romans 10:9-10). Then call upon His name (Romans 10:13), asking Him for forgiveness, and He will come into your heart and abide there, waiting the day to take you to Heaven. If you do this, I would love to hear from you.

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