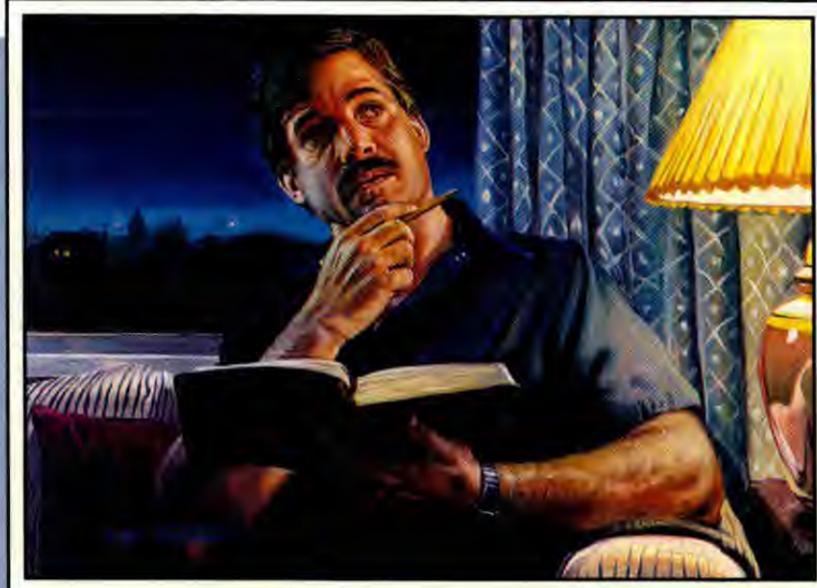




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SABBATH SCHOOL
LESSONS

Thessalonians 1&2

Living For His Coming



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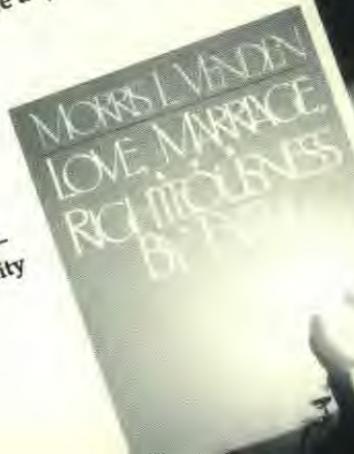
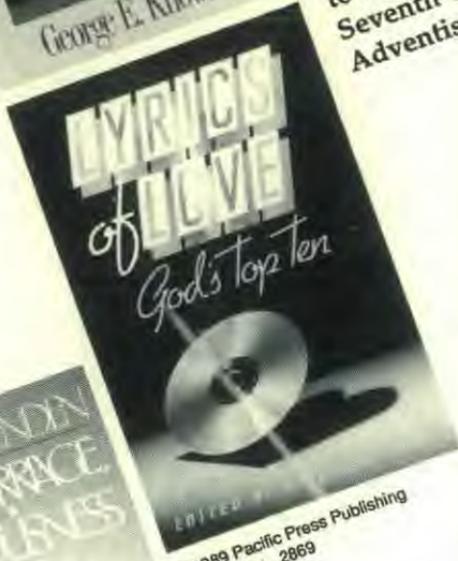
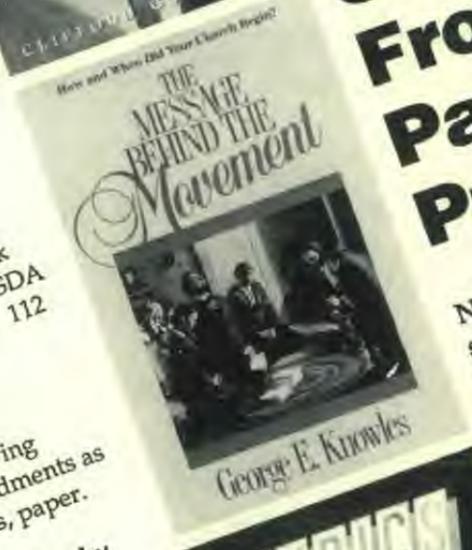
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Meet the Principal Contributor to This Quarter's Lessons



Since 1985 Dr. Calvin B. Rock has served as a general vice-president of the General Conference. He chairs the boards of Christian Record Services, Home Study International, Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries, the International Board of Education, the Legislation and Religious Liberty Committee, and the Church Manual Committee. He oversees our work in China and is advisor to the Department of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty and the Department of Education.

Prior to his service at the General Conference, Dr. Rock was president of Oakwood College in Huntsville, Alabama, for 14 years. A fourth-generation Adventist, he has served as pastor and evangelist in several local conferences and as ministerial secretary in the Southern Union Conference.

Dr. Rock received a Bachelor of Arts from Oakwood College, a Master of Arts from the University of Michigan, and a D.Min. and Ph.D. in religious ethics from Vanderbilt University.

Born in New York on July 4, 1930, Dr. Rock and his wife, Clara, have three adult daughters. Dr. Rock enjoys writing and outdoor recreation.

Check with your local conference Adventist Book Center for the companion book to this quarter's lessons.

Introduction to the Thessalonian Epistles

Living for His Coming

This quarter we will examine themes and experiences from Paul's deeply spiritual correspondence to the believers at Thessalonica. Thessalonica at the time of Paul's ministry was one of several capitals in the Roman province of Macedonia. This bustling seaport in Paul's day rivaled Corinth and Ephesus as a thoroughfare of commerce and trade. A major attraction in the first century A.D. was the celebrated amphitheater where gladiators fought to the death for the amusement of citizens and their guests.

Paul first visited Thessalonica during his second missionary journey, which is thought to have occupied the years from A.D. 49 to 52. While visiting Asia Minor he received the divine call to minister in Macedonia (Acts 16:6-10). At Philippi he was bitterly opposed and, in fact, jailed. When released he departed to Thessalonica (Acts 17:1).

Today the city is named Saloniki. Although it is no longer a major trade center, ships from many nations still come and go with cargos of oil, food, and animals. Ninety-seven percent of the population is Christian (Greek Orthodox). There is also a congregation of faithful Seventh-day Adventists.

The letters of Paul to the church at Thessalonica, probably written between A.D. 50 and 52, give us in clear, concise language the apostle's concerns for the church, which he had only recently established. Every pastor knows that congregations, as well as persons, differ in personality. Unfailingly, the messages of Paul's Epistles addressed the particular spiritual needs of his target group. What was written for the Ephesians or the Galatians or the Philippians would not have fit as well the needs of the Colossians or the congregation in Thessalonica. There is, however, useful and needed help in every letter for every church in every place and time.

The general theme of Paul's two Epistles to the Thessalonians is the need for consistent practical godliness on the part of those who are living for Christ's return.

As we study these two Epistles this quarter, we will enjoy learning about one of the most lively and productive New Testament congregations. We will learn that, in spite of the intervening centuries, the personality, the triumphs, and the travails of the Thessalonian Christians parallel closely our present experiences and needs. Also, we will learn much about the method and message of one of history's most colorful and productive authors, who in human language presents a vital message from God.

OVERVIEW OF 1 AND 2 THESSALONIANS

I. Paul's ministry to the Thessalonians.	1 Thess. 1:1—3:13
II. Living for the Lord's coming.	1 Thess. 4:1—5:28
III. Encouragement to endure.	2 Thess. 1:1-12
IV. Events preceding the day of the Lord.	2 Thess. 2:1-17
V. Continuing in the faith.	2 Thess. 3:1-18

Lesson 1

June 30—July 6

Responding to the Divine Call

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Acts 17:1-11; 1 Thessalonians 1:1-6; 2:1-12; 5:1, 2.

**SAB
PM** **MEMORY TEXT:** "And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us" (Acts 16:9).

GOOD RESULTS REQUIRE GOOD METHODS. To be successful soul winners we must enter into a personal relationship with Jesus and follow His methods and those of the apostles, adapting them to the age and culture in which we live and work. The ministry of Paul provides valuable principles for evangelistic outreach. The witness of the new believers in Thessalonica illustrates the power of personal testimony.

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. Large-City Evangelism (Acts 17:1).
- II. Paul's Evangelistic Strategy (Acts 17:2).
- III. The Heart of the Message (Acts 17:3; 1 Thess. 5:1, 2).
- IV. The Power of Personal Testimony (1 Thess. 2:8).
- V. Other Principles for Soul Winners (1 Thess. 1:1).

VITAL SOUL-WINNING PRINCIPLES DEMONSTRATED AT THESSALONICA. Thessalonica, before God sent Paul there to preach the saving gospel, was a heathen bastion containing one struggling Jewish synagogue. Paul's coming made a difference, and Paul's spiritual dedication and methodology were crucial to the changes that were effected. It is true that unless blessed by God the best of techniques will fail to achieve a proper harvest. On the other hand, we must never forget that even in spiritual endeavors the quality of our results depends to some degree upon the quality of our methodology. We are privileged to be able to catalogue various aspects of Paul's evangelistic procedures in each of his Epistles. In none are his techniques more clearly demonstrated than in his soul-winning labors at Thessalonica.

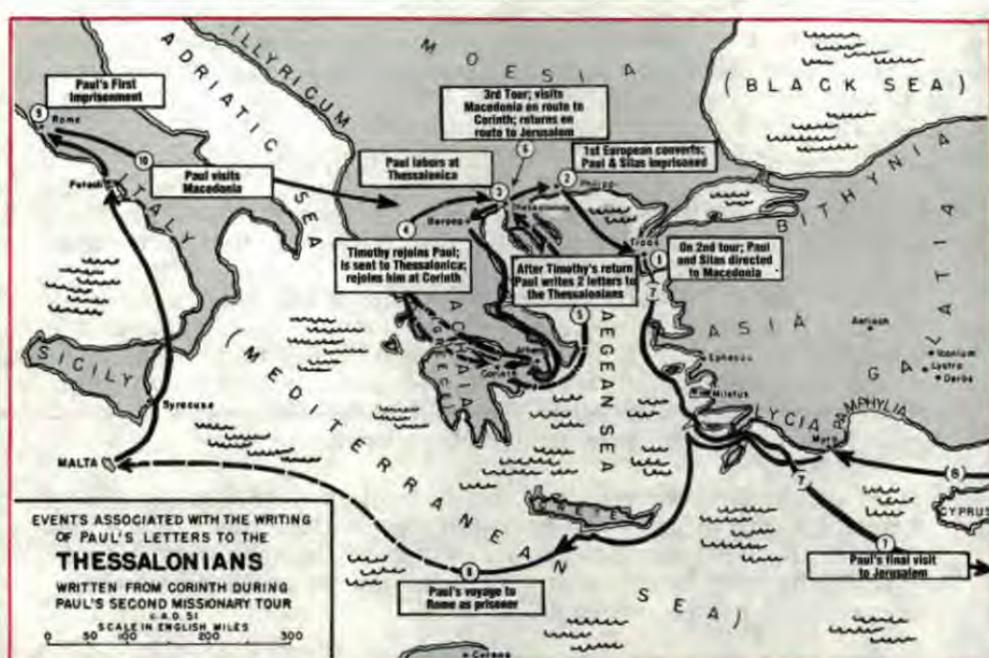
We will begin our studies by investigating the process whereby the gospel found root in Thessalonica. We will take an up-close view of the

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spiritual qualifications and evangelistic methodology of the man generally regarded as Christianity's most influential witness.

I. LARGE-CITY EVANGELISM (Acts 17:1).

- Upon his release from the Philippian jail, through what cities did Paul pass before arriving in Thessalonica? 1 Thess. 2:1, 2; Acts 17:1.



- SUN
- Why was Paul traveling through these and other Macedonian cities? Acts 16:4, 5, 8-10. Why do you think Paul chose Thessalonica as a place of labor rather than one of the smaller cities between it and Philippi?

A strategic center. "Thessalonica obviously had political and commercial importance, and was a strategic center of missionary activity. It was prosperous and populous. Traveling salesmen and their associates would have appealed to a discerning missionary of the first century no less than to one of the twentieth. Just as Jeannie Lawson and Gladys Aylward were impressed by the many mule-trains traveling hundreds of miles in China and in consequence set up the Inn of Eight Happinesses, so Paul was struck by the possibilities for evangelism if converted businessmen 'gossiped the gospel' in their travels. The two women missionaries to China told the stories of the gospel to the mule drivers in the inn. Paul preached Christ

and started in the Jewish synagogue. The principle is the same.”—Ronald A. Ward, *Commentary on 1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1973), p. 7.

3. In what way did Paul's decision prove to be strategically sound? 1 Thess. 1:6-8.

The Thessalonians an example. “Of what were they an example? Obviously evangelistic zeal, ‘for . . . the word . . . sounded forth’ (v. 8), but this must have a base and the authors have given it. Their *faith* is the talk of everybody. They are hence typical examples of sound conversion, persistent faith, and zealous proclamation. They were typical because unconsciously they were imitating the case of Paul himself, the most normal of all instances (1 Tim. 1:16).”—Ward, *Commentary on 1 & 2 Thessalonians*, pp. 37, 38.

Paul's move was a practical one. His agenda was crowded, his time was limited, his resources were meager; he had to choose, and he decided correctly. He loved the souls in the smaller cities no less, but he understood that in Thessalonica he would have the platform from which the gospel would be spread abroad to cities both large and small. That his method was sound is seen in the influence that the young church quickly developed. Paul’s work in Ephesus, Athens, Rome, Philippi, and other such cities shows that he was consistent in this methodology.

What parallels can you draw for the work of the Seventh-day Adventist Church today? Does this mean that smaller cities are less important? By what methods can we evangelize smaller towns and villages? Why is lay involvement so important to the proclamation of the gospel in cities large and small?

MON II. PAUL'S EVANGELISTIC STRATEGY (Acts 17:2).

4. With what population groups did Paul begin his witness at Thessalonica? Why? Acts 17:1, 2.

While Peter is recognized as the apostle to the Jews and Paul the apostle to the Gentiles, it is noteworthy that Paul often began his ministry in a city by preaching to the Jews. His habit in this regard is mentioned repeatedly throughout his evangelistic experience. It was so at Berea (Acts 17:10), at Corinth (Acts 18:4), at Ephesus (Acts 19:8), and, of course, at Thessalonica (Acts 17:2).

In this evangelistic approach Paul shared Christ’s concern for the “lost sheep of the house of Israel.” (See Matt. 10:5-7 and 15:24.) Paul had a great burden for the salvation of the former chosen people of God. (See Rom. 9:1-5.)

What practical reasons can you give for Paul's beginning his work by entering the synagogues of the Jews?

5. While Paul ordinarily began his efforts with the Jews, how wide a ministry did he customarily conduct? Acts 13:42, 44, 48; 18:4.
-

The apostle sowed beside all waters. "There was a synagogue at Thessalonica, attended not only by Jews but by a large number of devout Greeks also.... These Gentiles, who were often called 'The God fearing,' were attracted to the lofty ethical monotheism of the Jews and attended the imageless worship of the synagogue with profit without becoming full proselytes. It was from this congregation that Paul won his first converts to Christ in Thessalonica, mainly Gentile (Acts 17:4; 1 Thess. 1:9)." —Ward, *Commentary on 1 & 2 Thessalonians*, p. 8.

Thus while Paul began with those who had a knowledge of God, he quickly expanded to the full range of the Gentile population.

TUE III. THE HEART OF THE MESSAGE (Acts 17:3; 1 Thess. 5:1, 2).

6. What primary instrument did Paul use in his approach to the people at Thessalonica? What specific aspects of Christ's life did he highlight? Acts 17:2, 3.
-

Christ the center of the message. Paul began his Thessalonian evangelistic crusade by preaching the life of Christ. "Paul preached to the Thessalonians, reasoning with them from the Scriptures regarding the life, death, resurrection, officework, and future glory of Christ, the 'Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.' Revelation 13:8. He exalted Christ, the proper understanding of whose ministry is the key that unlocks the Old Testament Scriptures, giving access to their rich treasures." —*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 229.

7. What was the customary emphasis in the preaching of the laity and leaders of the early church? Acts 5:42.
-

Glorying in the cross. "The consecrated messengers who in the early days of Christianity carried to a perishing world the glad tidings of salvation, allowed no thought of self-exaltation to mar their presentation of Christ and Him crucified. They coveted neither authority nor pre-eminence. Hiding self in the Saviour, they exalted the great plan of salvation, and the life of Christ, the Author and Finisher of this plan. Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever, was the burden of their teaching." —*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 209.

- 8. What other important element of Bible truth was prominent in Paul's presentations? 1 Thess. 5:1, 2; 2 Thess. 2:3-5.**

Why did the Thessalonians "have no need" for Paul to write unto them regarding times and seasons? How did they know perfectly well that Christ's coming would be "like a thief in the night"? (1 Thess. 5:2, NIV). Because they already had been taught these things. The texts make it clear that while in Thessalonica Paul had carefully instructed his hearers regarding the prophecies of the first and second advents of Christ.

- 9. Which prophetic message did Paul emphasize above all others? Acts 26:19-23.**

Preaching from the Old Testament. "Paul made the prophecies in the Old Testament relating to the Messiah, and the agreement of those prophecies with the life and teachings of Christ, clear in the minds of all among his hearers who would accept evidence upon the subject. Christ in His ministry had opened the minds of His disciples to the Old-Testament scriptures; 'beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.' "—*Sketches From the Life of Paul*, p. 82.

Why must preaching on prophecy never diminish among Seventh-day Adventists? (See 1 Thess. 5:20; 2 Tim. 4:2.)

WED

IV. THE POWER OF PERSONAL TESTIMONY (1 Thess. 2:8).

- 10. In appealing to the Thessalonian believers, how did Paul refer to his involvement in ministry? 1 Thess. 2:8.**

A story of Christ's transforming power. "Paul told the Thessalonian Jews of his former zeal for the ceremonial law and of his wonderful experience at the gate of Damascus. Before his conversion he had been confident in a hereditary piety, a false hope. His faith had not been anchored in Christ; he had trusted instead in forms and ceremonies. His zeal for the law had been disconnected from faith in Christ and was of no avail. . . .

"But at the time of his conversion all had been changed. Jesus of Nazareth, whom he had been persecuting in the person of His saints, appeared before him as the promised Messiah. The persecutor saw Him as the Son of God, the one who had come to the earth in fulfillment of the prophecies and who in His life had met every specification of the Sacred Writings."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 228.

- 11. On what notable occasion did Paul later draw upon his personal experience? With what dramatic result? Acts 25:22, 23; 26:1, 13-18, 28.**

Whether with peasants or potentates, Paul's testimony often included his exciting encounter with Jesus on the Damascus road and the radical reversal of his life that resulted. King Herod Agrippa II was not the only royal person to hear the story of Paul's conversion, but he appears to have come the closest to conviction. Because Agrippa was a Jew, his conversion to Christianity would have been a great triumph for the cause of God. It is regrettable that he did not yield to the pleadings of the Spirit. Nevertheless, given his background and status, it is remarkable that he was so deeply affected by Paul's words and was willing to confess his feelings before Festus and his sister Bernice, as well as other dignitaries.

What makes personal testimonies so powerful? What makes them so effective?

V. OTHER PRINCIPLES FOR SOUL WINNERS (1 Thess. 1:1).

12. **What important witnessing technique established by Christ is reflected in Paul's labors at Thessalonica? Mark 6:7; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1.**

Friend helping friend. "Calling the twelve about Him, Jesus bade them go out two and two through the towns and villages. None were sent forth alone, but brother was associated with brother, friend with friend. Thus they could help and encourage each other, counseling and praying together, each one's strength supplementing the other's weakness. In the same manner He afterward sent forth the seventy. It was the Saviour's purpose that the messengers of the gospel should be associated in this way. In our own time evangelistic work would be far more successful if this example were more closely followed."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 350.

13. **For how long did Paul preach in the synagogue in Thessalonica? Acts 17:2.**

A short stay. Most Bible commentators see the total evidence of the two Epistles to the Thessalonians, along with Acts chapter 17 and Philippians 4:16, as suggesting a stay of perhaps two or three months. Paul's stay in Thessalonica was comparatively short. Not all of his evangelistic campaigns were so brief. For instance, he labored in Corinth for 18 months (Acts 18:11) and in Ephesus for three years (Acts 20:31). What the Thessalonian experience reveals is that there are times when circumstances make possible abundant harvests from brief endeavors. Philip's "same day" baptism of the Ethiopian illustrates the point. (See Acts 8:29-39.)

Which is the greater danger, delaying the baptism of converts or baptizing them too soon? How do we know when a person is ready for baptism? Should we insist on a certain number of weeks or months for preparation? What do you regard as a reasonable time?

14. What two words best summarize Paul's balance of gospel endeavors while at Thessalonica? 1 Thess. 2:2, 7.

What a wonderful balance the apostle exercised. He was fearless and brave, yet kind and considerate; intrepid and firm, yet gentle and fair. Would it not be a wonderful thing if we labored today with the same balance, not only in our outreach to others but also in our association with one another? Bold but gentle! Think of what a difference such a combination of graces would make for us today. How glorious the effect would be on our evangelism, in our homes, our institutions, and in our personal lives and witness!

ASK YOURSELF:

- Am I making a daily attempt to study the life of Christ? Am I able to tell the difference that such study makes on my attitudes and temperament?
- What experiences—soul-winning or otherwise—have I had recently that prove the value of following biblical principles?
- How do I explain that, even when I do everything God says, the results are not always what I expected?

FRI FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION:

What Jesus says on the heart of the gospel message: John 3:14-21; 12:30-32; Matt. 28:18-20.

What Paul says elsewhere: 2 Cor. 4:1-7; 5:14-21.

What Ellen White says: "Lift Him up, the Man of Calvary, higher and still higher. There is power in the exaltation of the cross of Christ. . . .

"Christ is to be preached, not controversially, but affirmatively. Take your stand without controversy. Let not your words at any time be uncertain. The Word of the living God is to be the foundation of our faith. Gather up the strongest affirmative statements regarding the atonement made by Christ for the sins of the world."—*Evangelism*, p. 187.

"Of all professing Christians, Seventh-day Adventists should be foremost in uplifting Christ before the world."—*Gospel Workers*, p. 156.

Also read the chapter entitled "The Thessalonian Letters" in *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 255-268.

SUMMARY: The biblical account of Paul's labors at Thessalonica reveals his faithful application of several vital principles of evangelism. By first listening to and obeying God's voice, Paul launched his career. He entered into a personal relationship with Christ, willingly receiving the presence of the Holy Spirit into his heart. Then by following God's counsel with respect to methodology, he maximized results.

Results and Resistance at Thessalonica

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Acts 17:1-9; 1 Thessalonians 2:13, 14.

SAB PM **MEMORY TEXT:** "And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost" (1 Thessalonians 1:6).

VICTORY IN SPITE OF OBSTACLES. Satan does not yield his territory and subjects willingly. Since Eden, the preaching of the Word has inspired his fiercest hatred. However, in spite of determined opposition by the enemies of the Christian cause, God's Word and people endure, and He wins His case in the Great Controversy.

LESSON OUTLINE.

- I. The Word Bears Fruit (Acts 17:4).
- II. Preaching of the Word Brings Persecution (Acts 17:5; 1 Thess. 2:15, 16).
- III. The Believers' Response to Persecution (1 Thess. 1:6; 2:14; 2 Thess. 1:4, 5).
- IV. The True Source of Persecution (Rev. 12:1-5).
- V. The Reasons for Persecution (Rev. 12:17).

GOOD NEWS AND BAD NEWS. While Timothy remained at Philippi to follow up on the work that had been started there, Paul and Silas kept busy at Thessalonica. Having just experienced bitter persecution in Philippi (Acts 16:22-40), Paul, no doubt, would have enjoyed a respite of peace and tranquility in Thessalonica. This was not to be. The work in Thessalonica turned out to be a case of good news and bad news. The good news was that several important elements of the population yielded converts who became charter members of the church there. The bad news was that the majority of the populace either ignored or objected to Paul's message. Having accused the evangelists of turning the world "upside down" with their seditious gospel of a king other than Caesar (Acts 17:6, 7), they brought legal charges against them and their brave host, Jason (Acts 17:8, 9).

While Seventh-day Adventists in most of the world do not suffer the

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same high level of hostility that Paul faced at Philippi, Thessalonica, and many other places, there are some who do. These members who live under intolerance and misunderstanding need our special prayers.

Paul's example of steadfastness under trying circumstances is encouraging for those who suffer for the gospel's sake. It is also instructive for us who in the future may face similar ordeals.

SUN

I. THE WORD BEARS FRUIT (Acts 17:4).

1. What people groups were most receptive to Paul's ministry? Acts 17:4.

The primary population groups of Thessalonica were Roman, Greek, and Jewish. The group that receives most prominent notice in Acts 17:4 is the Greeks. Luke calls them "devout" Greeks. He refers to those Greeks who already had replaced their mythical gods with the one true God. They were Greeks who, while refusing circumcision and resisting certain other legalistic demands of first-century Judaism, ardently read and believed Old Testament truths. This group formed the largest part of those who accepted Paul's teachings at Thessalonica, and in many of the other cities where he planted churches.

2. How did those who responded to Paul's appeals demonstrate their sincerity? 1 Thess. 1:9.

Thessalonica in Paul's day was a highly idolatrous city. Among the many false gods citizens worshiped were Zeus, Janus, and Hercules. The chief god, however, was the Greek god Jupiter, father of Hercules, thought to be the author of life. Since those who "turned to God from idols" were not Jews, they must have been unbelieving Gentiles. Because in their account of the Thessalonian experience neither Luke nor Paul mentions Roman converts, these individuals probably were mainly Greeks.

Which of these groups do you think can be most readily reached with biblical truth today: (a) atheists, who reject the idea of a superior being altogether, (b) non-Christians, such as Buddhists or Hindus, who worship deities other than Jehovah, (c) Jews who worship the Father but who do not believe in His Son, Jesus Christ, (d) Christians who do not believe as do Seventh-day Adventists? In what ways is it necessary to vary our approaches to these groups?

3. What success did Paul have among the Jews to whom he preached? Acts 17:1-4.

The "them" in the first part of verse 4 and the "them" in verse 2 refer to the Jews of the synagogue mentioned in verse 1. The gospel of Jesus Christ pierces all prejudices and traditions. The church must never abdicate its commission to work for the Jewish people. Even where Christians of past generations have created ill will because of their treatment of Jews, Christ-like love can overcome barriers.

Many Jews will be converted. "There is a mighty work to be done in our world. The Lord has declared that the Gentiles shall be gathered in, and not the Gentiles only, but the Jews. There are among the Jews many who will be converted, and through whom we shall see the salvation of God go forth as a lamp that burneth. There are Jews everywhere, and to them the light of present truth is to be brought. There are among them many who will come to the light, and who will proclaim the immutability of the law of God with wonderful power. The Lord God will work. He will do wonderful things in righteousness."—*Evangelism*, p. 578.

How would you share Christ with a Jewish associate or neighbor?

4. What other special class of persons is noted as having accepted the Word? Acts 17:4.

A similar statement by Luke regarding the results of Paul's labors in Berea (Acts 17:12) suggests that these were Greek women of high economic or social standing, perhaps wives of men who held leading positions in the city. Two reasons why women accepted the gospel in Thessalonica were: (1) *The high degree of mobility and the people mix in Macedonia.* The inhabitants of this province were restless, commercially-minded, and non-traditional. As such they were not as conservative in their social arrangements as were the more rural and less populated provinces around them. (2) *Paul's emphasis on freedom in Christ.* It is not strange that women in Thessalonica and Berea followed him. His gospel emphasis was such that true liberation—social as well as spiritual—became a value to his hearers. In this sense Paul's preaching had a social impact that was radical for his day. Certainly relationships between men and women were quite different from those that exist in some societies today. Even so, the gospel proclaimed by Paul elevated the status of women. Their personal spiritual union with Christ was as important as that of men, and men were instructed to love their wives as Christ loved the church (Eph. 5:25). Undoubtedly this was a radical departure from established custom for many men of that age.

Can you think of other instances of social liberation resulting from Paul's preaching? What instances come to mind of social liberty brought about by Christ's personal example? How should the Adventist message "liberate" the social attitudes of converts in today's world?

II. PREACHING OF THE WORD BRINGS PERSECUTION (Acts 17:5; 1 Thess. 2:15, 16).

5. Which group of persons does Luke mention as reacting violently against Paul? Acts 17:5.
-

It is a tragic commentary upon God's professed children that they so often persecute each other in His name. The animosity of the Jews toward Paul provides an example of the great number of religious feuds that stain the pages of history. Later there were other persecutions by professed Christians—against Jews and against Christians who differed in their beliefs. So-called religious warfare is most reprehensible. Particularly is it sad when it is triggered by envy of another's witness for the meek and lowly Jesus.

6. To what length did this group go in their attempt to silence the testimony of truth? Acts 17:5-9.
-

The strategy is familiar. The opponents of truth secured the help of baser witnesses; they stirred a mob to excited activity; they dragged Jason, Paul's Christian host, and other believers before the civil authorities; they accused them of crimes against Caesar. Here is an example of Satan's usual method in the Great Controversy: force!

- TUE 7. How does Paul describe the extent of Jewish hostility against the truth? 1 Thess. 2:15, 16.
-

Why do you think opposition of the unbelieving Jews receives more prominent mention than that of the idolatrous Gentiles?

III. THE BELIEVERS' RESPONSE TO PERSECUTION (1 Thess. 1:6; 2:14; 2 Thess. 1:4, 5).

8. At whose hands did the Gentile believers in Thessalonica also suffer? 1 Thess. 2:14.
-

The apostle and his flock did not have an easy time at Thessalonica. Not only did unbelieving Jews trouble them but they suffered at the hands of the Gentile citizenry as well. Since almost 100 percent of the population of Thessalonica (Saloniki) today profess some form of Christianity, they no longer suffer at the hands of non-Christians. Unfortunately, however, tensions among Christian groups are sometimes problematic.

-
9. How does Paul later evaluate the church's quality of endurance under persecution? 1 Thess. 1:6; 2 Thess. 1:4, 5.

The Thessalonians are a wonderful example of faithfulness under pain and suffering. For this Paul highly commended them on several occasions. Despised by the Jews and vilified by the Gentiles, nevertheless they were constant in their newly established devotion. Later, Paul evaluated the Bereans as being on the whole more studious than the people of Thessalonica (Acts 17:11). However, their endurance under persecution makes it evident that most of those who were baptized in Thessalonica were honest of heart and rooted in the Word of God.

Where in the world today does persecution of Christian believers exist? How should we respond to it?

WED

IV. THE TRUE SOURCE OF PERSECUTION (Rev. 12:1-5).

10. How does John the revelator portray both the beginning and the continuation of the controversy between Christ and Satan? Rev. 12:1-5, 17.
-

In Jeremiah 6:2, the prophet describes the church thus: "I have likened the daughter of Zion to a comely and delicate woman." A woman often represents the church in biblical symbolism; the dragon represents Satan.

11. Who is the man-child described in Revelation 12:5?

"Satan wishes to destroy the child that is about to be born lest it should later destroy him. . . . But the Messiah is **caught up to God and to His throne**. In language adopted from Ps. 2:6 the Messiah is described as one destined to **rule all nations with a rod of iron**."—Charles M. Laymon, ed., *The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1971), p. 960.

12. What desperate effort did Satan make to abort the ministry of Jesus? Matt. 2:13, 14.
-

Not just at His birth but all during His life, Jesus was the object of Satan's malignant animosity. Satan's singular determination was to thwart the plan of salvation and to revenge his ignominious defeat in heaven. He would have taken the life of Jesus much earlier had not the angels of God protected Him long enough for Calvary to become a reality. And it was not only physical oppression that Satan employed as a means of defeating

Christ. He never relented in the psychological warfare by which he hoped to overcome Him. Satan's purpose was to malign the character of God and prevent Christ from saving His people from their sins.

"Satan contested every inch of ground, exerting his utmost power to overcome Him. Like a tempest temptation after temptation beat upon Him."—*Signs of the Times*, Aug. 27, 1902.

Why does religious prejudice develop into active, hostile acts of persecution?

V. THE REASONS FOR PERSECUTION (Rev. 12:17).

13. After Jesus was "caught up" to God's throne (Rev. 12:5), against whom would Satan vent his wrath? Rev. 12:13, 17.

History will be repeated. The kind of suffering inflicted upon Paul and the Thessalonian believers may be suffered in some degree by any person who claims the name of Jesus.

Several years ago in a large city in the United States a citizen sued a church group because he was injured by a falling tree limb while walking a city street. The reason he sued the church? He was told that the dislodging of the limb was an "act of God." He could not, he reasoned, sue God, so he acted against His visible representatives. He lost the case—and so will Satan, whose head is already bruised (Gen. 3:15). In the meantime he seeks to wreak havoc on God's people.

14. What fundamental principles of Christianity are especially offensive to the dragon? John 15:12-14; Eph. 5:2.
-

Satan hates sacrifice. "All who follow Christ will wear the crown of sacrifice. They will surely be misunderstood by selfish men, and will be made a mark for the fierce assaults of Satan. It is this principle of self-sacrifice that his kingdom is established to destroy, and he will war against it wherever manifested."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 223.

In the light of the above quotation, what would seem to be the case if the people of God are living in happy favor with society? Is rejection inevitable for those who live right and who preach Jesus Christ? Is martyrdom inevitable? What is the difference between redemptive and nonredemptive suffering?

15. Against what particularly unseemly form of persecution does Jesus warn? Matt. 24:48-50.
-

A sure way to failure. "It is not the opposition of the world that most

endangers the church of Christ. It is the evil cherished in the hearts of believers that works their most grievous disaster and most surely retards the progress of God's cause. There is no surer way of weakening spirituality than by cherishing envy, suspicion, faultfinding, and evil surmising."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 549.

"In the place of turning the weapons of warfare within our own ranks, let them be turned against the enemies of God and of the truth."—*Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 18. (This statement is not intended to legitimize persecuting others who differ from us.)

ASK YOURSELF:

- Can I honestly say that I have suffered for the gospel's sake? If so, in what ways?
- Should I feel good while suffering because of doing right? If so, why? If not, why not?
- What kinds of persecution do I find the most difficult or unpleasant?
- What are the levels of persecution that I am prepared to suffer in defense of my faith?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Loss of job	<input type="checkbox"/>	Loss of friends
<input type="checkbox"/>	Loss of spouse	<input type="checkbox"/>	Family rejection
<input type="checkbox"/>	Loss of life		
- What act of Christ more than any other inspires and strengthens my ability to withstand persecution?
- What causes opposition to the Adventist message in your local community today? How should the church respond to it?

FRI

FURTHER READING AND MEDITATION:

What Jesus says about persecution: Matt. 16:21-28; John 15:18-25.

What Paul says elsewhere: Rom. 8:35-39; 2 Cor. 4:8-18.

What Ellen White says: "The same enmity is manifested toward Christ's followers as was manifested toward their Master. Whoever sees the repulsive character of sin, and in strength from above resists temptation, will assuredly arouse the wrath of Satan and his subjects. Hatred of the pure principles of truth, and reproach and persecution of its advocates, will exist as long as sin and sinners remain. The followers of Christ and the servants of Satan cannot harmonize."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 507.

Read also *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 85, 86, 213-218, 597, 598.

SUMMARY: As Paul preached at Thessalonica he encountered both receptive people and bitter opponents. However, the actions of Christ's enemies did not prevent a rich and rewarding harvest. Although Paul had to escape for his life, it was not before he had firmly planted the cross of Christ in a most strategic location.

Lesson 3

July 14-20

The Epistles Are Born

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Acts 17:10-21; 18:1-5, 11; 1 Thessalonians 3:1-13; 2 Thessalonians 1:1-3.

SAB
PM

MEMORY TEXT: “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” (1 Thessalonians 3:5).

NURTURE OF NEW CONVERTS. Paul’s tender concern for the young church at Thessalonica is an example of the relationship that should exist between pastor and people. It is a worthy model for the efforts of modern-day soul winners to nurture those who come to Christ.

LESSON OUTLINE:

- I. Paul Leaves Thessalonica (Acts 17:10-14).
- II. Paul Leaves Berea (Acts 17:13-22, 32, 33).
- III. From Athens to Corinth (Acts 18:1-8, 11).
- IV. Timothy’s Report From Thessalonica (1 Thess. 1:2, 3; 3:1-6).
- V. The Epistles Are Born (1 Thess. 1:1; 3:7-9; 5:27).

PAUL’S LAWFUL BIAS. The great evangelist, Paul, might rightfully be accused of preferential regard for those whom he had won to Christ. He never relinquished the special pastoral ties that he had established with his converts. One of Paul’s more memorable characterizations of the bond between soul winner and convert is the parent-child relationship. (See 1 Thess. 2:11.) The New Testament Epistles that Paul penned to churches for which he labored are evidence that this fatherly affection concerned not only baptizing but also stabilizing his converts in Christ.

Paul had a pastor’s heart. He would much rather have visited the new believers than write to them. He longed to sit with them face to face, to share individually in their sorrows and joys and to rejoice in the excitement of their growth. But travel in his day was extremely difficult compared to today’s standards. Sometimes Paul never saw his converts again. This is why his letters were so important to them and to him—they were the very best he could do.

PRAY for 25 hand water pumps for rural areas in the Eastern Africa Division (US\$200 each).

Through his letters Paul sought to communicate not only his loving concern but also needed instruction regarding doctrine, personal piety, interpersonal relationships, church order and organization, the ministry of the laity, and any other topic that he knew was vital to their spiritual survival. He often had to accomplish this under trying circumstances. The conditions that occasioned the Thessalonian letters are typical of Paul's experience and quite clearly reveal the shepherd's heart of the great apostle and the love of God in sending him to minister.

SUN

I. PAUL LEAVES THESSALONICA (Acts 17:10-14).

Because of the unrest in Thessalonica, the believers secretly sent Paul and Silas to Berea (Acts 17:10). Berea is a much smaller city than Thessalonica. It is inland, not coastal. The population is thought to have been approximately 50,000 in Paul's day and is about half that today. The modern name of the city is Verroia. In order to reach Berea, Paul had to travel 50 miles, at least a two-day journey.

1. How did the response at Berea compare with the one in Thessalonica? In what way does the Berean response inform and instruct hearers today? Acts 17:11. Can you think of a person in your congregation who had a similar response?

"More noble" here means more generous in spirit, more open-minded. We cannot assume from Luke's observation that there were more people baptized at Berea, but simply that the level or quality of response was more intense and that there was less opposition to the gospel.

The value of personal investigation. "Wherever the truths of the gospel are proclaimed, those who honestly desire to do right are led to a diligent searching of the Scriptures. If, in the closing scenes of this earth's history, those to whom testing truths are proclaimed would follow the example of the Bereans, searching the Scriptures daily, and comparing with God's word the messages brought them, there would today be a large number loyal to the precepts of God's law, where now there are comparatively few. But when unpopular Bible truths are presented, many refuse to make this investigation. Though unable to controvert the plain teachings of Scripture, they yet manifest the utmost reluctance to study the evidences offered. Some assume that even if these doctrines are indeed true, it matters little whether or not they accept the new light, and they cling to pleasing fables which the enemy uses to lead souls astray. Thus their minds are blinded by error, and they become separated from heaven."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 232.

How can we awaken interest in Bible study among the unchurched in our local community? What are some of the social and demographic realities that might impact upon a people's response to the gospel? Is it right to evaluate evangelistic results strictly in terms of numbers baptized? Why?

II. PAUL LEAVES BEREIA (Acts 17:13-22, 32, 33).

- 2. Why did Paul leave Berea and with what consequences to the Thessalonian believers? Acts 17:13, 14.**
-

A change in plans. The Jews of Thessalonica who had rejected Paul's message followed him to Berea and stirred up the opposition of the lower class. Because the believers in Berea were afraid for Paul's life, they sent him to Athens. Paul had hoped to go back to Thessalonica and pay a pastoral visit to the new believers there. Now this was impossible. (See *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 232, 233.)

Paul did as Jesus had advised in such situations: "If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town" (Matt. 10:14, NIV).

In what situations today would you apply Jesus' counsel? Why is it sometimes wiser to leave people in their unbelief than to attempt to combat their hostility?

- 3. Where did Paul go when he left Berea? Acts 17:15.**
-

Athens was the home of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle; it was the undisputed queen of Grecian art, poetry, and philosophy. It was described by Aristophanes as "our Athens, violet-wreathed, brilliant, most envious city." Athens represents, as no other ancient city does, "the glory that was Greece." It is located approximately 200 miles south of Thessalonica and was in Paul's day the undisputed intellectual center of the world.

- 4. How did Paul approach the Athenians? What can we learn about our approach to large, secular cities today? Acts 17:18-22.**
-

On Mars' Hill. Paul's hearers in Athens recognized his learning and admired his eloquence. His years of training at the feet of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3) paid off in this situation. Paul's rabbinic education rendered him able to argue his case with devastating logic. His knowledge of philosophy and literature enabled him to meet the scholars of Athens on their own ground. Mars' Hill or the Areopagus was the seat of the ancient Athenian court that judged certain crimes and religious offenses. This court also had the power to license teachers and control education in Athens.

How significant that Hebrew-Christian thought should thus meet Greek philosophical thought head-on at this great center of learning. Paul quickly discovered what many philosophers and theologians have never recognized, that Greek philosophy is basically antagonistic to the Hebrew-Christian tradition.

5. What important lesson can we learn from Paul's ministry on Mars' Hill? How can I apply this lesson to my own daily witness to unchurched friends, relatives, neighbors, and co-workers?

Speaking the truth in love. "Paul's words contain a treasure of knowledge for the church. He was in a position where he might easily have said that which would have irritated his proud listeners and brought himself into difficulty. Had his oration been a direct attack upon their gods and the great men of the city, he would have been in danger of meeting the fate of Socrates. But with a tact born of divine love, he carefully drew their minds away from heathen deities, by revealing to them the true God, who was to them unknown."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 241.

6. What were the results of Paul's witness at Athens? Acts 17:32-34.
-

Athens compared to other major cities. The Bible does not indicate how long Paul worked in Athens or whether he returned there at a subsequent time. It is interesting to compare the response to the gospel by the less sophisticated Thessalonians and Corinthians with the response of the philosophically trained Athenians.

Paul's labor in Athens not entirely in vain. "The labors of Paul in Athens were not wholly in vain. Dionysus, one of the most prominent citizens, and some others, became converts to Christianity, and joined themselves to him. The words of the apostle, and the description of his attitude and surroundings, as traced by the pen of inspiration, were to be handed down through all coming generations, bearing witness of his unshaken confidence, his courage in loneliness and adversity, and the victory he gained for Christianity, even in the very heart of paganism."—*Sketches From the Life of Paul*, pp. 96, 97.

Why do the less educated sometimes respond more gladly to the gospel? How can we learn to be more effective in winning to Christ the educated and affluent?

TUE III. FROM ATHENS TO CORINTH (Acts 18:1-8, 11).

7. Where did Paul go from Athens? Acts 18:1.
-

Athens was the diadem of intellectual culture in Paul's day, but Corinth was the titan of commerce, trade, and military power. And, like most large seaport centers of commerce, it was a wicked city. Its devotion to the goddess Aphrodite encouraged prostitution and sensuous revelry.

8. Thinking that his philosophical defense of Christianity on Mars' Hill was not very productive, what was Paul's singular determination upon reaching Corinth? 1 Cor. 2:1, 2.

Positive, Christ-centered preaching. At Athens Paul had departed from his usual pattern of gospel preaching. He tried to meet the educated, argumentative Greeks on their own ground in their own terms. (See *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 244.) Although he called upon the name of Jesus, and his efforts were not altogether futile, he was not satisfied, but was determined from then on to preach only Jesus—that is, to ground his messages in no other material or discipline than the Word of God.

9. What were the happy results of Paul's preaching in Corinth? How long did he labor there? Acts 18:1-8, 11.
-

Is your local community more like Athens or Corinth? How would Paul have approached it?

WED

IV. TIMOTHY'S REPORT FROM THESSALONICA (1 Thess. 1:2, 3; 3:1-6).

10. Even though he was busy establishing God's work in other places, what had been Paul's daily habit with respect to the newly baptized in Thessalonica? 1 Thess. 1:2, 3.
-
11. Who was sent by Paul to visit the Thessalonians? What was his primary goal? 1 Thess. 3:1-5.
-

The importance of spiritual nurture. The apostle longed to see the newly formed congregation. His brief stay among the Thessalonians, his abrupt departure, and his shepherd's sense of their need for instruction and encouragement weighed heavily upon his mind. Time, distance, and the hostility of enemies frustrated his desires in this regard. Since, as he expressed, Satan had "again and again" hindered his plans of returning to Thessalonica (1 Thess. 2:18, Amplified Version), Paul did the next best thing—he sent his spiritual son, Timothy, to encourage and instruct the new believers. And he was wise in doing so, for "transplanting is easy, but rooting takes time." That sentiment summarizes an essential part of soul winning. Paul understood this principle and applied it faithfully in relating to the Thessalonians.

Are there recently baptized members in your local church congregation? Does your church have planned activities for stabilizing recent converts? What activities would you suggest?

12. What report did Timothy bring back to Paul? 1 Thess. 3:6.
-

As is usually the case, converts and teacher longed to see each other. The soul winner is grateful, gratified by the sight or even remembrance of those whose lives he or she has been used to win. And the converts also are grateful. While primarily debtors to Christ, they also feel beholden to the individual whom God used to bring them the truth.

Pastors and lay workers testify to the bond that they enjoy with those whom they have been able to lead to the Lord. The mutual joy, the shared memories, and gratitude of the believers in some ways rival the intensity of the bonds shared with immediate family members.

THU

V. THE EPISTLES ARE BORN (1 Thess. 3:7-9; 1:1; 5:27).

13. How did Paul react to the good news that Timothy delivered? 1 Thess. 3:7-9.

The good report does not elicit boasting or self-congratulation. Paul understood that the effectiveness seen at Thessalonica was the work of the Holy Spirit, not his genius. Thus, he gave the glory and credit to God and wished to make an adequate response (thanksgiving) to God. He did not say what he would render, but his dedicated witness from city to city makes it clear that he saw a life totally committed to God's bidding as the only adequate response to His blessings. (See Rom. 12:1.)

Have you had the pleasure of leading a person or persons to Christ? How do you describe the feeling of seeing them still faithful years later? Describe your emotions when such a one leaves the church. What parallels can you draw between your attitude toward those who leave the church and Jesus' love for us?

Paul's grateful response. "Delighted at the good news which Timothy had brought back, Paul took up his pen and wrote to the community; the result is our 1 Thess., the oldest surviving Pauline Epistle. It was written in the early months of his sojourn at Corinth, probably at the beginning of 52 A.D."—Alfred Wikenhauser, *New Testament Introduction*, p. 364.

Internal evidence suggests that 2 Thessalonians was written within a period of weeks or months of 1 Thessalonians and that both were written from Corinth, not Athens, as suggested by the translators' footnotes at the end of each book. The two letters differ considerably in tone, but slightly in content. There is little in either of the Thessalonian Epistles that fits Peter's charge that some of Paul's writings are hard to understand. (See 2 Peter 3:16.) The thrust of the letters to the Thessalonian church involves simple, practical, Christian counsel.

14. With what earnest appeal to fidelity does Paul undergird the message of both Epistles? 1 Thess. 5:21; 2 Thess. 2:15.

PERSONAL CONSIDERATIONS:

- Do you sense special emotional ties with the minister who baptized you? Is this wrong? How do you feel about these ties?
- Do you sometimes make negative comparisons of pastors? If so, is this right? How can a partisan spirit be avoided or overcome? (See 1 Cor. 3:21-23; *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 280.)
- Name several ways in which you can express proper appreciation for an evangelist or pastor.
- What way or ways can you think of to respond to the gifts of Christ, the chief Shepherd? (1 Peter 5:14).

FRI

FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION:

What Jesus says about spiritual shepherding: John 10:7-14; 21:15-17.

What Paul says elsewhere: 1 Cor. 3:1-23.

What Ellen White says: "Preaching is a small part of the work to be done for the salvation of souls. God's Spirit convicts sinners of the truth, and He places them in the arms of the church. The ministers may do their part, but they can never perform the work that the church should do. God requires His church to nurse those who are young in faith and experience, to go to them, not for the purpose of gossiping with them, but to pray, to speak unto them words that are 'like apples of gold in pictures of silver.' "—*Evangelism*, p. 352.

SUMMARY: Paul's triumphs and trials in new cities did not diminish his concern for those whom he had left behind. He often was hindered from seeing the believers again, but through his letters he was able to sustain his relationships and facilitate their growth in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Water Of Life

The gospel of Christ is the water of life,
 And this water of life is free;
 But it costs for the plumbing and all of the pipes
 To bring it to you and to me.

—Adlai Albert Esteb

Pipe the water of life to the Trans-European Division this Thirteenth Sabbath for a church in Thessalonika, Greece, and an evangelistic center in Copenhagen, Denmark. Twenty-five percent of the September 28 offering will support these projects.

But don't wait just for Thirteenth Sabbath. Your weekly World Budget Offering pipes the water of life around the world all quarter!

The Gospel Identified

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10; 2:1-9; Revelation 14:6-12.

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MEMORY TEXT: "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" (1 Thessalonians 2:4).

GOSPEL ROOTS. The 27 fundamental beliefs that Seventh-day Adventists espouse today are rooted in the rich mines of truth that Paul explores throughout the Epistles to the Thessalonians. His view of how the Persons of the Godhead work to save human beings is central to gospel understanding and provides an example for our witness today.

LESSON OUTLINE:

- I. Paul's Gospel Emphasis (1 Thess. 1:5, 6).
- II. God the Father and the Gospel (1 Thess. 1:9, 10).
- III. God the Son and the Gospel (1 Thess. 1:10).
- IV. The Holy Spirit and the Gospel (1 Thess. 1:5).
- V. The Gospel and the Remnant Church (Rev. 14:6-12).

THE CENTRALITY OF THE GOSPEL. First Thessalonians consists primarily of general admonitions and expressions of gratitude. It does not have the deep theological veins contained in Romans, Galatians, or some other letters. The emphasis in this book is on practical godliness. Nevertheless, there are fundamental doctrinal teachings intermingled with pastoral counsel. We shall identify and study the more important of these during the following weeks.

This week we begin by examining the foundation upon which the apostle structured his approach, not only to the Thessalonians but also to all of the churches for whom he labored. This approach shaped his messages while laboring for their conversion and shaped the Epistles he later wrote to encourage their continuance in the faith. The dynamic, soul-winning, soul-conserving principle basic to Paul's ministry was the gospel itself. Who better than Paul—one so dramatically rescued by God—to reveal

PRAY for 25 bicycles for pastors and colporteurs in Burma (US\$175 each).

more fully the truth that for ages past had been presented in prophecy and symbol?

I. PAUL'S GOSPEL EMPHASIS (1 Thess. 1:5, 6).

1. While Paul begins his correspondence by labeling his preaching as "our gospel" (1 Thess. 1:5), in what clear terms does he identify the true source of his message?

1 Thess. 2:2 _____

1 Thess. 2:8 _____

1 Thess. 2:9 _____

1 Thess. 3:2 _____

2 Thess. 1:8 _____

A divine mission of rescue. Throughout his long and fruitful ministry, Paul conducted himself as a representative of God to His lost family on earth. What message did he communicate? It was the good news of human rescue by the Deity. Through incomprehensible pain and sacrifice, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit have provided the means for salvation of doomed humanity. Existence for worldlings need not end in extinction. Heavenly forces have found a way out of sin, degradation, and eternal death. That is the essence of Paul's message—salvation provided by a sovereign God for His lost creation.

Not a human discovery. "It should not be forgotten that the *gospel came* to the Thessalonians. It had to—or they would never have known it. It does not arise from within the heart of man. It is not human nature and it is not human discovery. God sent his Son; that is, he came from outside history into history and he still has to be proclaimed."—Ronald A. Ward, *Commentary on 1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1973), p. 34.

II. GOD THE FATHER AND THE GOSPEL (1 Thess. 1:9, 10).

2. How does Paul state the involvement of God the Father with the gospel?

1 Thess. 1:9, 10 _____

1 Thess. 2:12 _____

1 Thess. 4:14 _____

1 Thess. 5:9 _____

1 Thess. 5:23 _____

The Father suffered with the Son. God the Father is an equally active participant, involved not only in the “handshake,” or agreement, that launched Jesus on His way but in devising the means whereby His Son was able to become our substitute and surety, and in suffering vicariously the agony of Christ’s life and death. (See *The Desire of Ages*, p. 693.)

3. What clear outline of the Father’s relationship to Christ’s ministry is given in the book of Hebrews? Heb. 1:1-3.
-

“Had God the Father come to our world and dwelt among us, humbling Himself, veiling His glory, that humanity might look upon Him, the history that we have of the life of Christ would not have been changed. . . . In every act of Jesus, in every lesson of His instruction, we are to see and hear and recognize God. In sight, in hearing, in effect, it is the voice and movements of the Father.”—*That I May Know Him*, p. 338.

How many specific incidents in the life of Jesus can you think of in which the Father and the Son interacted directly?

MON III. GOD THE SON AND THE GOSPEL (1 Thess. 1:10).

4. What does Paul tell us about the involvement of God the Son with the gospel?

1 Thess. 2:15 _____

1 Thess. 3:12, 13 _____

1 Thess. 4:16, 17 _____

1 Thess. 5:9, 10 _____

5. On what events in the ministry of Jesus does Paul place particular emphasis? 1 Thess. 1:10; 1 Cor. 15:3, 4, 17.
-

A comprehensive gospel. The gospel Paul preached to the Thessalonians emphasized the death, resurrection, and second coming of Jesus Christ. These truths are central to the gospel. Christ’s death atoned for our sin; His resurrection makes possible His mediation for our sin as well as the resurrection, at His second advent, of those who died believing in Him.

The centrality of the cross. “The sacrifice of Christ as an atonement for sin is the great truth around which all other truths cluster. In order to be rightly understood and appreciated, every truth in the Word of God, from Genesis to Revelation, must be studied in the light that streams from the cross of Calvary.”—*Evangelism*, p. 190.

Christ's resurrection essential to our salvation. To the Corinthians Paul wrote: "And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain" (1 Cor. 15:14). Paul presented the resurrection as the divine proof of the Sonship of Christ. Christ rose from the grave in fulfillment of His promise (Matt. 12:40; John 2:19-21). It is also essential truth that He arose by His own power. Jesus said of His life, "I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again" (John 10:18). The powers of response were resident within the sleeping form.

"He who had said, 'I lay down my life, that I might take it again' (John 10:17), came forth from the grave to life that was in Himself. Humanity died; divinity did not die. In His divinity, Christ possessed the power to break the bonds of death. He declares that He has life in Himself to quicken whom He will."—*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 301.

"All that comprised the life and intelligence of Jesus remained with His body in the sepulchre; and when He came forth it was as a whole being; He did not have to summon His spirit from heaven."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1151.

6. In addressing the church of Rome what clarion witness summarized Paul's attitude toward the gospel of Christ? Romans 1:16.

"The second 'For' gives the reason for Paul's boldness: this good news concerning Christ's death, burial, resurrection, and appearing, 'is the power of God unto salvation unto every one that believeth.' There is no fact for a preacher or teacher to hold more constantly in his mind than this. It is not the 'excellency of speech or wisdom,' or the 'personal magnetism,' or 'earnestness,' of the preacher; any more than it is the deep repentance or earnest prayers of the hearer, that avails. But it is the *message of Christ crucified, dead, buried, and risen*, which, being believed, is 'the power of God'!"—William R. Newell, *Romans Verse by Verse* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1940), p. 19.

TUE IV. THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE GOSPEL (1 Thess. 1:5).

7. What medium of communication is especially essential for the transmission of the gospel? 1 Thess. 1:5.

The Bible teaches that spiritual matters are spiritually discerned (see 1 Cor. 2:14). The Holy Spirit imparts this ability to discern truth (see 1 Cor. 2:13; John 16:13.) That the Holy Spirit is willing and able to do this with human will and mentality is a powerful testimony to both the love and the power of the cooperating Persons of the Deity.

8. What influence did the Holy Spirit have on the lives of the Thessalonians? 1 Thess. 1:6.

Life's highest joy. Is there any experience more exhilarating, more thrilling, more satisfying than conversion? Can not all of us testify that being wooed and won by the Holy Spirit, being freed of confusion, darkness, and fears of sin, and being grounded in the knowledge, love, and faith of Jesus is life's highest joy? There is no more satisfying realization than that of knowing that we are loved, valued, treasured, redeemed by Christ; that there is hope beyond the grave, that life does have meaning, that God's principles and promises are true, that Jesus lives eternally, and that He is mine! And there is no more fulfilling experience than communion with Him through the agency of the Holy Spirit.

WED

9. What practical, everyday function, also critical to the gospel process, does the Holy Spirit conduct? 1 Thess. 4:7, 8; 1 Peter 1:2, 22.

In addition to enlightenment and joy the Holy Spirit brings cleansing and transformation of heart. There are those who seek knowledge and happiness without pursuing holiness. Their attempt ignores one of the Spirit's primary functions—that of regeneration and reconciliation. The Holy Spirit wrought miraculous changes in the lives of the Thessalonians and, if permitted, will do the same for church members today.

10. Given the importance of the Holy Spirit to the success of the gospel program, what should be the church's earnest endeavor? Zech. 10:1.
-

The promise of "added power." "But near the close of earth's harvest, a special bestowal of spiritual grace is promised to prepare the church for the coming of the Son of man. This outpouring of the Spirit is likened to the falling of the latter rain; and it is for this added power that Christians are to send their petitions to the Lord of the harvest 'in the time of the latter rain.' In response, 'the Lord shall make bright clouds, and give them showers of rain.' 'He will cause to come down . . . the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain.' "—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 55.

V. THE GOSPEL AND THE REMNANT CHURCH (Rev. 14:6-12).

11. Compare the gospel that Paul preached and the one that we preach today. Rev. 14:6.
-

Why is the gospel that the remnant preach called everlasting? Because its wonders never cease, its beauties never fade, its promises never fail, and its principles never falter. It is today and it will be tomorrow and beyond that, if time should last, as relevant, as exciting, as redemptive, as when Adam heard it outside the gates of Eden, or as when Moses saw it on

Mount Nebo, or Abraham viewed it in Haran, or the disciples touched and handled it in Palestine, or Paul dispensed it throughout his missionary journeys. It is everlasting because it transcends time. Born in the precouncils of eternity, it was here before our clocks began, and it will be here when time shall be no more. As unending eternity rolls we shall study its details at the feet of Jesus.

THU

- 12. While the gospel preached by the remnant is the same as that announced in Genesis 3:15 and that preached by Paul at Thessalonica, what special features are to be emphasized at this time in history? Rev. 14:6-12.**

Especially for our day. "The message of salvation has been preached in all ages; but this message [of the three angels] is a part of the gospel which could be proclaimed only in the last days, for only then would it be true that the hour of judgment *had come*. The prophecies present a succession of events leading down to the opening of the judgment. This is especially true of the book of Daniel. But that part of his prophecy which related to the last days, Daniel was bidden to close up and seal 'to the time of the end.' Not till we reach this time could a message concerning the judgment be proclaimed, based on a fulfillment of these prophecies."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 356.

Name at least four of the special reforms that are a part of the three angels' messages as recorded in Revelation 14.

- 13. What other agencies, in addition to the Persons of the Deity, have a vital part in the gospel program? Heb. 1:13, 14; Mark 16:15, 16.**

God's helpers. "The work of preaching the gospel has not been committed to angels, but has been entrusted to men. Holy angels have been employed in directing this work, they have in charge the great movements for the salvation of men; but the actual proclamation of the gospel is performed by the servants of Christ upon the earth."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 312.

- 14. What mission followed and commanded by Jesus are we to fulfill in cooperation with God's saving work? Matt. 28:19.**

Accepting the gospel. "Those who are baptized in the threefold name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, at the very entrance of their Christian life declare publicly that they have forsaken the service of Satan, and have become members of the royal family, children of the heavenly King."—*Evangelism*, p. 307.

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS: Please check the correct answer:

- Christ's role in the gospel effort is more important than that of God the Father or God the Holy Spirit. True / / False / /
- The resurrection is just as important as the crucifixion to the gospel plan. True / / False / /
- The Holy Spirit is even now moving upon the church with "early rain" power. True / / False / /
- The primary obstacle to "latter rain" power in the church is the inadequacy of the church organization. True / / False / /
- My own life is such that I can be a recipient of the latter rain. True / / False / /
- The primary meaning of baptism is affiliation with Christ and not with His representative organization, the church. True / / False / /

FRI

FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION:

What Jesus says about the work of the Persons of the Deity: John 5:17-30; 6:35-40; 10:17-30; 16:7-11.

What Paul says elsewhere: Rom. 1:1-17; Eph. 3:16-19.

What Ellen White says: "The first disciples went forth preaching the word. . . . Before the day of Pentecost they met together, and put away all differences. They were of one accord. They believed Christ's promise that the blessing would be given, and they prayed in faith. They did not ask for a blessing for themselves merely; they were weighted with the burden for the salvation of souls. The gospel was to be carried to the uttermost parts of the earth, and they claimed the endowment of the power that Christ had promised. Then it was that the Holy Spirit was poured out, and thousands were converted in a day."

"So it may be now. Instead of man's speculations, let the word of God be preached. Let Christians put away their dissensions, and give themselves to God for the saving of the lost. Let them in faith ask for the blessing, and it will come. The outpouring of the Spirit in apostolic days was the 'former rain,' and glorious was the result. But the 'latter rain' will be more abundant."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 827.

Also read the chapter entitled "Go Teach All Nations," in *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 818-828.

SUMMARY: Paul's concept of the gospel includes the dramatic and full participation of each Person of the Godhead. This view, firmly developed in 1 Thessalonians, undergirds Paul's faith, shapes his theology, and inspires his zeal. Clearly understood and appreciated, it will have the same effect upon modern believers as upon Paul and those who first read his message.

Lesson 5

July 28—August 3

The Gospel and the Kingdom

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 1 Thessalonians 2:10-14; Hebrews 4:15, 16.

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MEMORY TEXT: “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” (1 Thessalonians 2:11, 12).

MORE THAN GOOD NEWS. The gospel not only contains good news about God; it also is our call to a new existence, one that includes special affiliation and identification. The gospel calls us out of sin’s slavery into the light and the fellowship of Christ and His people. Properly understood, it is not simply the report of rescue, about which we read; it also is an act of redemption, which we experience.

LESSON OUTLINE:

- I. The Kingdom Identified (1 Thess. 2:12).
- II. The Kingdoms Distinguished (Matt. 4:17; 25:31-34).
- III. Jesus and the Kingdom (Matt. 24:14).
- IV. Kingdom Membership (1 Thess. 1:4).
- V. The Kingdom Extended (1 Thess 1:6, 8).

CITIZENS OF THE KINGDOM. The truth of the kingdom that Paul links with the gospel has critical implications for our spiritual understanding. However, because there are few kingdoms or even quasi-kingdoms left in the world, people today have little appreciation for what they were like in Christ’s day. Kingdoms were political strongholds in which monarchs ruled their subjects and territories with complete control. They were military domains in which all inhabitants belonged to the ruler. The citizens’ most essential task was to bring glory and honor to the throne.

The kingdom of God’s Son. Paul identifies for us the most basic of our Christian affiliations—the invisible kingdom of God (1 Thess. 2:12). Its provisions are similar in some respects to those of the ancient realm. As we study this week’s lesson we will see that, while Paul is categorically committed to the authority of the visible church, he is very positive with respect to our primary citizenship in the unseen or invisible kingdom of God.

PRAY for three outboard motors for Inter-American lay preachers in Guyana and Nicaragua (US\$400 each).

This concept of a present spiritual kingdom is absolutely crucial to Paul's total surrender to the will of Christ. For him, the kingdom model dominates. He sees himself as one rescued from Satan's kingdom, or "the power of darkness," and taken or delivered "into the kingdom of his [God's] dear Son" (Col. 1:13).

SUN

I. THE KINGDOM IDENTIFIED (1 Thess. 2:12).

1. What is the relationship between the two privileges to which the Thessalonians were called? 1 Thess. 2:12.

The sequence is instructive—kingdom and glory. Here Paul speaks of a present kingdom and glory which prepare us for the future kingdom and glory. The glory of the character of Christ given us now when we believe (John 17:22) is the qualification for the entry into the glorious kingdom that Christ will establish at His second advent.

2. What else are we told regarding the nature of the present kingdom? Heb. 4:14-16.

Thrones represent kingdoms. The "throne of grace" (Heb. 4:16) is symbolic of the kingdom of grace over which Christ reigns now. "Unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom" (Heb. 1:8). His subjects in heaven and earth acknowledge His present rulership. (See Phil. 2:9-11.)

Satan knew. "He knew, through prophecy, that a Saviour was predicted, and that His kingdom would not be established in earthly triumph and with worldly honor and display. He knew that the prophecies foretell a kingdom to be established by the Prince of heaven upon the earth which he [Satan] claimed as his dominion."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1079.

II. THE KINGDOMS DISTINGUISHED (Matt. 4:17; 25:31-34).

3. By what names does Jesus designate the kingdom of grace?

Matt. 4:17 _____

Matt. 6:33 _____

Luke 17:20, 21 _____

The kingdom of grace that Jesus established while here on the earth (Mark 1:15) occupied a prominent place in His preaching. Jesus mentioned this kingdom 36 times in the book of Matthew alone; 31 times He called it the kingdom of heaven, 5 times the kingdom of God. In His teaching,

when speaking of the work of divine grace in human hearts, Jesus used the expressions "kingdom of God" and "kingdom of heaven." (See Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:14, 15.)

MON

4. With what other kingdom frequently mentioned in the Bible is the kingdom of grace often confused? 2 Thess. 1:5; Matt. 6:10; 25:31-34.

The throne of glory signifies the place and period of everlasting bliss that will be established upon the return of our Lord. This kingdom is referred to in 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10 and is alluded to by the words *and glory* in 1 Thessalonians 2:12. However, before we can claim membership in the future kingdom of glory, we must prove faithful in the present kingdom of grace. This is the kingdom into which the gospel now calls us.

III. JESUS AND THE KINGDOM (Matt. 24:14).

5. What question asked by the disciples at Christ's ascension shows that they too had difficulty distinguishing between the two kingdoms? Acts 1:6.

The disciples misunderstood. "They preached the message which Christ had committed to them, though they themselves misapprehended its meaning. While their announcement was founded on Daniel 9:25, they did not see, in the next verse of the same chapter, that Messiah was to be cut off. From their very birth their hearts had been set upon the anticipated glory of an earthly empire, and this blinded their understanding alike to the specifications of the prophecy and to the words of Christ."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 345.

How does our eagerness for future glory sometimes cause us to overlook the rule of grace?

6. When was the kingdom of grace instituted and when was it established? Gen. 3:15; 1 Peter 1:10-13 (compare Rom. 5:17, 18).

The kingdom now. "The kingdom of grace was instituted immediately after the fall of man, when a plan was devised for the redemption of the guilty race. It then existed in the purpose and by the promise of God; and through faith, men could become its subjects. Yet it was not actually established until the death of Christ. Even after entering upon His earthly mission, the Saviour, wearied with the stubbornness and ingratitude of men, might have drawn back from the sacrifice of Calvary. . . . But when the Saviour yielded up His life, and with His expiring breath cried out, 'It is finished,' then the fulfillment of the plan of redemption was assured. The

TUE promise of salvation made to the sinful pair in Eden was ratified. The kingdom of grace, which had before existed by the promise of God, was then established."—*The Great Controversy*, pp. 347, 348.

7. In what unmistakable way did Jesus link the kingdom of grace with the gospel? Matt. 24:14; Matt. 13:19.

The gospel is the announcement that Jesus has triumphed, that He has successfully invaded Satan's kingdom and that the process of Satan's overthrow has begun. It is the grand declaration that Christ has passed the critical test, that His sacrifice has been accepted by the Father, and that full provision has been made for our redemption. (See Eph. 1:7.) Further, the gospel is the affirmation that the kingdom of grace is available to all who in faith accept this loving provision. Matthew 24:14 suggests that citizenship in the kingdom of grace is essential for citizenship in the kingdom of glory.

Given Christ's linkage of gospel and kingdom, what should be the primary thrust of our evangelism as we seek to win people to church membership?

8. What are the keys of the kingdom mentioned by Christ in Matthew 16:18, 19 and Luke 11:52? Compare Rev. 1:18; 3:7; Acts 4:12.

Kingdom entrance provided. "The 'keys' to the kingdom of heaven are the words of Christ. . . .

"The saving power of the gospel is the only thing that admits men and women into the kingdom of heaven. Christ simply bestowed upon Peter and all the other disciples . . . the authority and power to bring men into the kingdom. It was Peter's perception of the truth that Jesus is indeed the Christ that placed the 'keys' of the kingdom in his possession and let him into the kingdom, and the same may be said of all Christ's followers to the very close of time."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 432.

IV. KINGDOM MEMBERSHIP (1 Thess. 1:4).

9. By what very meaningful expressions does Paul depict God's will for our rescue from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light?

1 Thess. 1:4 _____

1 Thess. 2:12 _____

1 Thess. 4:3 _____

1 Thess. 5:9 _____

2 Thess. 2:13 _____

How reassuring it is to know God's positive will regarding our salvation. Could Paul have stated it more clearly? All of us are included in God's invitation to membership in the kingdom of grace. He is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

WED

10. Through what agency, vital to the gospel proclamation, is the kingdom made effective in the hearts of humans? Eph. 3:14-21.

The work of the Holy Spirit. Christ's dwelling in the heart by faith (Eph. 3:17) is identified with "his Spirit in the inner man" (verse 16). Because the union of Christ and the Holy Spirit is so close, the presence of one is the presence of the other. When promising the gift of the Holy Spirit to His disciples, Jesus said: "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you" (John 14:18). His indwelling in our hearts makes us members of the kingdom of grace and enables us to "know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge" and to "be filled with all the fulness of God" (verse 19). What a privilege to be a subject in the kingdom of grace!

11. While the believer is a member of the kingdom of grace, what visible organization claimed Paul's unquestioned dedication? 1 Thess. 1:1; 2:14.

The call of the gospel is first of all to kingdom membership. However, answering this call leads to membership in the organized church of Christ. The purpose of an authoritative representative body of believers is made obvious in Old Testament history. It also was clearly sanctioned in New Testament times. (See Matt. 16:18; 18:15-20; Acts 2:47; 15:1-4; 1 Cor. 12:28-31; Rev. 12:1, 17.) The New Testament provides authority for the principle of church organization.

Of course, formal connection with the church is not proof that our membership in the kingdom of grace is intact. Proof that God's election is appreciated and appropriated is demonstrated by the quality of our lives, particularly the quality of our interaction with other members of the body of Christ and the witness of our lives in the world. (See 1 John 2:9-11.)

Think it through. What specific reasons can you cite for the existence of the organized church? Why does the *remnant* church require special organization? Do non-Seventh-day Adventist churches fulfill these purposes? In what ways does the Seventh-day Adventist Church witness effectively?

12. When preaching the gospel of the kingdom (Matt. 4:23), what

vital rules of kingdom dwelling did Jesus emphasize? Matt. 5:1-12.

Living by kingdom principles. The glory of Christ's character is to be demonstrated through His believing people (John 17:22, 23). Spirit-filled believers are inevitably bound together in Christ. His love is manifested in the home, the school, the church, and in every institution, the members of which are filled with His Spirit. (See *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 296, 297.)

THU V. THE KINGDOM EXTENDED (1 Thess. 1:6, 8).

13. What contrasting experiences did the Thessalonians have when they responded to the gospel call? 1 Thess. 1:6.

"No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous" (Heb. 12:11). And yet these believers, ridiculed by their countrymen and despised by the Jewish leaders of the synagogues, suffering the violence that the kingdom always produces (Matt. 11:11, 12), had received the word with happiness of heart.

How is it possible for a person to be happy while suffering affliction—be it economic, psychological, social, physical, or religious? Which is the hardest kind to endure?

14. What were the Thessalonian converts impelled to do with their newfound faith? 1 Thess. 1:8.

The impact of Christ's love was so transforming and exciting that they had to share the good news with others. When similarly impressed, we too will witness gladly. It is impossible to see clearly and accept wholly the love of Christ as outlined in the gospel and yet remain passive. The gospel is exhilarating, refreshing, stimulating, reviving, and compelling. It is an explosive, expansive, regenerating force that requires believing and provokes sharing.

A task for everyone. "Every Christian has something to do in the service of his Master. We are not to seek our own ease or convenience, but rather to make the upbuilding of Christ's kingdom our first consideration."—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 182.

God's scattered family. "Notwithstanding the spiritual darkness and alienation from God that exist in the churches which constitute Babylon, the great body of Christ's true followers are still to be found in their communion."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 390. (See John 10:16.) In response

to the loving proclamation, "Come out of her, my people" (Rev. 18:4), they will join the remnant church and prepare to meet Jesus when He comes.

Name one or two specific talents that you are currently exercising in helping to expand the kingdom. Are there other gifts that you have that should be utilized?

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS: Please fill in the appropriate word(s):

The kingdom within my heart is the kingdom of _____.

The kingdom to come is the kingdom of _____.

The clearest evidence of kingdom membership is _____.

The best part of membership in the kingdom of glory will be _____.

Even though membership in the invisible kingdom of grace is primary, church membership is important because:

FRI

FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION

What Jesus says about membership in His kingdom: Matt. 13:19-58.

What Paul says elsewhere: Col. 2:10-14.

What Ellen White says: "As the message of Christ's first advent announced the kingdom of His grace, so the message of His second advent announces the kingdom of His glory."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 234.

"Not by the decisions of courts or councils or legislative assemblies, not by the patronage of worldly great men, is the kingdom of Christ established, but by the implanting of Christ's nature in humanity through the work of the Holy Spirit."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 509. (See also *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 139, 550, 551; *The Great Controversy*, pp. 343-354.)

SUMMARY: The "gospel of the kingdom" that Christ commanded His disciples to preach is the gospel that Paul taught the Thessalonians. Because of Jesus' sacrifice we may have citizenship in His kingdom of grace as a preparation for citizenship in His kingdom of glory. We must preach the same gospel in word and deed to all humanity before our Lord returns.

Death and the Delay

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

**SAB
PM** **MEMORY TEXT:** "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" (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

DEATH IS NOT DISHONOR. The realization that our earthly sojourn may end in death rather than in translation may produce a severe disappointment, but it should not bring a sense of dishonor. The death of the saints should not be viewed as a defeat either of God's promises or of the Christian's hopes of witnessing Christ's return.

LESSON OUTLINE:

- I. Tensions Concerning the Dead (1 Thess. 4:13).
- II. Tensions Concerning Dying (1 Thess. 4:14).
- III. Tensions Concerning the Time of Christ's Coming (1 Thess. 5:5, 9).
- IV. Paul's Harmony of Hope (2 Thess. 2:2).
- V. The Basis for Hope (1 Thess. 4:14, 15).

CONFUSION REGARDING CHRIST'S RETURN. Timothy's report to Paul of how the young church at Thessalonica was progressing was encouraging, but that did not mean there were no problems. One serious concern was the confusion of the new believers regarding death and dying. Before their conversion to Christianity, the Jews and Greeks who comprised the bulk of the church membership had held a variety of erroneous beliefs regarding the dead. The Thessalonians' initial acceptance of the doctrine of the second coming of Jesus was itself a miracle. But because their expectations of translation had not been fulfilled, frustration had developed. As time elapsed and Christ did not come, old theories surfaced, doubts were raised, their beliefs were ridiculed by the public, and their confidence was weakened. Paul, who had launched them on this journey of faith, was nowhere near to buttress or reinforce their hopes. Some among them were feeling deceived and deserted—spiritual orphans. A crisis was slowly developing. Upon hearing of this from Timothy, Paul quickly re-

PRAY for another 20,000 "Power to Cope Bible Guides for Handling Stress" to be distributed on the streets of New York (US\$5,000).

sponded by providing the stimulating clarifications that we see in his two Epistles.

SUN

I. TENSIONS CONCERNING THE DEAD (1 Thess. 4:13).

1. What problem regarding death and the delay was disturbing the believers? 1 Thess. 4:13; 5:9, 10.

Fear of death as eternal separation. "The Thessalonians had eagerly grasped the idea that Christ was coming to change the faithful who were alive, and to take them to Himself. They had carefully guarded the lives of their friends, lest they should die and lose the blessing which they looked forward to receiving at the coming of their Lord. But one after another their loved ones had been taken from them, and with anguish the Thessalonians had looked for the last time upon the faces of their dead, hardly daring to hope to meet them in a future life."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 258.

The believing dead will rise again. The Thessalonians were disappointed not just that death was robbing their loved ones of the privilege of witnessing Christ's return, but that they would never see them again. That these members lacked an understanding of the resurrection was due in no small part to the fact that Greek mythology had little or no place for personhood in a future life. Moreover, Judaism was influenced strongly by the belief of the Sadducees, who, for all practical purposes, denied the possibility of a resurrection. Paul comforted the Thessalonians greatly by pointing out that they would surely live together again with their loved ones.

2. How does Paul summarize the truth regarding the state of the dead as it relates to the second coming of Jesus? 1 Thess. 4:13-17.

The promises of these passages are as comforting to us today as they were to the believers in Thessalonica. For the three years prior to 1989, deaths of Seventh-day Adventists have averaged 23,412 a year worldwide. Because Adventist members in most countries lead more healthful lives than the general population, many live longer than do their fellow citizens. However, God's people are not exempt from accidents, assaults, and diseases, which claim lives prematurely. How important to cling to the promises of God and cherish the blessed hope. We need not sorrow in despair, for we may be assured that "weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (Ps. 30:5).

3. What effect did Paul intend his message to have upon the believers' hearts? How were his efforts rewarded? 1 Thess. 4:18; 1 Thess. 5:11.

New life for the Thessalonians. "As Paul's epistle was opened and read, great joy and consolation was brought to the church by the words revealing the true state of the dead. Paul showed that those living when Christ should come would not go to meet their Lord in advance of those who had fallen asleep in Jesus. . . .

"The hope and joy that this assurance brought to the young church at Thessalonica can scarcely be appreciated by us. They believed and cherished the letter sent to them by their father in the gospel, and their hearts went out in love to him."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 258, 259.

MON

II. TENSIONS CONCERNING DYING (1 Thess. 4:14).

4. What fundamental doctrine is stressed in each of the five chapters of Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians?

1 Thess. 1:10 _____

1 Thess. 2:19, 20 _____

1 Thess. 3:13 _____

1 Thess. 4:16-18 _____

1 Thess. 5:23 _____

The return of his Lord was a treasured hope that Paul constantly shared with his hearers. "Paul was an Adventist; he presented the important event of the second coming of Christ with such power and reasoning that a deep impression, which never wore away, was made upon the minds of the Thessalonians."—*Sketches From the Life of Paul*, p. 83.

5. How did Paul address the believers' fear of not living to witness the return of Christ? 1 Thess. 4:14; 5:9, 10.

Death not the end. Paul wanted the believers to know that death before Christ's second coming is not a breach of God's promises. Their prevailing expectation was that they would not die. They believed so ardently in Christ's imminent return that death for them had been unthinkable. Yet they were dying, and the longer the list of their dead grew, the more confused they became theologically and emotionally. By emphasizing, as he does in 1 Thessalonians, the possibility of their sleeping before Jesus' return, the apostle sought to relieve their tensions. He provided them and us a proper frame of reference for death as it relates to the second coming of Christ.

6. While death as a prospect is no more pleasant for us today than for these early believers, what practical counsel should we keep in mind? Ps. 90:10-12; 1 Cor. 4:2.

The wisdom of a will. "Those who are faithful stewards of the Lord's means will know just how their business stands, and, like wise men, they will be prepared for any emergency. Should their probation close suddenly, they would not leave such great perplexity upon those who are called to settle their estate. . . .

"Death will not come one day sooner, brethren, because you have made your will. In disposing of your property by will to your relatives, be sure that you do not forget God's cause. You are His agents, holding His property; and His claims should have your first consideration. Your wife and children, of course, should not be left destitute; provision should be made for them if they are needy. But do not, simply because it is customary, bring into your will a long line of relatives who are not needy."—*The Adventist Home*, p. 397.

Do you know the name of the trust officer of your local conference or mission? Have you thought about including in your will the needs of foreign and home missions, Christian education, and the impoverished and needy people of your community and of the world?

TUE

III. TENSIONS CONCERNING THE TIME OF CHRIST'S COMING (1 Thess. 5:5, 9).

7. In what way do Paul's words appear to contribute to the idea of the imminent return of Christ? 1 Thess. 4:17.

Paul's remarks are not the only ones in Scripture that lead to expectation of the imminent return of Christ. There are many others. (See 2 Peter 3:10-13; Luke 17:26-30; Matt. 24:3-14, 27, 29, 30; Rev. 6:12-17.)

8. While Paul's language conveys the idea of immediacy, what hint does he give of the possibility of delay? 1 Thess. 5:9, 10.

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9. What indications did Christ Himself give of the possibility, or even the necessity, of delay? Matt. 24:6, 8, 29, 48; 25:5, 14-19.

The Thessalonian believers cannot be faulted for their hopes, even expectations, of the imminent return of Jesus. Given their newness in the faith, their brief experience with Paul, and the natural longing of all Christians for deliverance from this wicked world and for eternal fellowship with Christ, they had reason to hope, but also reason to wonder—why death? Nevertheless, closer scrutiny of the apostle's message, as well as of the words of Christ, would have alerted them to the possibility of a lengthy wait.

IV. PAUL'S HARMONY OF HOPE (2 Thess. 2:2).

10. How is it possible to harmonize Paul's view of a more distant Second Coming in 2 Thessalonians 2:2 with the impression of "suddenness" and "immediacy" given in such places as 1 Thessalonians 5:3 and Romans 13:11, 12?

In 1 Thessalonians 4:17 Paul speaks of being translated; in 1 Corinthians 6:14 he speaks of being resurrected. It appears that while Paul hoped that all the signs would be completed and Christ would come in his day, he did not predict a time of Christ's return. A serious review of his personal reflections regarding the time of Christ's return discloses a picture of a hopeful believer who was nevertheless prepared to die because: (1) He trusted God's wisdom concerning the timing of His appearance, and (2) He trusted God's promises and powers of resurrection.

11. What grim reality of human experience makes the Advent an immediate event for every human being? Eccl. 9:5; Ps. 90:10.
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As soon as we are born we begin to die. Because death is a sleep from which we eventually shall awaken, and because we shall be in the presence of the Lord of judgment in the initial moments of consciousness following the sleep of death, it is true that Christ's appearing is both soon and sudden for each of us. Life is short. Even those who live what we regard as a long time, really stay but briefly upon the earth. Furthermore, recurring catastrophes by sea, air, and land make it truer than ever that we all walk with "but one step between us and death."

12. From what other perspective is it possible to think of Christ's return as being soon? Ps. 90:1-4 (compare 2 Peter 3:8-10).
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13. What graphic phrase coined by Zechariah accurately describes those who wait in hope for the return of Christ? Zech. 9:12.
-

Captured by the love of Christ, all who sincerely believe are prisoners of hope. It is the paradox of faith that while we believe that Christ is coming soon, we do not know precisely how soon. As were our predecessors, we are prisoners of hope, living in the bound freedom of the righteous kingdom—willingly committed, patiently waiting, and knowingly dying. Pleading, with the saints of all times, "How long, O Lord? How long?" we consciously declare our allegiance and approach our graves, if that must be, affirming with the patriarch Job, "For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms

destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God" (Job 19:25, 26).

THU

V. THE BASIS FOR HOPE (1 Thess. 4:14, 15).

- 14. Upon what glorious event did Paul base the triumphal promises of the last six verses of 1 Thessalonians 4? 1 Thess. 4:14.**

"The Pharaoh-gods of Egypt were still in their graves until their mummified remains were placed on show in the world's museums. Parts of Buddha's body are enshrined as relics in different places in the East. The tomb of Confucius in China is still occupied—and the grave of Mohammed at Medina in Arabia is not an empty grave. But the tomb of Jesus Christ is empty. 'He is not here, but is risen!' . . .

"Jesus urged His followers to look beyond this life, beyond the grave, beyond death. To prove what He said, He laid down His life and on the third day rose from the dead. Says Paul, the resurrection of your loved ones is as certain as the resurrection of Christ. Your hope and mine for resurrection from death depends entirely on the irrefutable fact that Jesus defeated death."—Derek M. Marley, *Death and Beyond* (Grantham, England: Stanborough Press), pp. 19, 20.

What factors in nature also stimulate and sustain our resurrection hopes?

- 15. What further thoughts on this subject did Paul provide when writing to the church at Corinth a few years later? 1 Cor. 15:14-19, 51-58.**

Many theories; one truth. We did not ask to be born. No one is here because of self-determination. Since we are here and obviously are not immortal, we must make decisions regarding the future. There are many theories. These include the belief that (a) death ends one's existence forever—that there is nothing beyond, (b) death is followed by reincarnation as another person, animal, object, or spirit, (c) death is followed immediately by a happy or miserable life in another world, and (d) death is the temporary cessation of all life functions, to be reversed by a resurrection that will restore the individual to eternal life or to eternal destruction. The option a person chooses has pervasive meaning for that individual's world-view and lifestyle.

The last of the above options, that of resurrection to eternal life, is the Christian hope. It is the only one consistent with the Word of God. We must await the fulfillment of our desires to prove their veracity, but without that hope we are, as Paul states, "of all men most miserable" (1 Cor. 15:19). And to those who say we are dreamers, we reply, "It is better to die with an unfulfilled expectation than to live with no hope at all."

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

- How long have you been a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church?
- What explanation do you give for the apparent delay of the Advent?
- If you should die next week, who would be responsible for your children? Have you designated the one to take care of your financial obligations? Have you given clear instructions on how your money should be divided?
- Is it wrong for one who believes in Christ's return to have life insurance?
- Whom do you especially wish to see in the earth made new?

FRI

FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION:

What Jesus says about His delay: Matt. 24:42-51; 25:1-13; Mark 5:39; John 11:11.

What Paul says elsewhere: 1 Cor. 15:20-26.

What Ellen White says: "Especially important to the church in our time are the teachings of the apostle upon this point. To those living so near the great consummation, the words of Paul should come with telling force: 'Let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for a helmet, the hope of salvation.' "—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 260.

SUMMARY: Translation to eternal life is preferable to death and resurrection, not because of any advantage at or after Christ's second coming; it is preferable because the thought of death is painful to us and to the hearts of those who survive us. But death has lost its sting to the believer, because he will awake to greet the Lord of life.

**The
Trans-European Division
needs your
Trans-World Prayerlines
this quarter for the**

Thirteenth Sabbath Offering projects:

1. A church in Thessalonika, Greece,
2. An evangelistic center in Copenhagen, Denmark.

Twenty-five percent of the September 28 offering will support these projects.

Lesson 7

August 11-17

The Consequences and Manner of Christ's Coming

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

SAB
PM

MEMORY TEXT: "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with a voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet 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" (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17).

PAUL PREDICTS NOT WHEN—BUT HOW, AND WHAT THEN. While Paul at no time intended to pinpoint the moment of Christ's second coming, in 1 Thessalonians 4 he is quite specific regarding the manner and the consequences of His appearing.

LESSON OUTLINE:

- I. Consequences for the Righteous Dead (1 Thess. 4:14-16).
- II. Consequences for the Righteous Living (1 Thess. 4:17).
- III. Consequences for the Wicked Living (1 Thess. 5:2, 3).
- IV. Consequences for the Wicked Dead (Rev. 20:5, 6).
- V. The Manner of Christ's Return (1 Thess. 4:16).

THE DAY OF THE LORD. We know exactly when Christ's final offensive against sin began—A.D. 31—when our Lord successfully completed His mission on earth. This date was projected in Daniel 9:24-27 and was clearly fulfilled in the life of Christ. Although we do not know the date of final victory, in the writings of Paul and other Bible writers we are provided an arresting picture of what that victory will be like when it takes place.

First Thessalonians 4:13-18 is more than a description of the final triumph. It is a rich source of information regarding a number of details connected with that climactic event. Among the many aspects of the Advent illuminated in this passage are: the fate of the living righteous; the fate of the righteous dead; and, by implication, the fate of the wicked living and

PRAY for 10 village church buildings for unentered sections of the South American Division (US\$5,000 each).

dead. All four of these concerns are involved in Paul's description of what he terms "the day of the Lord"—the second coming of Christ.

The questions that Paul answers regarding the state of the dead, life after death, and the end of human history are the fundamental considerations of all religions. The belief of so-called nonreligionists that there is no life after death is itself a religious tenet; it deals with two of the most vital of all religious questions—Is there a God? and Where do we go when we die? Our lesson this week will address these and other ultimate concerns as depicted in the writings of the inspired apostle.

SUN

I. CONSEQUENCES FOR THE RIGHTEOUS DEAD (1 Thess. 4:14-16).

1. What stunning event inexplicable to human reason opens the drama of consequences at the second coming of Christ? 1 Thess. 4:14-16.
2. Who will comprise a large and very happy class of the righteous resurrected? Rev. 6:9-11.

The last become first. "The heirs of God have come from garrets, from hovels, from dungeons, from scaffolds, from mountains, from deserts, from the caves of the earth, from the caverns of the sea. On earth they were 'des-
titute, afflicted, tormented.' Millions went down to the grave loaded with infamy because they steadfastly refused to yield to the deceptive claims of Satan. By human tribunals they were adjudged the vilest of criminals. But now 'God is judge himself.' Psalm 50:6. Now the decisions of earth are reversed. 'The rebuke of his people shall he take away.' Isaiah 25:8. 'They shall call them, The holy people, The redeemed of the Lord.' He hath appointed 'to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.' Isaiah 62:12; 61:3. They are no longer feeble, afflicted, scattered, and oppressed. Henceforth they are to be ever with the Lord."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 650.

3. How will the form of the resurrected righteous compare with their former physical state? John 20:15-18; Phil. 3:20, 21.

Identity preserved. "Our personal identity is preserved in the resurrection, though not the same particles of matter or material substance as went into the grave. The wondrous works of God are a mystery to man. The spirit, the character of man, is returned to God, there to be preserved. In the resurrection every man will have his own character. God in His own time will call forth the dead, giving again the breath of life, and bidding the dry bones live. The same form will come forth, but it will be free from disease and every defect. It lives again bearing the same individuality of features,

so that friend will recognize friend. There is no law of God in nature which shows that God gives back the same identical particles of matter which composed the body before death. God shall give the righteous dead a body that will please Him.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1093.

4. What miracle of Christ's more than any other anticipated His resurrecting the righteous dead? John 11:41-44.
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Because He is the Deity, the life of Christ is unborrowed, original, and underived. He is the author of life, the source of life, the origin of all that lives and breathes on this planet and throughout the universe. All things were made by Him, and He has the power to recreate that which has died. (See John 1:1-3; Col. 1:16; John 11:25.)

MON II. CONSEQUENCES FOR THE RIGHTEOUS LIVING (1 Thess. 4:17).

5. What joyous response will the righteous living make to the appearance of Christ? Isa. 25:8, 9.
-

It is impossible to describe what the living righteous will feel and think at that glad hour. All the saints who died in the faith of the three angels' messages will be brought forth in a special resurrection to witness the coming of their Lord. (See Daniel 12:2; *The Great Controversy*, p. 637.) The living righteous will behold the small cloud in the east swell into a brightness that engulfs heaven. In the dazzling glow they will behold the presence of the King.

6. What glorious transformation will the righteous living experience? 1 Thess. 4:17; 1 Cor. 15:51-54.
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Forever changed. “The living righteous are changed ‘in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.’ At the voice of God they were glorified; now they are made immortal and with the risen saints are caught up to meet their Lord in the air. Angels ‘gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.’ Little children are borne by holy angels to their mothers’ arms. Friends long separated by death are united, nevermore to part, and with songs of gladness ascend together to the City of God.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 645.

7. What experience in the life of Christ most clearly prefigures the consequences of the Second Coming for His faithful people? Luke 9:28-35.

A preview of glory. "In these glorified ones, the disciples saw in miniature a representation of the kingdom of the redeemed. They beheld Jesus clothed with the light of heaven; they heard the 'voice out of the cloud' (Luke 9:35), acknowledging Him as the Son of God; they saw Moses, representing those who will be raised from the dead at the time of the second advent; and there also stood Elijah, representing those who at the close of earth's history will be changed from mortal to immortal and be translated to heaven without seeing death."—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 227.

TUE

III. CONSEQUENCES FOR THE WICKED LIVING (1 Thess. 5:2, 3).

8. By what Old Testament designation does Paul label the second coming of Christ? 1 Thess. 5:2; Amos 5:18-20.

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9. How does the New Testament elsewhere describe this climactic day or event?

John 6:39, 40 _____

Rom. 2:5 _____

1 Cor. 1:7, 8 _____

2 Peter 2:9 _____

2 Peter 3:12 _____

10. Upon whom does the wrath of God fall at the second coming of Christ? 2 Thess. 1:5-10.
-

For the living righteous there is joyous reward. For the living wicked there is awesome recompense. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Eccl. 8:11). The divine Watcher is keeping accurate records and will treat every person justly. The Lord will mete out final recompense at the end of the millennium (see Rev. 20:7-9), but the glory of the Second Coming will destroy the living wicked at the beginning of the millennium. (See 2 Thess. 2:8.)

11. How does Isaiah typify the punishment connected with the day of wrath? Isa. 28:21.
-

God's strange act. "God is, by nature, merciful, gracious, and long-suffering. . . . It is alien to His character to inflict pain and suffering,

punishment and death, upon His creatures. But at the same time He will 'by no means clear the guilty' (Ex. 34:7). Sometimes divine justice seems so long delayed that men conclude it will never come (Eccl. 8:11; Zeph. 1:12; Mal. 2:17; 3:14), and that they may go on in their evil ways with impunity. All who thus presume to take advantage of God's long-suffering and mercy are here warned that judgment is sure to come. . . . When Christ appears as a warrior to subdue His enemies (Rev. 19:11-21), men will see Him acting in a role that appears vastly different from anything they have known before. The Lamb of God will then appear as 'the Lion of the tribe of Juda' (Rev. 5:5, 6)." —SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 4, p. 212.

WED

IV. CONSEQUENCES FOR THE WICKED DEAD (Rev. 20:5, 6).

12. What happens to the wicked dead? Rev. 20:5, 6.

Paul does not mention the wicked dead in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. The implication of the passage is that they are unaffected by the second coming of Christ. John makes clear that these are brought forth in the *second* resurrection, at the conclusion of the millennium, when they are eternally destroyed. (See Rev. 20:9, 10.)

13. Since the wicked dead do not live again until the end of the 1,000-year period, how do we explain John's statement in Revelation 1:7 that those who pierced Him will witness His second coming? Matt. 26:64; Dan. 12:1, 2.

The first become last. At His trial Jesus predicted that His persecutors would see His second coming. "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven" (Matt. 26:64). Since the wicked dead are not raised until the end of the millennium (Rev. 20:5), the resurrection of those who condemned and crucified Christ must be a partial resurrection immediately prior to the Second Advent. Daniel 12:2 predicts that some righteous and some wicked will be raised at the Advent. (See *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 739, 740; *The Great Controversy*, p. 637.)

14. What graphic illustrations portray the wicked's response to the sudden trauma of Christ's appearing? 1 Thess. 5:3; Matt. 22:12, 13; Rev. 6:14-17.

V. THE MANNER OF CHRIST'S RETURN (1 Thess. 4:16).

15. While Paul speaks hopefully of his being among those who will be translated, what is the true emphasis of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17?

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Date setting is hazardous. Paul could not tell the believers at Thessalonica the year or the day of Christ's return. He did not know. Neither do we. Those individuals who work out dates and draw up schematics showing the return to be at a certain point, or within a certain period, or by a certain date, or before a certain event, do so without the permission of the Word of God. Since it has always been possible to see in current events the fulfillment of prophecies of Christ's return, the anticipation of the early Christians was normal. They wished to be alive for that event. However, because most of God's promises are conditional and because the baleful results of the unfulfilled desire for certainty drive us toward either fanaticism or despondency, precise calculations and predictions should be studiously avoided.

The manner and consequences. Paul's discussion of the Second Coming in 1 Thessalonians emphasizes the manner and consequences, not the hour or time of Christ's return. Paul informs us that (a) Christ will descend from above in a manner consistent with John's promise that "every eye shall see him" (Rev. 1:7), (b) He will employ voice and trumpet to announce His appearance and to awaken the dead, (c) God the Father and the holy angels will accompany Him, (d) His appearance will be as a flaming fire to the wicked, (e) His timing will be as that of a thief in the night, and (f) the living righteous will be gathered with the resurrected righteous in the clouds and escorted by heavenly hosts to their celestial abode.

16. What cosmic sounds herald the appearance of our Lord? 1 Thess. 4:16.

The end of earth's history announced. Of all biblical descriptions of the second coming of Christ, none is more spectacular than this. The Lord Himself is shouting, the highest angel in heaven is calling, and some celestial being is filling the airwaves with the trumpet sound that is evidently reserved for God's use on special occasions—all fitting precursors to the climax of this planet's sin-cursed existence.

Paul does not say who will do the shouting, but in the light of John 5:28 it is reasonable to believe that it is Christ who here expresses Himself. Nor does Paul identify the archangel who speaks, but since Michael is the only archangel mentioned in the New Testament (Jude 9), the conclusion of most is that this too is Jesus. The trump of God is mentioned elsewhere (1 Cor. 15:52; Matt. 24:31) and is, apparently, sounded by an angel or angels. Paul does not make these details clear. What is clear, however, is that they are all acts of authority and triumph whereby the God of creation announces the end of earth's history as we now experience it.

17. By what authority does Paul proclaim, not the time, but the manner and consequences of these cataclysmic events? 1 Thess. 4:15.

Paul could evoke no greater assurance than the Word of the Lord. His

offensive strikes against superstition and sin and was made possible and effective by faith in the Word of God. The Word is still the Christian's only weapon of aggression and defense. The Word gives us faith, the Word gives us power, the Word gives personal victory. Paul had no proof; that is, he could not physically demonstrate that what he was saying was true. But he did have evidence of the workings of the Word in fulfilled prophecies and in the changes it had wrought in his own life, as well as the lives of others. This is what gave him confidence, and to this more than any other source he rightly appealed.

ASK YOURSELF:

- What reasons can I give for God's raising the righteous dead before translating the righteous living?
- Why are those who crucified Jesus raised to see Him coming the second time?
- How does God's act of destroying the wicked fit my concept of His love and mercy?
- Why is it important for me to know the manner and consequences of Christ's coming?

FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION:

What Jesus says about His second coming: Luke 17:22-24; 13:23-29.

What Paul says elsewhere: 1 Cor. 15:35-58.

What Ellen White says: "To the believer, death is but a small matter. Christ speaks of it as if it were of little moment. 'If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death,' 'he shall never taste of death.' To the Christian, death is but a sleep, a moment of silence and darkness. The life is hid with Christ in God, and 'when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory.' "—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 787.

Also read "God's People Delivered" in *The Great Controversy*, pp. 635-652.

SUMMARY: Because of the inevitable result of sin's inherent consequences, for the wicked the Second Coming will mean unspeakable pain; for the righteous it will mean indescribable joy and satisfaction. The most thrilling aspect of the redeemed's experience will be the privilege at last of beholding Christ, whose trumpet and voice reunite and immortalize the righteous.

Signs of Christ's Coming

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12.

SAB
PM

MEMORY TEXT: "And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming" (2 Thessalonians 2:8).

THE MAN OF SIN. In 2 Thessalonians 2, Paul outlines the ways in which the man of sin will orchestrate the mystery of iniquity. While the process had already begun in his day, its full development is even yet being accomplished. It is possible, and from all signs probable, that our generation will see the final act of the drama, the completion of this primary harbinger of Christ's return.

LESSON OUTLINE:

- I. The Man of Sin Introduced (2 Thess. 2:3).
- II. The Man of Sin Described (2 Thess. 2:4, 7).
- III. The Man of Sin Revealed (Dan. 7:24, 25).
- IV. The Counterfeit Coming (2 Thess. 2:9, 10).
- V. The Christian's Defense (2 Thess. 2:10-12).

SATAN'S MASTERPIECE. The great controversy that Satan has waged against God's people is but an extension of the insurrection that he inaugurated in heaven. (See Rev. 12:7-9.) Through various means, among them persecution, compromise, material prosperity, and even societal praise and acceptance, he is doing his utmost to defeat the plan of salvation. He knows that at Calvary his doom was sealed, his kingdom of evil destined for extinction. He is now busy trying to destroy as many individuals as possible. Hatred for Christ and the desire to deplete His kingdom are his primary motives.

The masterpiece of all Satan's programs of deception, the one that has succeeded in causing more loss of life than any other, is the work of the mystery of lawlessness or the "man of sin." This week's lesson will explore the nature and consequences of this masterful deception.

PRAY for 100 desks for the Adventist boarding school in the Southern Asia Division (US\$50 each).

I. THE MAN OF SIN INTRODUCED (2 Thess. 2:3).

1. What names does Paul ascribe to the individual or power most prominently associated with the “falling away” from strict biblical injunctions? 2 Thess. 2:3.

The Bible gives us signs in four distinct realms. There are signs in the natural world (Matt. 24:7), signs in the social world (Luke 17:26-28), signs in the political world (Matt. 24:6; 1 Thess. 5:3), and signs in the religious world. The “falling away” (Greek *apostasia* = “apostasy”) described in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 is the religious sign of prime importance. “Falling away” involves a diminishing of fervor, a loss of zeal, a lessening of commitment to Christ, departure from strict, faithful following of His commands, capitulation to a lesser intensity of belief and Christian lifestyle. Other signs in the religious world are recorded in Matthew 24:5, 6, 14, 24, and Revelation 14:6-12.

2. How do John’s messages to the Christian church harmonize with Paul’s prediction?

Rev. 2:4 _____

Rev. 2:9 _____

Rev. 2:13, 15 _____

Rev. 2:20 _____

Rev. 3:1 _____

Rev. 3:9 _____

Rev. 3:16 _____

The seven churches of Revelation 2 and 3 represent seven consecutive time periods of church history stretching from Christ’s departure to His second coming. Christ’s messages to the seven churches in Asia Minor are His messages to the church throughout the seven phases of its history. These messages anticipated the progressive spiritual decline in the church leading to the medieval papacy (“that woman Jezebel”—Rev. 2:20), the spiritless post-Reformation church (Sardis), and the lukewarm church of Laodicea.

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, John predicted that the medieval papacy and the spiritless post-Reformation Protestant church would eventually unite to establish Satan’s end-time masterpiece of deception. (See Revelation 13 and 17.) John’s predictions and those of Paul (see 2 Thessalonians 2) refer to the similar apostasy and antichristian religious union of the last days.

II. THE MAN OF SIN DESCRIBED (2 Thess. 2:4, 7).

3. What specific un-Christ-like attitudes characterized the "man of sin"? 2 Thess. 2:4.
-

"Opposing and exalting oneself above all that is called God" or that is worshiped means to claim for humanity the powers, the prowess, the wisdom, the prerogatives that are distinctly and uniquely God's. Sitting "in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God" means to demand of fellow human beings worship, adoration, and surrender due only our Creator.

4. What other name is given to this power? What is the significance of this name? 2 Thess. 2:7.
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Mystery here means something hidden, knowledge in secret, information held in confidence by an initiated few. Iniquity means transgression of the law. It is clear then that whatever the identity of this power, it will challenge or claim God's authority and will surreptitiously transgress or defy the law of God. Because God's law is an expression of His character, Satan's chief aim is to depreciate its value and to demonstrate that it cannot be obeyed.

The New International Version translates 2 Thessalonians 2:7: "For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way."

5. Whose spirit and example are clearly expressed in the attitude and work of the man of sin? Isa. 14:12-14.
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"In the last analysis, this description [2 Thess. 2:7] applies to Satan, the author of lawlessness . . . but the devil has generally camouflaged his personality by working through agents. . . .

"Hence the 'man of sin' and 'the mystery of iniquity' may be considered as representing the same apostate papal power . . . ; and behind all human manifestations of iniquity stands Satan himself, who in the end will play a personal role in an effort to lead the whole world captive."—SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 7, p. 272.

TUE III. THE MAN OF SIN REVEALED (Dan. 7:24, 25).

6. How do the system and history of papal Rome fulfill the predictions of this apostate power given in 2 Thessalonians 2:4?
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The boldness of papal Rome, in declaring that its priests have the power to forgive sin and in stating that its head of government exercises divine powers, leaves little doubt that it is the power of which Paul is here speaking.

7. How does Daniel in a parallel passage further identify the apostate power? Dan. 7:23-25.

The prediction of a power that would arise to: (a) "speak great words against the most High," (b) "wear out the saints of the most High," and (c) "think to change times and laws" has remarkable fulfillment in the history of the Roman Church. Notice how its history conforms to the description of Daniel 7:23-25:

- A. It rose up from the ten divisions of the fourth beast, the Roman Empire. (See Dan. 7:1-8, 23.)
- B. It spoke words against the Most High in its declaration that the pope exercises God's authority on earth.
- C. It sought to wear out the saints of the Most High by the persecutions during the period of its ecclesiastical supremacy (538-1798).
- D. It changed divine times and laws by substituting Sunday worship for worship on the seventh day, God's holy Sabbath day. This latter act, accomplished during the early stages of the Smyrna period (the immediate postapostolic period), is a key element in the identification process. Perhaps unintentionally, but nevertheless unmistakably, papal Rome confesses its guilt by claiming that its change of the Sabbath from the seventh to the first day of the week demonstrates its religious and spiritual supremacy. Typical of its historical position in this matter is the following statement:

"If the Bible is the only guide for the Christian, then the Seventh Day Adventist is right in observing the Saturday with the Jew. But Catholics learn what to believe and do from the divine, infallible authority established by Jesus Christ, the Catholic Church [papal Rome], which in Apostolic times made Sunday the day of rest. . . . Is it not strange that those who make the Bible their only teacher should inconsistently follow in this matter the tradition of the Church?"—Bertrand L. Conway, *The Question-Box Answers*, 1903 ed., p. 254.

Does the indictment of the system (papal Rome) mean that all of its leaders and members are evil? Is it right to charge modern-day Catholics with the mistakes of their predecessors? In what sense is Catholicism today guilty of apostasy? Will all Catholics be lost? Will all Adventists be saved?

IV. THE COUNTERFEIT COMING (2 Thess. 2:9, 10).

- 8. In another of his bold attempts to deceive the world, what last desperate effort does Satan make? 2 Thess. 2:9, 10.**
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The crowning act. The deceptions of the last days perpetrated by the "man of sin" will culminate in Satan's attempt to impersonate Christ:

"As the crowning act in the great drama of deception, Satan himself will personate Christ. The church has long professed to look to the Saviour's advent as the consummation for her hopes. Now the great deceiver will make it appear that Christ has come. In different parts of the earth, Satan will manifest himself among men as a majestic being of dazzling brightness, resembling the description of the Son of God given by John in the Revelation. Revelation 1:13-15. The glory that surrounds him is unsurpassed by anything that mortal eyes have yet beheld. The shout of triumph rings out upon the air: 'Christ has come! Christ has come!' "—*The Great Controversy*, p. 624.

9. Following what date and what events can both the imitation and the genuine Second Coming be expected? Compare 2 Thess. 2:3 with Dan. 7:25.
-

When to start looking. "The apostle Paul warned the church not to look for the coming of Christ in his day. 'That day shall not come,' he says, 'except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed.' 2 Thessalonians 2:3. Not till after the great apostasy, and the long period of the reign of the 'man of sin,' can we look for the advent of our Lord. The 'man of sin,' which is also styled 'the mystery of iniquity,' 'the son of perdition,' and 'that wicked,' represents the papacy, which, as foretold in prophecy, was to maintain its supremacy for 1260 years. This period ended in 1798. The coming of Christ could not take place before that time. Paul covers with his caution the whole of the Christian dispensation down to the year 1798. It is this side of that time that the message of Christ's second coming is to be proclaimed."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 356.

10. While the coming of Christ was not to take place prior to 1798, what has been the case since then?
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Statements are cited in the book *Evangelism* (p. 694) explaining the reason for the delay of the Advent:

A statement made in 1868: "The long night of gloom is trying, but the morning is deferred in mercy, because if the Master should come, so many would be found unready. God's unwillingness to have His people perish, has been the reason of so long delay."

A statement made in 1900: "Had the purpose of God been carried out by His people in giving to the world the message of mercy, Christ would, ere this, have come to the earth, and the saints would have received their welcome into the city of God."

A statement made in 1909: "The work is years behind. While men have slept, Satan has stolen a march upon us."

- THU 11. Even though we are now nearly two centuries past 1798, what cautions should we observe in relation to date setting?
-

"The apostle's admonition to the Thessalonians contains an important lesson for those who live in the last days. Many Adventists have felt that unless they could fix their faith upon a definite time for the Lord's coming, they could not be zealous and diligent in the work of preparation. But as their hopes are again and again excited, only to be destroyed, their faith receives such a shock that it becomes well-nigh impossible for them to be impressed by the great truths of prophecy. . . .

"The more frequently a definite time is set for the second advent, and the more widely it is taught, the better it suits the purposes of Satan. After the time has passed, he excites ridicule and contempt of its advocates, and thus casts reproach upon the great advent movement of 1843 and 1844."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 457.

V. THE CHRISTIAN'S DEFENSE (2 Thess. 2:10-12).

"For hundreds of years the circulation of the Bible was prohibited. The people were forbidden to read it or to have it in their houses, and unprincipled priests and prelates interpreted its teachings to sustain their pretensions. Thus the pope came to be almost universally acknowledged as the vicegerent of God on earth, endowed with authority over church and state.

"The detector of error having been removed, Satan worked according to his will."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 51.

12. How are the righteous protected from being deceived by the counterfeit Second Coming and all other errors regarding Christ's return? 2 Thess. 2:10-12.
-

Our primary protection. "Only those who have been diligent students of the Scriptures and who have received the love of the truth will be shielded from the powerful delusion that takes the world captive. By the Bible testimony these will detect the deceiver in his disguise. To all the testing time will come. By the sifting of temptation the genuine Christian will be revealed. Are the people of God now so firmly established upon His word that they would not yield to the evidence of their senses? Would they, in such a crisis, cling to the Bible and the Bible only?"—*The Great Controversy*, p. 625.

13. What other spiritual activities does Jesus recommend as necessary to avoid spiritual disaster? Matt. 17:21; 4:2.
-

A deeper experience. "We need to humble ourselves before the Lord, with fasting and prayer, and to meditate much upon His word, especially upon the scenes of the judgment. We should now seek a deep and living experience in the things of God. We have not a moment to lose. Events of vital importance are taking place around us; we are on Satan's enchanted ground. Sleep not, sentinels of God; the foe is lurking near, ready at any moment, should you become lax and drowsy, to spring upon you and make you his prey."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 601.

ASK YOURSELF: Please mark the appropriate box: (Some of these questions apply only to you; others are objectively true or false.)

- Although my church has a special message, my religious commitment remains quite superficial. True / / False / /
- There will be many people in the kingdom of heaven who did not belong to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. True / / False / /
- An honest, committed Christian who worships on Sunday will change to Sabbath worship if properly taught. True / / False / /
- My present Bible study habits are adequate for my stability in times of stress or persecution. True / / False / /
- I am satisfied with my prayer life. True / / False / /
- I should fast more often. True / / False / /

FRI

FURTHER READING AND MEDITATION:

What Jesus says about the signs of His second coming: Matt. 24:4-27.
What Paul says elsewhere: 2 Tim. 2:15-19; 3:1-5.

What Ellen White says: "I was shown that the law of God would stand fast forever, and exist in the new earth to all eternity. . . .

"I saw that the Sabbath never will be done away; but that the redeemed saints, and all the angelic host, will observe it in honor of the great Creator to all eternity."—*Early Writings*, pp. 215-217.

"Let opposition arise, let bigotry and intolerance again bear sway, let persecution be kindled, and the half-hearted and hypocritical will waver and yield the faith; but the true Christian will stand firm as a rock, his faith stronger, his hope brighter, than in days of prosperity."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 602.

Also read the chapter entitled "The Scriptures a Safeguard" in *The Great Controversy*, pp. 593-602.

SUMMARY: The activities of the man of sin are in direct contrast to those of the Man of Sorrows. Jesus enlightens humanity—Satan enslaves humanity; Jesus directs us to His law—Satan condemns us by the law; Jesus' single purpose was to honor the Father's will in the rescue of His creatures—Satan's great obsession is to misrepresent God as being like himself, and himself as being like God. By such misrepresentation he endeavors to thwart God's will and to cause the destruction of His creatures.

Lesson 9

August 25-31

Watching and Waiting

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 2 Thessalonians 3:1-10.

SAB PM **MEMORY TEXT:** "And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ" (2 Thessalonians 3:5).

WAITING PATIENTLY PRESENTS A PRIMARY CHALLENGE. The need to wait patiently for Christ presents a primary challenge to the Christian. It also represents a major difference in the world view that separates believers from nonbelievers.

LESSON OUTLINE:

- I. The Caution Repeated (2 Thess. 2:1, 2; 3:6).
- II. The Peril of Deceit (2 Thess. 2:3, 10).
- III. The Believer's Challenge (2 Thess. 3:5).
- IV. The Ingredients of Patience (1 Thess. 5:8).
- V. The Waiting Remnant (Rev. 14:12).

THE PARADOX OF FAITH. Paul desired that his words regarding the resurrection of the righteous would relieve the believer's tensions about dying before the Advent. However, he did not intend that the Thessalonians relax or lessen their faith in or hope of the Second Coming. Theirs was a paradox of faith. As trusting disciples, they were to be comforted by the promises of the resurrection; but as hopeful pilgrims they were to observe carefully the signs of Christ's coming and earnestly prepare for that event.

Hope despite disappointment. Such has been the case with each generation of Christians since Jesus ascended. All have been disappointed. In the case of the Thessalonians, disappointment was complicated by misinterpretation. This also was the case with the Adventist pioneers of 1843-1844. We can understand each generation's anxiety to be reunited with their departed loved ones, to live in a world of peace and plenty, to inherit everlasting life, and, most of all, to be eternally with Christ. We can understand because we are propelled to hope by the same considerations.

Our challenge today is the same as that of the generations before us—

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that of recognizing the signs and being stimulated to preparation without falling into either the fanaticism that demands fulfillment or the cynicism that questions God's Word.

In this week's lesson, Paul reminds us not only of the necessity but of the practical implications involved in waiting for Christ to come.

SUN

I. THE CAUTION REPEATED (2 Thess. 2:1, 2; 3:6).

1. With what caution did Paul preface his outline of the signs of Christ's coming? 2 Thess. 2:1, 2.

Timothy's report on his first visit to this church caused Paul to give the cautions regarding death and the delay that we find in 1 Thessalonians, chapters 4 and 5. Evidently the information provided in the first letter did not resolve the issue. This is evidenced by a number of statements in 2 Thessalonians, notable among which is the clear warning with which Paul begins chapter 2.

2. In what way does the language of 2 Thessalonians reveal a firmer attitude by Paul with respect to settling the believers' misapprehensions? 2 Thess. 3:6.

Whereas 1 Thessalonians is primarily thankful and laudatory in tone, 2 Thessalonians is primarily corrective and authoritative. It is as though, having failed to accomplish his purpose or to settle the believers' misapprehensions in his first letter, Paul now resorts to more stern and explicit discourse. This is mirrored in the fact that whereas he beseeches (1 Thess. 5:12) and exhorts (1 Thess. 5:14) and even charges (1 Thess. 5:27) in the first letter, he not only beseeches and exhorts (2 Thess. 2:1 and 3:12), but also commands repeatedly (2 Thess. 3:6, 10, 12) in the second. Close observation of 2 Thessalonians reveals a marked difference in tone.

II. THE PERIL OF DECEIT (2 Thess. 2:3, 10).

3. What word often used by both Christ and Paul emphasizes the danger of wrong attitudes regarding the second coming of Christ? Matt. 24:4, 5, 11, 24; 2 Thess. 2:3, 10.

Which is the harder trait to cure, the "fortress" mentality that results in date setting, or the coldness and unconcern that eventually leads to the loss of love? Is one more of a problem to the church than the other? What are the best ways to help people who take extreme positions?

MON

4. Why do you think that the believers were urged to: (a) watch (Mark 13:35), (b) look up (Luke 21:28), and (c) be ready (Matt. 24:42, 44) if the day of the Lord was not at hand?
 5. To what extreme conduct had the fanaticism of some of the Thessalonian believers driven them? 2 Thess. 3:10, 11.
-

While there are some among us today who also take an unhealthy position regarding the second coming of Christ, few go to the sad extreme of the believers in Thessalonica who actually left their jobs to wait. Some, however, may be guilty of unwise emphasis upon cataclysmic events.

Do not run ahead of the Lord. "There is a time of trouble coming to the people of God, but we are not to keep that constantly before the people, and rein them up to have a time of trouble beforehand. There is to be a shaking among God's people; but this is not the present truth to carry to the churches. . . . Satan's object is accomplished just as surely when men run ahead of Christ and do the work He has never entrusted to their hands, as when they remain in the Laodicean state, lukewarm, feeling rich and increased with goods, and in need of nothing. The two classes are equally stumbling blocks."—*Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 13.

6. While we cannot prove that Christ will come before we die, why is it impossible to place His coming beyond our death or any other future event? Acts 1:6, 7; Rom. 9:28; Matt. 24:36, 42, 44, 50.
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III. THE BELIEVER'S CHALLENGE (2 Thess. 3:5).

7. What warning given by Christ is repeated by Paul in the first Epistle? Mark 13:35-37; 1 Thess. 5:6.
 8. How does Paul instruct believers in regard to taking a correct attitude toward Christ's second coming? 2 Thess. 3:5.
-

Never has a generation been less susceptible to patience and waiting than ours. The people of many cultures today demand instant satisfaction and gratification. Modern technology and conveniences make waiting almost obsolete. We have instant communications, instant travel, instant food, instant money, and, alas, even instant marriage and divorce. Waiting is contrary to the cultural orientation of many people. Our push-button age does not accommodate well the capacity for waiting. It takes a special spiritual experience to obey God's command to wait.

9. What does “patiently waiting” imply for the righteous living?

Luke 12:35, 36 _____

Luke 19:13 _____

1 Thess. 1:8-10 _____

2 Thess. 1:4 _____

2 Thess. 3:4, 5 _____

Waiting does not mean standing idly, impassively marking time. Waiting includes “doing” (2 Thess. 3:4). It implies fighting courageously in the valley while looking to the hills as a reminder that our help comes from the Lord (Ps. 121:1, 2). Patience should not reduce enthusiasm; it implies enthusiasm. Even though Paul faithfully admonished to patience, he wisely amplified his counsel by saying, “Quench not the Spirit” (1 Thess. 5:19). The cold, lifeless formalism that typifies many congregations today is not the lively waiting that Paul enjoins. “Patiently waiting” in Paul’s context is aggressively enduring. It is being so thrilled with the provisions, the promises, and the prospects of salvation that we respond joyfully to God’s gracious love—when the Spirit inspires—by total commitment to His purposes, and even saying ‘‘Amen’’ in church.

IV. THE INGREDIENTS OF PATIENCE (1 Thess. 5:8).**10. What Christian virtues are especially vital to patiently waiting?**

2 Thess. 1:3 _____

2 Thess. 2:16 _____

2 Thess. 3:5 _____

11. In his letter to the Romans, what other virtue does the apostle mention as being tied to patience? Rom. 8:24, 25.

A triad of virtues. Patience is undergirded by all three virtues so prominent in Paul’s writings. *Faith* connects us with God; it is our only way of knowing Him. *Love* responds to what faith reveals. Furthermore, it constrains us (2 Cor. 5:14); that is: (a) it clinches the arguments of belief, (b) it controls the passions of the flesh, and (c) it impels us to share our blessings with others. Meanwhile, *hope*, the attitude of confident expectation, gives us joyous consistency. Hope is not fulfillment—it is trust; it understands that fulfillment alone will eradicate all doubt, but it weighs the evidence and bases all its emotions, all its resources, all its present and future plans, on the promises of God.

12. With what familiar typology does Paul link the practical functions of these three virtues? 1 Thess. 5:8.

Here Paul weds two images of which he is fond. The first is the military analogy that sees the Christian as a well-armed soldier. He uses this figure in Romans 13:12, 2 Corinthians 6:7, and 2 Corinthians 10:4. The second is the triad of virtues—faith, hope, and love. (See Rom. 5:2-5; 1 Cor. 13:13; Gal. 5:5, 6; Heb. 6:10-12; compare 1 Peter 1:21, 22.) The specifics of the imagery Paul uses sometimes change. For instance, in Ephesians 6:16 faith is the shield; in 1 Thessalonians 5:8 faith is part of the breastplate. What seems to be important for Paul is not which armament represents which virtue, but that we are, in fact, adequately protected and fully armed.

Why do you think that the armor Paul recommends in 1 Thessalonians 5:8 includes defensive elements only?

V. THE WAITING REMNANT (Rev. 14:12).

13. In what way does John's description of the remnant reiterate and reinforce Paul's admonition? Rev. 14:12.

John the revelator was inspired to comment on numerous occasions regarding the role of patience (endurance) in the Christian experience. (See Rev. 1:9; 2:2, 3, 19; 3:10; 13:10.) While he sometimes rebukes God's people for lack of patience, it is encouraging to note that there are occasions on which he praises them for maintaining, and even growing in, this vital attribute. His emphasis upon patience as a premier characteristic of the waiting remnant supports Paul's admonition in this regard.

14. How is patience developed? Rom. 5:3; James 1:3.

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- THU 15. What religio-political movement now developing throughout the world signals the end of Christianity's long and patient wait? Matt. 24:15-21, 28.

A sure sign. "By the decree enforcing the institution of the papacy in violation of the law of God, our nation [the United States] will disconnect herself fully from righteousness. When Protestantism shall stretch her hand across the gulf to grasp the hand of the Roman power, when she shall reach over the abyss to clasp hands with spiritualism, when, under the influence of this threefold union, our country shall repudiate every principle of its constitution as a Protestant and Republican government, and shall make

provision for the propagation of papal falsehoods and delusions, then we may know that the time has come for the marvelous working of Satan and that the end is near.

"As the approach of the Roman armies was a sign to the disciples of the impending destruction of Jerusalem, so may this apostasy be a sign to us that the limit of God's forbearance is reached, . . . and that the angel of mercy is about to take her flight, never to return. The people of God will then be plunged into those scenes of affliction and distress which prophets have described as the time of Jacob's trouble."—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 451.

What instances can you cite of recent interaction between the Vatican and various world powers that makes the fulfillment of this prophecy plausible in our day?

16. Signs and fulfilling prophecies notwithstanding, what is the most basic of all incentives for obedience and service to God? Rom. 8:35; compare John 15:9.

An even higher motive. "The shortness of time is frequently urged as an incentive for seeking righteousness and making Christ our friend. This should not be the great motive with us; for it savors of selfishness. Is it necessary that the terrors of the day of God should be held before us, that we may be compelled to right action through fear? It ought not to be so. Jesus is attractive. He is full of love, mercy, and compassion."—*Signs of the Times*, March 17, 1887.

Our lack of love delays the Advent. Two important thoughts must be kept in mind: (1) The love of Christ is to be our primary reason for serving Him—not reward or recompense at the Second Coming. (2) While each generation has been disappointed with respect to Christ's coming, Christ Himself is disappointed in our unreadiness for His coming. This is the real reason for the present delay.

"For forty years did unbelief, murmuring, and rebellion shut out ancient Israel from the land of Canaan. The same sins have delayed the entrance of modern Israel into the heavenly Canaan. In neither case were the promises of God at fault. It is the unbelief, the worldliness, the unconsecration, and strife among the Lord's professed people that have kept us in this world of sin and sorrow so many years."—*Evangelism*, p. 696.

What percentage of the church do you think must be ready before Jesus comes? Is there another more important variable that He is seeking? Do you think it is possible for people who live in comparative prosperity to maintain a dynamic, spiritual relationship with Christ? If so, what are the key elements of the process?

PERSONAL RESPONSE:

- Name two factors that influence the intensity of your desire for Christ's coming.

- Give two reasons that you are willing to die waiting, if necessary, rather than to abandon faith in Jesus.
- Give from memory, if you can, two promises of Jesus regarding His second coming.
- Name two activities that you regularly perform that contribute directly to the finishing of God's work.

FRI

FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION:

What Jesus says about our preparation for His coming: Luke 12:32-40; 21:7-36.

What Paul says elsewhere: Romans 8:18-25; Heb. 6:1-12; 10:35-39.

What Ellen White says: "The Lord intimates a delay before the morning finally dawns. But He would not have them give way to weariness, nor relax their earnest watchfulness, because the morning does not open upon them as soon as they expected." —*Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 192.

"I saw that it was impossible to have the affections and interests engrossed in worldly cares, to be increasing earthly possessions, and yet be in a waiting, watching position, as our Saviour has commanded. Said the angel, 'They can secure but one world. In order to acquire the heavenly treasure, they must sacrifice the earthly. They cannot have both worlds.' " —*Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 193.

Also read *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 731-733; 386-391; *Testimonies*, vol. 4, pp. 186-199.

SUMMARY: Hope deferred is not hope lost. Our hope of meeting our Saviour is the lodestar that focuses our efforts, giving meaning and direction to our lives. The life of the watching, waiting child of God may at times seem difficult and unrewarding but, without doubt, it is more satisfying, more noble, more productive of good, than that which is generated by any other ideology.

The Trans-European Division needs your Trans-World Prayerlines this quarter for the

Thirteenth Sabbath Offering projects:

1. A church in Thessalonika, Greece,
2. An evangelistic center in Copenhagen, Denmark.

Twenty-five percent of the September 28 offering will support these projects.

Living Together Harmoniously

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 1 Thessalonians 1:3; 4:7-12; 5:12-22.

**SAB
PM** **MEMORY TEXT:** "See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men" (1 Thessalonians 5:15).

PAUL'S PRIMARY CONCERN. The doctrinal and prophetic emphasis that we have studied in the two Thessalonian Epistles are important elements of Paul's communications to the vigorous young flock at Thessalonica. However, his most distinctive instructions to the Thessalonians were in the area of practical piety. This strong concern is common to both Thessalonian Epistles. That which particularly occupied his attention was their interpersonal relations, or the manner in which they treated one another. There is no doubt that modern Christians need the same counsel and for the same or similar reasons.

LESSON OUTLINE:

- I. A Faith That Works (1 Thess. 1:3).
- II. The Goal of Peace (1 Thess. 4:9, 10; 5:13).
- III. Pathways to Peace (1 Thess. 4:11, 12).
- IV. The Necessity of Self-Control (1 Thess. 5:15, 22).
- V. Models of Church Order and Harmony (1 Thess. 2:11; 4:9).

THE REASON FOR PAUL'S CONCERN. It was true of Thessalonica, as it has been true of every congregation in every age, that interpersonal relationships form the severest test of discipleship. Paul knew that the Thessalonians' treatment of one another was the most tangible evidence of Christian grace. He also knew that the quality of their relationship demonstrated the quality of the Spirit's manifestation among them.

There is no aspect of the Thessalonian admonitions more needed today than this. It is needed in our smaller churches, where often one or two individuals or families establish strong control, resulting in jealousy and bitter rivalry; it is needed in larger churches, where depersonalization and social cliques seem to manifest themselves; it is needed in the big cities, where larger congregations look down on smaller ones, and smaller

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ones call the larger ones selfish and worldly; and it is needed in our institutional settings, where, in many cases, familiarity and intense competition for notice and resources breed rivalries, rumors, suspicions, stereotyping, and unholy politics so damaging to harmonious relations.

SUN

I. A FAITH THAT WORKS (1 Thess. 1:3).

1. What spiritual qualities did Paul identify as especially active within the Thessalonian church?

1 Thess. 1:3 _____

1 Thess. 1:8 _____

1 Thess. 3:6 _____

2 Thess. 1:4 _____

Several of the spiritual qualities mentioned above are cited more than once, but the quality most often mentioned by Paul is faith.

2. What special concern of Paul had Timothy borne on his first trip back to Thessalonica? 1 Thess. 3:5.

Paul's earnest desire was that the members love one another. One of the primary expressions of faith is love (Gal. 5:6). Before there can be love, there must be faith. Faith is the first rung in the ladder of Christian growth. It is to faith that we add virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity. (See 2 Peter 1:5-7.)

II. THE GOAL OF PEACE (1 Thess. 4:9, 10; 5:13).

3. How does Paul label the quality of relationship that he wishes their love experience to achieve? 1 Thess. 1:1, 2; 5:13.

The desire of all believers. So strongly oriented is Paul in this direction that he might properly be called the apostle of peace. In none of his Epistles does he omit the mention of this treasured state. And he is not the only New Testament author with a strong orientation toward peace. Titus, James, Peter, Jude, and John the revelator join him in exalting peace as the prized state of Christian relations. Every New Testament Epistle with the exception of First John begins or ends with an injunction to peace.

A few centuries after Paul, Augustine captured the early church's craving for peace when he wrote: "And thus we may say of peace, as we have said of eternal life, that it is the end of our good; and the rather because the Psalmist says . . . 'Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem; praise thy God, O Zion: for He hath strengthened the bars of thy gates; He hath blessed thy children

within thee; who hath made thy borders peace.' . . . For peace is a good so great, that even in this earthly and mortal life there is no word we hear with such pleasure, nothing we desire with such zest, or find to be more thoroughly gratifying."—Augustine, *The City of God* (New York: Modern Library, 1983), p. 686.

What reasons can you give to support the appropriateness of Christ's title, Prince of Peace?

MON

4. What is the opposite of peace? 1 Cor. 14:33.

God is the author of our faith that works by love and establishes peace. Satan is the author of confusion and rejoices greatly when the church of God is torn by dissension, splintered by animosities, traumatized by misunderstanding, titillated by gossip, and rent by hostilities. The church's power quotient is directly proportionate to its level of peace. At Pentecost the members were at peace with one another—they were all at one place of one accord. (See Acts 2:1.)

Why must we have peace with ourselves before we can have peace with others? What is the secret to remaining peaceful in the midst of controversy?

5. What priority does Paul suggest we follow with respect to Christian charity?

Gal. 6:10 _____

1 Thess. 4:9, 10 _____

1 Thess. 3:12 _____

Why do bitterness and hostility sometimes exist within the church? What can be done to defuse these tensions?

III. PATHWAYS TO PEACE (1 Thess. 4:11, 12).

6. What three practical recommendations for augmenting peace does Paul make in chapter four? 1 Thess. 4:11.

Counsel for busybodies. It would be difficult to raise one of these prerequisites for peace above the others. The New International Version translates: "Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life" (1 Thess. 4:11). We are admonished to be calm, not excitable or agitated by every wind of gossip, trial, or disappointment.

"To do your own business" means to cease taking undue interest in or concern for the private affairs of others. We are our brothers' helpers, but

not necessarily their advisors or their counselors, and certainly not their judges, their prosecutors, or their superiors in value before God, Paul's counsel is an injunction against meddlesomeness.

"Work with your own hands" is a reminder of the dignity of labor and the shame of depending upon others—even the benevolent society of believers—when we have the opportunity and capacity to do what we can for ourselves.

7. In addition to the peaceful results that such attitudes and actions will bring the church, what other effects will accrue? 1 Thess. 4:12.
-

Is it true that obedient Christians will never lack material necessities? Under what circumstances might they lack? What is the church's responsibility in such cases? Does your church have an effective program for addressing such eventualities? If not, why not set one in motion now?

TUE

8. What activity common in church circles especially damages peace? Prov. 26:20-22; James 3:2-6.
-

Source of most conflicts within the church. "Gossipers and news carriers are a terrible curse to neighborhoods and churches. Two thirds of all the church trials arise from this source."—*Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 466.

"All dissension, all differences and faultfinding, should be put away, with all evil speaking and bitterness; kindness, love, and compassion for one another should be cherished, that the prayer of Christ that His disciples might be one as He is one with the Father, may be answered. The harmony and unity of the church are the credentials that they present to the world that Jesus is the Son of God. Genuine conversion will ever lead to genuine love for Jesus and for all those for whom He died."—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 279.

IV. THE NECESSITY OF SELF-CONTROL (1 Thess. 5:15, 22).

9. What other primary principle of peaceful relations introduced by Jesus does Paul urge? Matt. 5:38-42; 1 Thess. 5:15.
-

Absorbing and reducing anger. "Do not retaliate. So far as you can do so, remove all cause for misapprehension. Avoid the appearance of evil. Do all that lies in your power, without the sacrifice of principle, to conciliate others. . . .

"If impatient words are spoken to you, never reply in the same spirit. Remember that a 'soft answer turneth away wrath.' Proverbs 15:1. And there is wonderful power in silence. Words spoken in reply to one who is

angry sometimes serve only to exasperate. But anger met with silence, in a tender, forbearing spirit, quickly dies away."—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 486.

Forgiveness, not revenge. According to some social psychologists, revenge is the most natural and instinctive of vices. Whether that is true or not, we know it is common and hard to cure. The Christian way is not one of revenge; it is the way of forgiveness. A minister, powerful in preaching the Word, once spoke on the subject "Jesus at His Best." In his sermon he pointed out that Jesus was great when stilling the ocean, when casting out demons, when healing broken bodies, and when turning water into wine, but that He was at His best or greatest when on the cross He cried, "Father, forgive them."

Is there an individual or a family in your church fellowship with whom you need to talk over a painful injury or misunderstanding? If so, is this not a good time to do so?

WED

10. What consideration for peace so often ignored does Paul solemnly advance? 1 Thess. 5:22. What point of view is crucial to understanding and following this advice?

A sense of "corporate responsibility" is critical for following this advice. Church members who act without assuming obligation to the corporate body are an unfailing source of tensions. Membership has its privileges, but it also has its responsibilities—one of which is to speak and act in ways that are best suited to foster peace and understanding within the body. Individuals who function from the premise that their personal freedoms and interests supersede or are separate from the good of the whole are not helpful to peaceful relationships within the church.

11. Against what unacceptable manner of making peace does Jesus warn? Matt. 10:34-38.

Peace by compromise. "Jesus Himself never purchased peace by compromise. His heart overflowed with love for the whole human race, but He was never indulgent to their sins. He was too much their friend to remain silent while they were pursuing a course that would ruin their souls—the souls He had purchased with His own blood. He labored that man should be true to himself, true to his higher and eternal interest. The servants of Christ are called to the same work, and they should beware lest, in seeking to prevent discord, they surrender the truth. They are to 'follow after the things which make for peace;' but real peace can never be secured by compromising principle. And no man can be true to principle without exciting opposition. A Christianity that is spiritual will be opposed by the children of disobedience. But Jesus bade His disciples, 'Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul.' Those who are true to God need

not fear the power of men nor the enmity of Satan. In Christ their eternal life is secure. Their only fear should be lest they surrender the truth, and thus betray the trust with which God has honored them.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 356.

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V. MODELS OF CHURCH ORDER AND HARMONY (1 Thess. 2:11; 4:9).

- 12. What fundamental institution of society provides Paul’s working model of church relations? 1 Thess. 2:11; 4:9; Eph. 3:15.**

Brothers and sisters support one another. The church is likened to a number of things in the Word of God. Among the more prominent are: a house (Isa. 56:7), a city (Psalm 48; Matt. 5:14), a woman (Rev. 12:1), a nation (1 Peter 2:9), a priesthood (1 Peter 2:9), and an army (Song of Solomon 6:4). But the comparison probably most familiar to Bible believers is the church likened to the family. It is a family in which God is the Father and Jesus is the elder Brother by whose efforts we are all adopted and made children and heirs.

But we are not just children. We are brothers and sisters. In the two Thessalonian Epistles Paul addresses the believers in terms of brotherly or sibling relations no less than 26 times. The choice of the family model as a type of our interpersonal relationships is clear—under God we are one unitary whole and are admonished to protect, encourage, help, forgive, love, and cherish one another as do the children of homes where love has forged bonds that are stronger than death.

- 13. What other instructive model does Paul often use to demonstrate church harmony and cooperation? 1 Cor. 12:12-14; Eph. 4:16.**

A unit symmetrical and sanctified. “By a comparison of the church with the human body, the apostle aptly illustrated the close and harmonious relationship that should exist among all members of the church of Christ.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 317.

“As all the different members of the human system unite to form the entire body, and each performs its office in obedience to the intelligence that governs the whole, so the members of the church of Christ should be united in one symmetrical body, subject to the sanctified intelligence of the whole.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 16.

Think it through. What is the difference between unity and uniformity? What are some areas of church and family life in which members should expect or tolerate unity in diversity?

- 14. How did the apostle later summarize his desires for the members in the area of interpersonal relations? 1 Cor. 14:40.**

A heavenly example. "Angels work harmoniously. Perfect order characterizes all their movements. The more closely we imitate the harmony and order of the angelic host, the more successful will be the efforts of these heavenly agents in our behalf. If we see no necessity for harmonious action, and are disorderly, undisciplined, and disorganized in our course of action, angels, who are thoroughly organized and move in perfect order, cannot work for us successfully. They turn away in grief, for they are not authorized to bless confusion, distraction, and disorganization."—*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 28.

PERSONAL RESPONSE. On a scale of one to five rate the following considerations (five being the maximum):

- ____ The level of harmony in my church (congregation).
- ____ My recent contributions toward harmony in my church (congregation).
- ____ The level of harmony in my home.
- ____ My recent contributions toward harmony in my home.
- ____ The level of harmony in my work situation.
- ____ My recent contributions toward harmony at work.
- ____ My present willingness, by the grace of God, to contribute more effectively toward harmony.

FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION:

What Jesus said about peace among His followers: Mark 9:50; John 14:27.

What Paul said elsewhere: Rom. 12:9-21; 14:17; 2 Cor. 13:11; Col. 3:12-15; 2 Tim. 2:22.

What Ellen White said: "The church of Christ may be fitly compared to an army. . . . Unless the members of the church are active and vigilant, they will be overcome by his [Satan's] devices."—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 394.

"God's servants are to work together, blending in kindly, courteous order, 'in honour preferring one another.' Romans 12:10. There is to be no unkind criticism, no pulling to pieces of another's work; and there are to be no separate parties."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 275.

Also read *Testimonies*, vol. 3, pp. 434-455.

SUMMARY: The most effective means of dissipating the church's witness is strife and dissension within its ranks. On the other hand, the most powerful proof of the church's claims is its demonstration of loving, harmonious interaction within the framework of Christ's instructions.

Church Authority and Discipline

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 1 Thessalonians 5:5-14; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-18.

SAB PM **MEMORY TEXT:** "And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed" (2 Thessalonians 3:14).

ON PREDICTABILITY, RELIABILITY, AND COMPATIBILITY. God's physical realm, the universe, functions in accordance with laws that are predictable, reliable, and compatible. It is His divine will that His spiritual realm, the church, be guided by similar rules of authority and discipline.

LESSON OUTLINE:

- I. Church Organization and Authority (2 Thess. 3:14).
- II. The Causes for Discipline (1 Thess. 5:14).
- III. The Purpose of Discipline (Gal. 5:9).
- IV. The Process of Discipline (2 Thess. 3:6, 14).
- V. Attitudes Essential to Church Authority and Discipline (1 Thess. 5:12, 13).

AN UNMISTAKABLE EMPHASIS. Paul opens both the Thessalonian Epistles with general greetings, which provide valuable insights for those studying the historical and spiritual import of his thought. The fact is that we see little difference in his salutations to the Thessalonians and those given to the Corinthians, the Galatians, or the Ephesians. The same can be said of the closing, or signature, of each letter. That which states most strongly his specific wishes for the group's spiritual progress in many cases is summarized succinctly in the last chapters of the Epistle.

Instruction regarding church authority. In both of the Thessalonian Epistles, Paul's forthright instructions regarding church authority and discipline fit into this scheme. He leaves no doubt of the need for this counsel. In Thessalonica a number of the members were flaunting church authority in the name of personal freedom and special revelation. Paul's letter met this situation "head on." He does not mince words. If it is to

PRAY for 30 village church buildings for new people groups in China (US\$1,000 each).

prosper in its witness for truth, the church must confront and if necessary dismiss those who ignore counsel and defy duly constituted church authority.

I. CHURCH ORGANIZATION AND AUTHORITY (2 Thess. 3:14).

1. What ultimate authority should guide the church in structuring its rules and regulations? 1 Thess. 1:6; 2:13; 2 Thess. 3:14.

Is it reasonable to expect that principles and forms given 2,000 years ago and earlier can serve as accurate guides for church rules and regulations today? If so, why?

2. By what process did the apostolic church decide upon its organizational structure? Acts 6:2-6.
 3. What similar pattern was followed in outlining doctrine and discipline? Acts 15:1-6.
-

Like a mighty army. "The order that was maintained in the early Christian church, made it possible for them to move forward solidly as a well-disciplined army clad with the armor of God. The companies of believers, though scattered over a large territory, were all members of one body; all moved in concert and in harmony with one another."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 95, 96.

The Adventist pioneers were led to organize. "As our numbers increased, it was evident that without some form of organization there would be great confusion, and the work would not be carried forward successfully. To provide for the support of the ministry, for carrying the work in new fields, for protecting both the churches and the ministry from unworthy members, for holding church property, for the publication of the truth through the press, and for many other objects, organization was indispensable. . . .

"We had a hard struggle in establishing organization. Notwithstanding that the Lord gave testimony after testimony upon this point, the opposition was strong, and it had to be met again and again. But we knew that the Lord God of Israel was leading us, and guiding by His providence. We engaged in the work of organization, and marked prosperity attended this advance movement."—*Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 26, 27.

II. THE CAUSES FOR DISCIPLINE (1 Thess. 5:14).

4. How does Paul characterize those persons whose conduct is disruptive to church order and authority?

1 Thess. 5:14 _____

2 Thess. 3:6 _____

2 Thess. 3:11 _____

5. Against what other kinds of harmful people does Paul warn? Titus 3:9-11; 1 Cor. 5:9-11.

The specific reasons for discipline held by the Seventh-day Adventist Church are listed in the *Church Manual*. A summary is as follows:

- a. Denial of faith in the fundamentals of the gospel.
- b. Open violation of the law of God.
- c. Fraud or willful misrepresentation in business.
- d. Disorderly conduct that brings reproach upon the church.
- e. Adhering to or taking part in a divisive or disloyal movement or organization.
- f. Persistent refusal to recognize properly constituted authority or submit to order or discipline of the church.
- g. The use, manufacture, or sale of alcoholic beverages.
- h. The use of tobacco.
- i. The misuse of, or trafficking in, narcotics or other drugs.

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III. THE PURPOSE OF DISCIPLINE (Gal. 5:9).

6. Why should the church be concerned about addressing problems of behavior among the members?

Gal. 5:9 _____

Gal. 6:1 _____

1 Cor. 5:6, 7 _____

James 5:20 _____

Call sin by its right name. "But on the church in its organized capacity He [Christ] places a responsibility for the individual members. Toward those who fall into sin, the church has a duty, to warn, to instruct, and if possible to restore. 'Reprove, rebuke, exhort,' the Lord says, 'with all long-suffering and doctrine.' 2 Tim. 4:2. Deal faithfully with wrongdoing. Warn every soul that is in danger. Leave none to deceive themselves. Call sin by its right name. Declare what God has said in regard to lying, Sabbath-breaking, stealing, idolatry, and every other evil."—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 805, 806.

"If there were no church discipline and government, the church would go to fragments; it could not hold together as a body. There have ever been individuals of independent minds, who have claimed that they were right, that God had especially taught, impressed, and led them. Each has a theory

of his own, views peculiar to himself, and each claims that his views are in accordance with the word of God. Each one has a different theory and faith, yet each claims special light from God. These draw away from the body, and each one is a separate church of himself.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 3, pp. 428, 429.

7. How does Paul's personal conversion experience demonstrate the value of church authority? Acts 9:10-18.

Jesus chose the authorities of the church, whom He led to recognize Paul's special call. Paul was made aware that human authority in the church is subordinate to and directed by the authority of the Lord Himself. In his later ministry, Paul was willing to submit his opinions and plans to duly constituted church authority because he recognized the appointed leaders of the church as the instruments of Christ's will. (See Acts 15:2; Gal. 2:2; *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 122.)

TUE IV. THE PROCESS OF DISCIPLINE (2 Thess. 3:6, 14).

8. What provisions did Jesus make for the disciplinary process of the organized church? Matt. 16:18, 19.

In Christ's stead. “On the church has been conferred the power to act in Christ's stead. It is God's instrumentality for the preservation of order and discipline among His people. To it the Lord has delegated the power to settle all questions respecting its prosperity, purity, and order. Upon it rests the responsibility of excluding from its fellowship those who are unworthy, who by their unchristlike conduct would bring dishonor on the truth. Whatever the church does that is in accordance with the directions given in God's word, will be ratified in heaven.”—*Gospel Workers*, pp. 501, 502.

9. What initial step does Paul recommend be taken in dealing with disorderly or unruly persons? 1 Thess. 5:14.

The first step. “Speaking alone and in the spirit of Christ to the one who is in fault will often remove the difficulty. Go to the erring one, with a heart filled with Christ's love and sympathy, and seek to adjust the matter. Reason with him calmly and quietly. Let no angry words escape your lips. Speak in a way that will appeal to his better judgment.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 7, p. 261.

10. What ultimate course of action is sometimes required? 2 Thess. 3:6, 14; 1 Cor. 5:2, 9-13.

Painful but necessary. "Sin and sinners in the church must be promptly dealt with, that others may not be contaminated. Truth and purity require that we make more thorough work to cleanse the camp from Achans. Let those in responsible positions not suffer sin in a brother. Show him that he must either put away his sins or be separated from the church."—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 147.

The two main forms of discipline in the Seventh-day Adventist Church are censure (involving a period of probation) and disfellowshipping. Censure is the disciplinary measure imposed by the church that recognizes grievous misdeeds on the part of the member, but that allows the individual to maintain membership. It is hoped that during this period the individual will come nearer to the Lord, take time to think through the issue, and correct the mistake. The period, determined by the church, is usually from six months to a year in duration, and, if all goes well, when it is over the individual is restored to full fellowship without further vote.

The other, more drastic, form of discipline, disfellowshipping, is applied when acts are so grievous that the body believes it necessary to sever the individual from church membership. In no case should discipline—either censure or dismissal—be made such as to appear punitive. The aim is to lead a sinner to repentance in a spirit of Christian love, forgiveness, and understanding.

Why does God not give to private groups of members the task of correcting or purifying the church?

11. Who alone has the power to decide matters of church discipline?
Matt. 18:17.

The church board recommends; the church acts. "'And if he shall neglect to hear them,' what then shall be done? Shall a few persons in a board meeting take upon themselves the responsibility of disfellowshipping the erring one? 'If he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church.' . . . Let the church take action in regard to its members."—*Testimonies*, vol. 7, p. 262.

WED V. ATTITUDES ESSENTIAL TO CHURCH AUTHORITY AND DISCIPLINE (1 Thess. 5:12, 13).

12. What is to be our attitude toward individuals in the following categories?

- Persons being considered for discipline. (See James 5:19, 20.)
-

Justice and mercy. "Love and tenderness, patience and self-control, will at all times be the law of their speech. Mercy and compassion will be blended with justice. When it is necessary to give reproof, their language

will not be exaggerated, but humble. In gentleness they will set before the wrongdoer his errors and help him to recover himself. Every true teacher will feel that should he err at all, it is better to err on the side of mercy than on the side of severity."—*Education*, pp. 293, 294.

- b. Persons who have been disfellowshiped or who are currently under censure. (See 2 Thess. 3:14, 15.)

- c. Persons who have been disfellowshiped and who wish restoration to the body of believers. (See Gal. 6:1, 2.)

Giving another chance. "If the erring one repents and submits to Christ's discipline, he is to be given another trial. And even if he does not repent, even if he stands outside the church, God's servants still have a work to do for him. They are to seek earnestly to win him to repentance. And, however aggravated may have been his offense, if he yields to the striving of the Holy Spirit and, by confessing and forsaking his sin, gives evidence of repentance, he is to be forgiven and welcomed to the fold again."—*Testimonies*, vol. 7, p. 263.

THU **13. What should be the attitude of the believers toward members who live worldly lives but who commit no offense worthy of discipline? Matt. 13:30.**

Dealing with the tares. "Those who are carnally minded will be found in the church. They are to be pitied more than blamed. The church is not to be judged as sustaining these characters, though they be found within her borders. Should the church expel them, the very ones who found fault with their presence there, would blame the church for sending them adrift in the world; they would claim that they were treated unmercifully."—*Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 294.

14. What did Paul say should be the attitude of the members toward those chiefly responsible for interpreting and applying church rules and policies? 1 Thess. 5:12, 13.

Two specific postures toward church leaders are recommended by Paul: (a) know them (verse 12), and (b) esteem them highly in love (verse 13). Both attitudes of members toward leaders are essential to church order and discipline. "Knowing the leaders" means to appreciate fully or understand their worth and responsibility. To "esteem them highly" goes beyond that. The leaders are not to be simply respected for their position, or given deference as the cold voice of authority.

They are to be genuinely appreciated and loved.

By their godly lives and their devoted service to God and the church, leaders should merit the respect and the full support of the membership.

The adversarial relationship between leaders and laity so often seen in modern congregations and institutions is highly disruptive to church order and discipline.

- 15. How does Paul remind church leaders of their obligation to strive for harmony between themselves and the believers? 1 Thess. 4:9; Acts 20:18-21, 27, 28.**

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS.

- While all persons in the church are equal in terms of soul worth, some occupy positions in which God has placed special authority. True / / False / /
- Respect for authority is more easily maintained in our generation than in prior times. True / / False / /
- Many children are turned away from the church and religion as a result of their parents' conversations regarding church leadership and church affairs. True / / False / /

FURTHER MEDITATION AND STUDY:

What Jesus says about church authority: Matt. 18:15-17; John 20:22, 23.

What Paul says elsewhere: 2 Cor. 6:14-18; Eph. 5:6-13, 23-27; Titus 3:8-11.

What Ellen White says: "If one neglects the duty Christ has enjoined, of trying to restore those who are in error and sin, he becomes a partaker in the sin. For evils that we might have checked, we are just as responsible as if we were guilty of the acts ourselves."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 441.

"The church, enfeebled and defective, needing to be reproved, warned, and counseled, is the only object upon earth upon which Christ bestows His supreme regard."—*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 49.

"As we near the final crisis, instead of feeling that there is less need of order and harmony of action, we should be more systematic than heretofore."—*Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 26.

SUMMARY: The church is not just another institution in society; it is endowed with supernatural powers and authority. Its members and leaders are human, but its mandate and mission are divine.

Paul's Godly Example

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-9; 2:1-20; 2 Thessalonians 3:1-9.

SAB PM **MEMORY TEXT:** "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 Thessalonians 1:5).

THE GOSPEL MUST BE LIVED, NOT SIMPLY VERBALIZED. Paul's experience in Thessalonica demonstrates clearly how a good example strengthens and verifies the witness of the spoken word. Paul's example illustrates what every Christian should be—a revelation of God to the world. Because the Thessalonians followed his example by committing all to Christ and witnessing for Him, they too became examples to fellow believers in other centers.

LESSON OUTLINE:

- I. The Power of Example (1 Thess. 1:6-8).
- II. Paul's Example of Industry (1 Thess. 2:9).
- III. Paul's Example of Gratitude (1 Thess. 1:2, 7-9).
- IV. Paul's Example of Sincerity (1 Thess. 2:3, 4).
- V. Paul's Example of Humility (1 Thess. 2:1-20).

LIVING THE GOSPEL. It is true that a good sermon is truth flowing from the lips of a good person. This thought is brought home forcibly when we observe that the Thessalonian Epistles record not just Paul's various admonitions but also sketches of a life that gave credence and effectiveness to his preaching. Paul not only *told* the Thessalonians how to live but he also *showed* them how. He led by example. Of course, Paul well understood that Christ was the only perfect example. He often confessed, as in Philippians 3:13, 14, that God was not through with him yet. But he nevertheless enjoyed a rich, surrendered, progressive experience with Christ, and he was not shy about using his victorious spiritual experiences as a means of strengthening the resolve of those for whom he labored.

PRAY for a pioneer worker's budget to open a new area in Russia—20 are needed (US\$3,500 each).

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Paul's example. In his letter to the Thessalonians, more than in any other letter, Paul points confidently to his life among the people as proof of his sincerity and as an example of God's power to save. That is not pride or egotism. It was his way of encouraging the believers with a testimony that they could readily remember and understand. By reminding them of his exemplary life in their midst, Paul adds living example to idealistic theory. That, of course, is the ultimate witness for the child of God.

I. THE POWER OF EXAMPLE (1 Thess. 1:6-8).

1. What is unusual about the order of gospel influence mentioned by Paul in addressing the Thessalonian church? What influence did he and his associates have upon the Thessalonians? 1 Thess. 1:6; compare 1 Cor. 11:1.

The mention of the human agent before the Divine example. The Thessalonians became imitators of Paul because he was an imitator of Christ. Our listeners form impressions about us before they form impressions about what or whom we represent. What truly stands out here is that Paul recognized that the Holy Spirit's presence and power were functionally tied to the quality of his personal life.

Sermons we see. The word *followers* may be translated "imitators." As the converts left their former beliefs and rituals they were oriented to the lifestyle of Christianity by imitating Paul and his team in such matters as diet, speech, dress, and demeanor. Influence is a talent that all possess. It is especially important in soul-saving—as we work for our children, our neighbors, or persons attending an evangelistic meeting or a Bible study. Each student or observer of humanity may truthfully say in his or her heart:

"I'd rather see a sermon than hear one any day;
I'd rather one should walk with me than merely tell the way.
The eye's a better pupil and more willing than the ear,
Fine counsel is confusing, but example's always clear;
And the best of all the preachers are the men who live their creeds,
For to see good put in action is what everybody needs."—Edgar A. Guest, *Collected Verse of Edgar A. Guest* (1934), pp. 599, 600.

2. How does Paul characterize the quality of his living during his ministry in Thessalonica? 1 Thess. 2:10.

There was no hesitation, no equivocation; Paul had enjoyed a scandal-free ministry in Thessalonica. However, his ministry was not simply free from reproach; it was characterized by healthy contributions of a committed, energetic, sacrificial life.

"Paul carried with him the atmosphere of heaven. All who associated with him felt the influence of his union with Christ. The fact that

his own life exemplified the truth he proclaimed, gave convincing power to his preaching. Here lies the power of truth. The unstudied, unconscious influence of a holy life is the most convincing sermon that can be given in favor of Christianity. Argument, even when unanswerable, may provoke only opposition; but a godly example has a power that it is impossible wholly to resist."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 510, 511.

3. How did Paul's influence upon the Thessalonians reproduce itself in their witness? 1 Thess. 1:7, 8.

The word *example* is the Greek word *tupos*, from which is derived our word *type*. The Greek word means "visible impression," "copy," "image," "pattern," "model."

As model Christians, the Thessalonian believers provided an example to the converts in Macedonia and Greece. As others became aware of their sacrifice and piety they were moved to come closer to Christ and to remain true to the principles of the gospel.

"We need not suppose that all the Thessalonians were preachers in the ordinary sense of the word. Some of them no doubt were. But the Acts of the Apostles gives us glimpses of the life of the early church and what was done in one place by aroused and determined men may well have been done in another. A vibrant and living faith could not be silent."—Ronald A. Ward, *Commentary on 1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1973), p. 39.

Can you cite examples of new believers in your church who have become effective witnesses for Christ? What impact has their love and enthusiasm had upon the church as a whole?

MON II. PAUL'S EXAMPLE OF INDUSTRY (1 Thess. 2:9).

4. What feature of his stay in Thessalonica did Paul repeatedly mention? 1 Thess. 2:9; 2 Thess. 3:7, 8.

The system of ministerial support in Paul's day was not identical to ours. The tithe was used to assist in the support of the priesthood in Old Testament times. But many preachers and teachers of New Testament times, especially itinerant evangelists such as Paul, used their hands as their primary means of support.

Paul did this to avoid criticism from those whom he was endeavoring to win to Christ, even though he taught that the ministry should be supported from the tithe. (See 1 Cor. 9:9-15.)

5. What was one of the main reasons for Paul's self-supporting efforts at Thessalonica? 2 Thess. 3:8, 9.

Paul not only ate and drank in a manner consistent with his teachings; he was ethically upright. He respected the rights and personhood of others. If anything, he went overboard in refusing to take advantage of others, going so far as to waive his God-given right of remuneration. Instead, he earned a living with his own hands.

6. Based upon his own example, what counsel did Paul give regarding the indolent? 2 Thess. 3:10.
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TUE III. PAUL'S EXAMPLE OF GRATITUDE (1 Thess. 1:2, 7-9).

7. For what was Paul particularly grateful?

1 Thess. 1:7-9 _____

1 Thess. 2:13 _____

2 Thess. 2:13 _____

8. How frequently did the apostle express gratitude to God? 1 Thess. 1:2; 2 Thess. 2:13.
-

Note that Paul gives thanks to God for *all* the church. Each member is loved, remembered, and probably also mentioned by name in his daily prayers. Every one is treasured as a precious gift of God, and each is appreciated for the gifts that he or she has to contribute to the church and to the community.

9. For what does Paul say the Thessalonians should be thankful?
1 Thess. 5:18.
-

Be continually grateful. We may have extreme difficulty in understanding the Scriptures to mean, "Be thankful for tragedies, losses, and disappointments." That probably is not what Paul meant. What he intended was that they should maintain the spirit of gratitude, being hopeful no matter what the circumstances. Their knowledge that, however unpleasant the conditions of their lives, God was working His purposes for the world, the church, and for them, should lead them to rejoice. They could be continually grateful in the knowledge that God understands, God sees, God knows, and that sometimes He uses even unpleasantness to glorify His name and to work out His divine purposes. (See Phil. 4:11; Rom. 8:28.) Thanks is also to be directed to God in prayer for His precious gifts. In this Paul practiced what he preached.

It is God's will that we give thanks. Why? Because gratitude fosters

good cheer and good health. (See 3 John 2.)

"Nothing tends more to promote health of body and of soul than does a spirit of gratitude and praise. It is a positive duty to resist melancholy, discontented thoughts and feelings—as much a duty as it is to pray. If we are heaven-bound, how can we go as a band of mourners, groaning and complaining all along the way to our Father's house?"

"Those professed Christians who are constantly complaining, and who seem to think cheerfulness and happiness a sin, have not genuine religion."—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 251.

If we cannot be grateful for what happened, we should be grateful for what did not happen. Can you cite examples of this thought in your life?

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IV. PAUL'S EXAMPLE OF SINCERITY (1 Thess. 2:3, 4).

10. In reminding the Thessalonians of his manner among them, what supreme objective of his service does Paul emphasize? 1 Thess. 2:3, 4.

Paul did not have hidden agendas. His only aim was to please God. He was not laboring for material reward, for selfish satisfaction, nor, as he emphasizes repeatedly, for human applause or approbation. He had reached the pinnacle of freedom. He cared so much about God's approbation that human praise meant nothing to him.

The word *guile*, meaning "subtlety" or "craftiness" (1 Thess. 2:3), is often used in the Bible to typify deceit or insincerity. What New Testament life do you regard as the supreme example of one without guile? Why?

11. How important is sincerity to our acceptance by God? Rev. 14:5; 1 Peter 2:1-3.

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12. Against what manifestation of insincerity did Jesus warn? Who were the classic examples that He mentions? Luke 12:1; Matt. 23:1-7.

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13. What is the most observable manifestation of sincerity? Matt. 7:18-20; 2 Thess. 3:4, 13, 14.

Faith and works. "When it is in the heart to obey God, when efforts are put forth to this end, Jesus accepts this disposition and effort as man's

best service, and He makes up for the deficiency with His own divine merit. But He will not accept those who claim to have faith in Him, and yet are disloyal to His Father's commandment. We hear a great deal about faith, but we need to hear a great deal more about works. Many are deceiving their own souls by living an easy-going, accommodating, crossless religion. But Jesus says, 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.' "—*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 382.

THU V. PAUL'S EXAMPLE OF HUMILITY (1 Thess. 2:1-20).

14. Paul frequently uses the first-person plural pronouns *we*, *our*, *us* in his address to the Thessalonians. What does this reveal about his attitude toward his fellow workers? 1 Thess. 2:1-20.

Paul shared the credit. Instead of *our*, *we*, and *us*, the great apostle could have said, *mine*, *me*, and *I*. After all, he was the leading evangelist—"the boss," we would say today. But not so; Paul was not concerned about the "pecking order." At the end of 2 Thessalonians he confirmed that he, himself, had written the letter. (See 2 Thess. 3:17.) But throughout the Epistles, he shared the credit. He did not seek for self-exaltation. His was no false or affected meekness. He was not "proud of his humility." He even risked being misunderstood by recounting the drama of his personal life. But his aims are clear—he wished only to exalt his Lord. And when God blessed his sacrificial labors, he was happy to share the credit with his young helpers Timothy and Sylvanus.

Compare Paul's attitude with that of Christ referred to in Philippians 2:6.

15. What request did Paul make of the membership that reflects further his Christ-like humility? 2 Thess. 3:1, 2.

Paul's frequent request. "Paul was a very great apostle, but his greatness consisted not so much in sheer native ability (although he had his share of that) as in his recognition of his dependence upon God. It arises out of this that he so often requests the prayers of those to whom he ministers. He did not feel himself as high above them, but as one with them. He valued their intercessions and sought their prayers."—Leon Morris, *New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1973), p. 244.

16. What additional evidence can we find of Paul's humble attitude? 1 Cor. 15:9; Eph. 3:8.

What do you think made the greatest impression upon the Thes-

salonians? Paul's knowledge of Scripture, his preaching abilities, his personal conversion experience, or his lifestyle and manner? Why?

While formal preaching and teaching are still God's appointed means of winning souls, nothing witnesses so powerfully as the Christ-like life. The real power among the Thessalonians was their conviction of the Jesus who had come and the Jesus who was about to return. This was the basis for their lives and message. A church of believers whose lives exemplify the message they espouse will in the end make a stronger impression upon others than the clearest accumulation of facts and figures or the most articulate exposition of prophecy.

PRACTICAL RESPONSE:

- Name two personal blessings you have received this week for which you are grateful.
- Name two blessings recently enjoyed by your church (congregation) for which you are particularly grateful.
- Name two special blessings enjoyed recently by your family, or persons with whom you are closely associated, for which you are particularly grateful.
- What is the most effective way of expressing thanksgiving to God for His goodness to you and those you love?

FRI

FURTHER MEDITATION AND STUDY:

What Jesus says about people who follow practical Christianity: Matt. 5:1-12.

What Paul says elsewhere: 2 Cor. 3:1-6; Phil. 2:1-11; 3:17-21.

What Ellen G. White says: "It is a terrible thing to lose our own soul, but to pursue a course that will cause the loss of other souls is still more terrible."—*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 158.

"Hard and dark as the world is, the influence of a really consistent example will be a power for good."—*Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 286.

"Every day of life is freighted with responsibilities which we must bear. Every day, our words and acts are making impressions upon those with whom we associate."—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 348.

"A godly example will tell more for the truth than the greatest eloquence, unaccompanied by a well-ordered life."—*Gospel Workers*, p. 104.

SUMMARY: The demonstration of the gospel's power in our lives is the most effective weapon in heaven's arsenal. We may not be the thoroughly finished product that heaven desires, but even in our developing condition, we are lights in a darkened world—happy testimonies of the regenerating power of the Word of God.

Lesson 13

September 22-28

The Sanctified Life

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 1 Thessalonians 4:1-7; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17.

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MEMORY TEXT: "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

HOLINESS IS OUR GOAL. Sanctification is the highest and most complete form of Christian living possible. Jesus Christ, the Man of Galilee, is our example in this regard, but He has provided us more than just the example. He also provides us the understanding and the re-creative force that make sanctification (holiness) possible.

LESSON OUTLINE:

- I. Exhortations to Godly Living (1 Thess. 4:3, 4, 7).
- II. The Agent of Sanctification (2 Thess. 2:13).
- III. Bodily Sanctification (1 Thess. 4:3-7).
- IV. Complete Sanctification (1 Thess. 5:23).
- V. Christ Our Sanctification (1 Thess. 5:24).

THE EMPHASIS ON SANCTIFICATION IN PAUL'S WRITINGS. Paul wished for the elders of Ephesus an inheritance among "them which are [Greek: 'have been'] sanctified" (Acts 20:32). He used the term in connection with his labors among the Gentiles in Rome who were made acceptable by sanctification. (See Rom. 15:16.) He addressed the believers at Corinth as "them that are [Greek: 'have been'] sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints" (1 Cor. 1:2). He also wrote to the Corinthians: "But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:11, RSV). He reminded the Ephesians that "Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word" (Eph. 5:25, 26). He challenged Timothy to flee youthful lusts and be a "vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use" (2 Tim. 2:21). To the Hebrews he wrote that "both the one

PRAY for this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath special projects. Can you name them? (See back cover.)

who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family" (Heb. 2:11, NIV).

Paul's fundamental concern for the Thessalonians was not merely that they escape from one specific sin or another, but rather that they attain that state which he called "holiness." He expresses this concern for the believers in Thessalonica through a number of illuminating phrases. They were to "walk worthy of God" (1 Thess. 2:12; 2 Thess. 1:11), to be "unblamable" (1 Thess. 3:13; 5:23), and to be holy (1 Thess. 4:7).

In writing to the Thessalonians in this manner, Paul points believers of all eras to the fundamental concern of Christian endeavor. In upholding sanctification (holiness) to the church at Thessalonica, Paul makes this objective not only necessary but attractive, and entirely possible.

I. EXHORTATIONS TO GODLY LIVING (1 Thess. 4:3, 4, 7).

1. What words may be used to describe the Christian's ideal lifestyle?

1 Thess. 3:13 _____

1 Thess. 4:3, 4 _____

1 Thess. 4:7 _____

2 Thess. 2:13 _____

The Greek word translated "sanctification" may also be translated "holiness." For example, 1 Thessalonians 4:7 may be translated, "For God has not called us to impurity, but to *sanctification* [KJV: 'holiness'].'" Throughout the New Testament *holiness* and *sanctification* are synonymous terms.

2. What is meant by "unblamable in holiness" (1 Thess. 3:13)? Compare 1 Thess. 5:23.

The judgment is God's. "'Unblamable in holiness' represents the highest possible ethical and spiritual standard. The apostle believes that such a standard can be reached by the grace that Christ supplies to those of His followers who increase in love. To believe less would be to deny the gospel. . . .

"Paul's concern is that his converts should be adjudged blameless, not by men, who are fallible, but by God, who searches the hearts and knows what is in the mind."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 241.

3. What two important aspects are involved in sanctification? Compare 1 Cor. 6:11 with 1 Thess. 3:12—4:3.

"True sanctification is harmony with God, oneness with Him in character."—*Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 350.

"Sanctification is a state of holiness, without and within, being holy and without reserve the Lord's, not in form, but in truth."—*Our High Calling*, p. 214.

[“Sanctification] is a continual growth in grace.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 340.

"Sanctification means habitual communion with God."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 908.

"Sanctification is a progressive work; it is not attained to in an hour or a day, and then maintained without any special effort on our part."—*Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 472.

"Sanctification consists in the cheerful performance of daily duties in perfect obedience to the will of God."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 360.

Sanctification is both present holiness in Christ and growth in holiness in Christ. When Christ comes into the heart of the believer, he or she receives the gift of the holiness of Christ. But the believer remains a fallen human being with tendencies toward evil. (See 1 Cor. 9:27.) Sanctification also involves growth in holiness. This growth is effected by the daily reception of Christ's power, which alone can overcome the biases of fallen humanity.

II. THE AGENT OF SANCTIFICATION (2 Thess. 2:13).

4. Who is the active agent in the sanctification process? 2 Thess. 2:13; Rom. 15:16; 1 Peter 1:1, 2.

Never does the Bible speak of human beings making themselves holy.

"It is through the Spirit that Christ dwells in us; and the Spirit of God, received into the heart by faith, is the beginning of the life eternal."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 388.

"The followers of Christ are to become like Him—by the grace of God to form characters in harmony with the principles of His holy law. This is Bible sanctification. This work can be accomplished only through faith in Christ, by the power of the indwelling Spirit of God."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 469.

5. Name the primary influences utilized by the Holy Spirit in the sanctification process.

Eph. 5:26 _____

Acts 20:32 _____

Acts 26:15-18 _____

Heb. 10:10, 14 _____

- 6. What tangible evidence is seen in the life of those for whom sanctification is a reality? Acts 5:32; 1 Peter 1:2.**

"It is not enough for us to believe that Jesus is not an impostor, and that the religion of the Bible is no cunningly devised fable. We may believe that the name of Jesus is the only name under heaven whereby man may be saved, and yet we may not through faith make Him our personal Saviour. It is not enough to believe the theory of truth. It is not enough to make a profession of faith in Christ and have our names registered on the church roll. 'He that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.' 'Hereby we do know that we know him if we keep his commandments.' 1 John 3:24; 2:3. This is the genuine evidence of conversion. Whatever our profession, it amounts to nothing unless Christ is revealed in works of righteousness."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 312, 313.

TUE

III. BODILY SANCTIFICATION (1 Thess. 4:3-7).

- 7. What aspect of the Thessalonian believers' sanctification especially concerned the apostle? 1 Thess. 4:3-7.**

Paul warned both the Thessalonians and the Corinthians about the danger of sexual immorality. (See 1 Corinthians 7.) There were sufficient problems in Thessalonica to warrant his caution and correction. In 1 Thessalonians chapter four, Paul devotes no less than five of the 18 verses to pointed injunctions against moral impurity.

The Greek word translated "fornication" (1 Thess. 4:3) refers to sexual immorality whether committed by married or unmarried persons. (See Matt. 5:32; 19:9.)

A tragedy repeated. "As we approach the close of time, as the people of God stand upon the borders of the heavenly Canaan, Satan will, as of old, redouble his efforts to prevent them from entering the goodly land. He lays his snares for every soul. It is not the ignorant and uncultured merely that need to be guarded; he will prepare his temptations for those in the highest positions, in the most holy office; if he can lead them to pollute their souls, he can through them destroy many. And he employs the same agents now as he employed three thousand years ago. By worldly friendships, by the charms of beauty, by pleasure seeking, mirth, feasting, or the wine cup, he tempts to the violation of the seventh commandment."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 457, 458.

In what ways may sexual immorality be understood as defrauding another, or others, or even one's self?

IV. COMPLETE SANCTIFICATION (1 Thess. 5:23).

8. What is to be the extent of the sanctification that Paul wishes for the believers? 1 Thess. 5:23.
-

The spirit and soul. "By 'spirit'... may be understood the higher principle of intelligence and thought with which man is endowed, and with which God can communicate by His Spirit.... It is by the renewing of the mind through the action of the Holy Spirit that the individual is transformed into Christ's likeness....

"By 'soul', . . . when distinguished from spirit, may be understood that part of a man's nature that finds expression through the instincts, emotions, and desires. This part of one's nature can be sanctified, too. When, through the working of the Holy Spirit, the mind is brought into conformity with God's mind, and sanctified reason bears sway over the lower nature, the impulses, which would otherwise be contrary to God, become subject to His will. Thus the humble Christian may reach such a height of sanctification that when obeying God he is really carrying out his own impulses. He delights to do God's will."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 257.

WED

9. Why is sanctification (holiness) so important? Hebrews 12:14.
-

The message of Hebrews 12:14 summarizes Paul's wish for the believers—peace and holiness—peace, denoting the believers' relationships with their fellow humans, and holiness, signifying their relationships with God. Without the latter, there cannot be the former, and without both, one cannot see God.

V. CHRIST OUR SANCTIFICATION (1 Thess. 5:24).

10. By whose authority does the Holy Spirit accomplish our sanctification? 1 Thess. 5:24.
-

11. Why is sanctification necessarily a lifelong process? Gal. 5:16-18.
-

The struggle continues. "So long as Satan reigns, we shall have self to subdue, besetting sins to overcome; so long as life shall last, there will be no stopping place, no point which we can reach and say, I have fully attained. Sanctification is the result of lifelong obedience."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 560, 561.

12. How does Paul emphasize the means of victory over sin throughout the lifelong process of sanctification? Romans 6:9-14.

We live in Christ. The word *reckon* used in the King James of Romans 6:11 is variously translated as "consider" (RSV, Moffatt, Amplified), "regard" (Weymouth, NEB). The Good News Bible (TEV) reads "think of yourselves as dead, so far as sin is concerned." The Greek word translated "reckon" often means to "count something to be true because it is true."

The "old man" of sin, which Paul defines as the old sinful manner of life, no longer controls the person who has accepted Christ as Saviour and Lord. (See Rom. 6:6; Eph. 4:22-24; Col. 3:1-10.) Even so, the born-again believer remains a fallen human being with biases to evil that must be continually combatted through the power bestowed by Christ. (See Gal. 5:16-19; 1 Cor. 9:27.)

THU **Christ now reigns within.** (See Col. 1:27). He occupies the throne; our fallen humanity is reduced to helplessness by the indwelling power of Jesus. As long as we allow Him to reign, we are no longer discouraged, dismayed, or overcome. Our flesh is unholy (see *Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 32), and we will not be rid of this mortal burden until Jesus comes. But we proceed as if it were so even now—overcoming and ignoring the suggestions of the flesh—because the "new man," Christ Himself, is living in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. (See Rom. 8:1-11.)

13. Because the process by which we grow spiritually never is fully completed in this life, what absolutely essential role does Jesus perform for our salvation? 1 Cor. 1:30, 31; Jer. 23:6 (compare 1 John 5:4, 5).

Christ our righteousness. "And while we cannot claim perfection of the flesh, we may have Christian perfection of the soul. Through the sacrifice made in our behalf, sins may be perfectly forgiven. Our dependence is not in what man can do; it is in what God can do for man through Christ. When we surrender ourselves wholly to God, and fully believe, the blood of Christ cleanses from all sin. The conscience can be freed from condemnation. Through faith in His blood, all may be made perfect in Christ Jesus. Thank God that we are not dealing with impossibilities. We may claim sanctification. We may enjoy the favor of God. We are not to be anxious about what Christ and God think of us, but about what God thinks of Christ, our Substitute. Ye are accepted in the Beloved. The Lord shows, to the repenting, believing one, that Christ accepts the surrender of the soul, to be molded and fashioned after His own likeness."—*Selected Messages*, book 2, pp. 32, 33. (See also *Testimonies*, vol. 5, pp. 471, 472.)

Why is it necessary to rely upon Christ's sanctification if in fact we ourselves are being daily renewed or sanctified, that is, growing in grace?

ASK YOURSELF:

- What are the clearest evidences in my behavior that the process of sanctification is being successfully conducted?
- What are the evidences in my thoughts and behavior that the process

of sanctification is not yet complete in my life?

- What historical event more than any other convinces me of Christ's willingness to substitute His complete or absolute holiness for my developing or incomplete righteousness?

FRI

FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION:

What Jesus says about sanctification: John 17:9-19.

What Paul says elsewhere: 1 Cor. 7:2-5; 2 Cor. 7:1; Heb. 10:10-29.

*What Ellen White says: "It is impossible for any to enjoy the blessing of sanctification while they are selfish and gluttonous."—*The Sanctified Life*, p. 25.*

"The only way in which He [Jesus] could set and keep men right was to make Himself visible and familiar to their eyes."—*Signs of the Times*, Jan. 20, 1890.

"There will be no place for outward adornment in the sanctified heart; but there will be an earnest, anxious seeking for the inward adorning, the Christian graces—the fruits of the Spirit of God. . . . If the heart is reformed, it will be seen in the outward appearance."—*Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 162.

"[Sanctification] is not gained by a happy flight of feeling, but is the result of constantly dying to sin, and constantly living for Christ. Wrongs cannot be righted nor reformations wrought in the character by feeble, intermittent efforts. It is only by long, persevering effort, sore discipline, and stern conflict, that we shall overcome."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 560, 561.

"Bible sanctification does not consist in strong emotion. Here is where many are led into error. They make feelings their criterion. When they feel elated or happy, they claim that they are sanctified. Happy feelings or the absence of joy is no evidence that a person is or is not sanctified."—*The Sanctified Life*, p. 10.

"The sanctification set forth in the Sacred Scriptures has to do with the entire being—spirit, soul, and body. Here is the true idea of entire consecration. Paul prays that the church at Thessalonica may enjoy this great blessing. 'The very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Thess. 5:23)."—*The Sanctified Life*, p. 7.

Also read *The Great Controversy*, pp. 469-478.

SUMMARY: Quickened by the Spirit, convicted by the cross, cleansed by the Word, redeemed by the blood, covered by the robe, by God's grace all of us can enjoy the happy, holy life of those for whom sanctification is a daily reality. This can be achieved through a trusting relationship with our friendly, trustworthy God.

Lessons for Fourth Quarter, 1991

Sabbath School members who have not received a copy of the adult Sabbath School lessons for the fourth quarter of 1991 will be helped by the following outline in studying the first two lessons. The title of the series is *Proverbs to Live By*. This quarter's lessons cover the book of Proverbs.

FIRST LESSON: First Things First

MEMORY TEXT: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding" (*Proverbs 9:10*).

THEME: What wisdom and righteousness are, how they are interrelated, and how they are attained.

OUTLINE:

- I. What Is Wisdom? (*Prov. 1:1-7; 2:10, 11*).
- II. The Value of Wisdom (*Prov. 4:7*).
- III. How Is Wisdom Attained? (*Prov. 2:1-6; James 1:5*).
- IV. What Is Righteousness? (*Prov. 2:7-9; 21:3*).
- V. Righteousness and Wisdom (*Prov. 9:10*).

SECOND LESSON: A Star to Guide the Humble

MEMORY TEXT: "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (*Proverbs 3:5, 6*).

THEME: The subject of trust—*what* it is, *for* what it is, and *for whom* it is.

OUTLINE:

- I. What Trust Is and Is Not (*Prov. 22:17-19*).
- II. Is Our Trust Misplaced? (*Prov. 28:26*).
- III. A Star to Guide the Humble (*Prov. 3:5, 6; 2 Cor. 12:10*).

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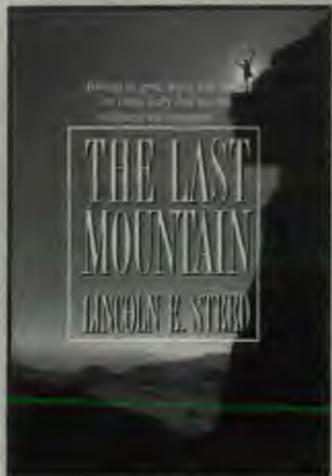
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JULY/AUGUST 1991

TRANS-EUROPEAN DIVISION

Unions	Churches	Membership	Population
British	199	17,355	60,719,369
Finland	58	6,217	5,219,520
Hungarian	111	3,615	10,620,000
Netherlands	51	4,049	14,200,000
Pakistan	45	6,648	76,000,000
Polish	124	4,718	38,700,000
Swedish	47	3,268	8,458,888
West Nordic	126	8,654	9,498,618
Yugoslavian	278	10,132	22,018,000
Greek Mission	9	303	9,848,000
Iceland Conference	7	546	251,690
Israel Field	4	74	4,129,000
Totals June 30, 1989	1,069	65,597	259,663,085

