
a ***Grace Notes*** course

1 Thessalonians

an expositional study
by Dr. Grant Richison

Lesson 7

1 Thessalonians 5:16-28

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1 Thessalonians 5:16

"Rejoice always..."

Paul now turns to dealing with the attitude of the individual Christian. Spiritual responsibilities towards others call for addresses one's own viewpoint. Paul now prescribes the personal issues that correspond to the fellowship of the saints.

This is the shortest verse in the Greek New Testament.

Rejoice

A rejoicing attitude does not tumble into a survival mode toward life. The Holy Spirit commands the believer at Thessalonica to "rejoice" even in duress situations. The Thessalonians were living with deep and daily persecution. Their circumstances did not alter their joy. True joy transcends circumstance. This is not self-hypnosis. Biblical joy rests in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

always

God wants us to rejoice "always," not just some of the time but all of the time.

Principle

At the heart of Christianity is the outlook of joy.

Application

We cannot constantly carry joy in our lives if we look to the circumstances of life. Joy is not the same thing as happiness. Happiness depends on circumstances being right. If I get a new car, I am happy. If someone bumps my fender in the parking lot, I am not happy. Joy is inner animation of soul regardless of circumstance. Our joy depends on our orientation to God's providence and promises.

The foundation for the believer's rejoicing is in who God is and what He does. There are many reasons why a Christian should always rejoice:

God's presence – Psalm 16:11 The God of our salvation – Habakkuk 3:18 Answered prayer – John 16:24 Our hope -- Acts 5:41 Our hope --

Romans 5:2 Our hope -- Romans 12:12 The Holy Spirit -- Romans 14:17 The fruit of the Spirit – Gal 5:22 The Lord is the source of our joy -- Philippians 4:4 Tribulation works endurance -- James 1:2-3 Purpose in suffering – 1 Peter 4:12,13 Joy in trial -- 1 Peter 1:5-8

1 Thessalonians 5:17

"...pray without ceasing..."

The Greek used the word "without ceasing" for a person with a hacking cough and for repeated military attacks. This is not continuous prayer but prayer that recurs regularly. The idea is persistence in prayer.

The word "pray" is in the present tense and carries the idea of customary prayer. This person shoots up prayers throughout the day.

Principle

Dynamic prayer prays at stated and non-stated times.

Application

When thankful, pray. When in trouble, pray. When lacking in wisdom, pray. Pray at stated times and non-stated times. Always be willing and ready to pray. We do not have to lift the receiver off the hook to talk to God. We do not even need to dial; we just shoot up our requests. We can talk to God while we work or drive our car.

"Evening and morning and at noon I will pray, and cry aloud, And He shall hear my voice" (Psalm 55:17).

"Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart..." (Luke 18:1).

"...but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4).

"Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church" (Acts 12:5).

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"...rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer..." (Romans 12:12).

"...praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—" (Ephesians 6:18).

"Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving..." (Colossians 4:2).

Continued prayer is a state of steady communion with God. We do not allow great gaps to intervene between episodes of prayers. He takes interest in the small areas of our lives. We do not brush off our children when they come to us with a little scratch. Neither does God brush us off when we come to Him with little things.

Great people of God in the Bible persevered in their appointed times and non-appointed times of prayer. They never got out of communication with the throne of grace. They constantly had a sense of dependence on God.

1 Thessalonians 5:18

"...in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you"

in everything give thanks;

We can give thanks "in everything" because we know that "all things work together for good to them that love God" (Romans 8:28). God ordains adversity as well as prosperity. Every circumstance that comes our way is from God. Failure to accept this as true is an indication of skepticism about God's plan for the universe. We can give thanks for everything because God is in control.

Principle

We give thanks in everything that comes into our lives because it comes by the will of God.

Application

There is a difference in giving thanks "for" everything and "in" everything. If we gave

thanks "for" everything that would mean that we give thanks for the Devil and his plan for the world!

Neither do we give thanks necessarily "after" everything. It does not require much faith to trace the hand of God with the benefit of hindsight. However, it takes faith to accept one's lot with gratitude in the midst of circumstances.

"...giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ..." (Ephesians 5:20).

This passage in Ephesians is more powerful than our verse in Thessalonians. We are to give thanks always for all things. When the police call and tell you that your son is in jail, it is difficult to give thanks for that. But we need to have the attitude of Samuel in 1 Samuel 3:18,

Whatever comes in our lives comes in by the will of God, otherwise, He would prevent it. God mixes with His divine compound the bitter and the sweet, the good and the bad, in appropriate proportions so that they work together for good. God knows just the right amount of sunshine and rain. He measures out these things with great precision.

for this is the will of God

The Holy Spirit highlights giving thanks in everything by saying that it is the will of God. By recognizing God's will, we give thanks for both prosperity and adversity. By knowing that God has a sovereign plan for adversity, we can put right our anxiety about trouble that comes our way. This is one area where we can know God's will without a doubt.

"So the king did not listen to the people; for the turn of events was from the LORD, that He might fulfill His word, which the LORD had spoken by Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam the son of Nebat" (1 King 15:15).

in Christ Jesus

God always links His will for us in association with Christ. Jesus is the reason we accept

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suffering as God's will for us. We have an occasion to represent Him in adversity.

for you

God designs all circumstances for the benefit of the believer. God thinks about your limitations. He knows the proper proportions of adversity that are right for you. We should not concern ourselves with the portion given to someone else. God works in each person's life differently.

He custom designs the structure of their circumstances by divine design. God knows the straw that will break the camel's back. He will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you can bear, but He wants a tested product. Engineers of today's automobiles test drive prototypes so that they know what these cars can tolerate. God wants to bring out the best in us.

Principle

God has a purpose for everything that happens to the believer.

Application

God's providential plan for our lives includes all contingencies. God foresees every circumstance that comes into our lives. Not only does He foresee everything that happens to us, but He providentially plans or allows each situation that comes into our lives.

There is no substitute for understanding the will of God for our suffering. Nothing can come into our lives unless the Lord allows it. God must put His initials on everything that comes into our state of affairs. We may give thanks through tears.

Our obligation is to believe God's Word about these matters. The Bible teaches God's providential care of His creatures throughout the Scriptures.

1 Thessalonians 5:19

"Do not quench the Spirit"

Paul transitions from individual responsibility to corporate worship with verse 19. God

reveals His will to the church as well as to the individual. We can squelch the public movement of the Holy Spirit. Five commands about life in the assembly follow.

The Bible commonly portrays the Holy Spirit like a flame. The idea of "quench" carries the idea of putting out a light of a torch, lamp or fire (Matthew 12:20; 25:8; Hebrews 11:34). Paul uses "quench" metaphorically to speak of hindering the operations of the Holy Spirit. People who refuse to submit to the teaching of the Word "quench" the Spirit. Those who usurp the ministry of the Spirit in the local church throw cold water on God's work in the congregation.

The Bible portrays the Holy Spirit as both heat and light. As heat, He impresses the reality of God upon the believer. As light, He reveals who God is to the believer. Some Christians blow out the flame of the Spirit in their lives. They do this by not yielding to the conviction of the Spirit about their sin and by accommodating sin.

The Greek indicates that the Thessalonians were to stop something they were already doing. In essence, "stop stifling the Spirit."

Principle

Rebellion in the local church against its leadership quenches the Spirit's ministry in that church.

Application

A believer can extinguish the work of the Spirit in the church. Every local church has those who try to stifle the ministry. Some do this by opposing leadership. Others do it by indifference to leadership and thus lull themselves and others to sleep. Whatever means they may use, the result is that they extinguish the fire of the Spirit.

A dynamic move of the Spirit of God may be perceived as a threat to some people in the church. Lacking understanding, they will reject any proposal outside their comfort zone.

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Christians need to be careful about limiting the ministry of the Spirit in the local assembly. To put out the flame of a manifestation of the Spirit is to interfere in what God is doing. Either we yield to the work of the Spirit or we extinguish His work. Those are the alternatives. We can grieve the Spirit as well as quenching the Spirit (Ephesians 4:30).

If you are hindering the work of your local church, you may be suppressing what the Spirit is doing. Do you take the negative position on most things? Are you on the negative side of every positive issue and on the positive side over every negative issue? It is incumbent upon Spirit-filled believers to be on the side of the ministry of the Spirit in the local church.

We must be careful not to stifle the Spirit of God in our church. When we do this, we are spiritual anarchists against the work of God in our church.

"But they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit; So He turned Himself against them as an enemy, And He fought against them" (Isaiah 63:10).

1 Thessalonians 5:20

"Do not despise prophecies"

We now come to the second command about corporate worship.

The word "despise" means to make of no account and frequently signifies to despise. We can make prophecies of no account and treat them with contempt. "No account" is less than one. We can treat the Bible as nothing. It is a dangerous thing to treat with disdain what God says or reject with contempt God's revelation.

"Prophecies" here probably refers to the gift of prophecy. The person with this gift could directly receive revelation from God before the Bible was completed. There came a time toward the close of the first century when this prophetic gift came became inoperative (1 Corinthians 13:8). The prophetic gift not only dealt with future things but things in the

present (Acts 13:2). "Prophecies" include both a prophetic element and a proclaiming element. These were oral proclamations before the revelation of the New Testament. The prophetic element came to close but the preaching element continues to this day.

Some people in Thessalonica may have pawned off their own personal notions without the gift of prophecy. People today pawn off their personal ideas about God by claiming that they special contact with God.

Others despise the teaching of God's Word. They falsely interpret and twist the Bible to suit their biases. They reject the clear claims of Scripture. The believer who treasures the Word is the believer who honors what it says.

"But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men. He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification" (1 Corinthians 14:3-5).

Prophecy was a special, temporary gift before the completion of the canon [the writing of the New Testament books] of the New Testament. By this gift, God revealed His mind and will to a prophet so that Christians could understand New Testament truth before the New Testament existed.

Today God succeeded the prophet by the teacher who expounds the mind of God already revealed on the pages of completed Scripture.

Principle

Christians are to carry a positive attitude toward the teaching of God's Word by their pastor.

Application

Some Christians believe that they must challenge all teaching from the pastor. They make themselves the final arbiter of truth.

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Their pride keeps them from learning from God's appointed teacher. The three pastoral books (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus) all declare that the church is to operate under a pastor/teacher who clearly and systematically sets forth doctrine.

The qualification to the above statement is that Christians who listen to the exposition of Scripture should check what the pastor teaches against the Word of God (Acts 17:11). That is why the church is to "test" the prophecy (5:21).

It is bad enough to discourage the preaching of God's Word. It is even worse to despise it. When we underestimate the significance of God's Word, we do it to our loss. Some people view the teaching of the Bible as irrelevant to their lives.

1 Thessalonians 5:21

"Test all things; hold fast what is good"

By challenging the Thessalonians to not despise prophecies, Paul did not want to imply that they were to be gullible and swallow any religious nonsense that might come their way. This verse puts a qualification on the previous verse.

Test

We test preaching (5:20) against the Word of God. The final arbiter of truth is God's Word. The word "test" means to test with the purpose to approve. We approve prophecy by the Bible.

"To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isaiah 8:20).

"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1).

Satan is in the business of imitating God's Word. Christians are to test truth as a FBI agents examine counterfeit money. Some people will contrive ideas and pass them off as God's ideas.

all things;

God wants us to test "all" things, not simply most things. Do not condemn anything without first investigating it. On the other hand, do not accept anything until you first test it against the objective truth of God's Word.

It is difficult to put aside our preconceptions about truth because we build security around what we believe. Honesty means that we examine the Bible without bias as much as possible.

Principle

All Christians need to develop a sense of discernment.

Application

Some people try to pawn off their personal ideas as being from God. This confuses the voice of God with the voice of man.

One drop of poison in your food spoils the entire meal. False doctrine usually carries much truth. The Devil is too smart to tempt you with absolute contradiction to what you believe. He takes what you believe and modifies it slightly. Peter, for example did not discern the plan of God, so Jesus rebuked him.

"But when He had turned around and looked at His disciples, He rebuked Peter, saying, 'Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men'" (Mark 8:33).

Jesus said in effect, "Peter, you are peddling the Devil's lie. What may look right to you is, in fact, a lie." Very few Christians today take the time to sniff out error. Everything seems to sit right with them because they do not rightly divide the word of truth.

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).

hold fast what is good

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Once we test a teaching against the Bible, then we hold on to that truth with the confidence that this is what God says. After we search the Scriptures, there comes a point where we need stability in what we believe. The phrase words "hold fast" means to have and hold. First we gain truth, then we retain it.

If we constantly open ourselves to new things without the appropriate testing, we introduce instability into our Christian experience. We come to settled convictions by extensive study, not by impulsively embracing some new idea.

The word "good" is the term for something profitable or useful. God's Word is profitable for our lives (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Principle

Learning the principles of God's Word is profitable and aids our everyday living.

Application

We are not to seek truth to denounce false ideas primarily, but to find what is true in God's Word. We study the Word to preserve its true teaching and apply it to our experience. Once we establish genuine teaching from God's Word then we hold onto it tenaciously.

"These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11).

1 Thessalonians 5:22

"Abstain from every form of evil"

The word "form" is something that strikes the eye, or which is out in the open. It is the external appearance or shape of something. Our passage probably carries the idea of "sort, kind". There are many kinds of evil out there — including doctrinal error.

The word "abstain" means to hold oneself from (4:3). Invariably, this word refers to evil practices whether doctrinal or moral (Acts 15:20,29; 1 Timothy 4:3; 1 Peter 2:11).

Christians are to keep themselves from foul doctrine. We should not play with evil teaching. We should distance ourselves from it.

The phrase "form of evil" is a contrast to the phrase in verse twenty, "hold fast what is good." Christians are to avoid anything that smacks of bogus doctrine. They cannot do this if they have not examined the Word of God thoroughly. "Hold yourselves aloof from any prophecy that is not based in truth from the Bible."

"Every form of evil" does not restrict itself to those things that appear evil. Rather, we must recognize that evil, including false doctrine, may manifest itself in any visible outward form. However, when evil clearly manifests itself, believers must keep their distance lest they be implicated in it (Numbers 16:26).

Principle

Christians should avoid anything that is a forerunner to false doctrine, seems like fake doctrine or is beyond the borders of truth.

Application

God expects us to make a clean break with error when we become Christians. The worst form that evil takes is false prophecy or untrue religious teaching. Christians should not associate themselves with any religious organization that seems to endorse doctrine that has been proven unscriptural or dishonoring to Christ.

Christians should also avoid doctrine that may not be evil in itself, but does not appear right. Christians who flirt with false doctrine open themselves up to trouble. Once these Christians adopt bogus principles for living, they move into misery. We must live out our lives based on solid, godly principles evident in God's revealed Word.

1 Thessalonians 5:23

"Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit,

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soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ"

Since the preceding 16 exhortations require God to make them possible, Paul invokes God's help toward that end. Without God's work on our behalf, it is tough to live up to these directions.

Paul concludes this section on sanctification with a prayer. Verse 23 is Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians.

Now

With the word "now" Paul shifts into his conclusion to the book. Paul prays that God will enable the Thessalonians to fulfil the imperatives of the previous section. By adding up the 16 exhortations like a string of numbers, he draws the sum of sanctification. God finishes what He starts. God never embarks upon a job He does not finish. God takes different courses of action, based on the response of the believer.

may the God of peace

God, characterized by peace, will sanctify and preserve the Thessalonians. Paul presents God as the God of peace because He puts everything in order. Nothing goes without His notice. Only God can impart peace to the soul. As long as He ensures that spiritual harmony and tranquility prevail, there will be no discord in the life of the believer. Thus, God works an overall progressive holiness in our lives that will find its ultimate completion at the coming of Christ where we will receive ultimate sanctification.

God made His peace with us initially by sending His Son to die on the cross (Romans 5:1). He is in the process of making peace with us daily as we depend on Him to overcome sin in our lives. He will ultimately make His peace with us by eradicating any sin in our lives in the eternal state. (Romans 16:20).

"Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, 21 make you complete in every good work to do His will,

working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen" (Hebrews 13:20-21).

Himself

The word "Himself" is emphatic in the Greek and indicates that God will have to do this, not us. No one else can do this for us either. This does not imply that we have no part in sanctification. God sets us apart when we come to Christ in terms of our position with Him. Then He enables us to become more and more like the Lord Jesus. Finally, He will completely sanctify us at the coming of Christ.

Principle

Sanctification is not only the will of God but also His work.

Application

Sanctification is the will of God (1 Thessalonians 4:3,4,7). Sanctification is also the work of God (Exodus 31:13; Leviticus 21:8; Ezekiel 37:28; John 17:19).

God's commands are one thing but His enablement is something else. Understanding the principles of God is one thing but the power to live them out is another. We do not find that power in ourselves but in God Himself. God is the singular source for our sanctification because He does it "wholly." God is the God of peace because God puts all things in order.

sanctify you completely;

God will sanctify you "completely," sanctify you to every part of your being, all three essential parts of your being. God will sanctify us through and through, with no area escaping His sanctifying influence. He will sanctify us quantitatively, qualitatively and ultimately when He delivers us from our sin capacity. God sanctifies us from stem to stern, from time into eternity.

Jesus will save us "completely" (Hebrews 7:25). We believe in the finished and unfinished work of Christ and we believe in the unfinished work of Christ. Jesus did a work for us on the cross

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and He is doing a work for us in Heaven. He is saving us daily. He is in the business of keeping saved people saved.

"For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life" (Romans 5:10).

"Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25).

We have a "great high priest" (Hebrews 4:14). We are not trying to get one. Jesus is taking care of our affairs over there.

"My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world" (1 John 2:1-2).

As a "high priest," Jesus advocates for us as a lawyer. He represents us personally and pleads the case of His shed blood.

Jesus will work for us until He comes back again.

"...being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ..." (Philippians 1:6).

and may your whole spirit, soul, and body

The word "whole" means complete, sound in every part. This is a qualitative term implying having integrity, complete, undamaged, intact, blameless. The Lord can make us complete in all our parts, in the entity as a whole. God is not interested in getting just our "leftovers" or "unwanted items."

Paul describes the believer in this passage as having three parts. The "spirit" is the capacity to relate to God. This spiritual dimension puts us in touch with God. The Bible never says that

God saves the "spirit," only the soul can be saved.

The "soul" is the person, the psychology of man. This is the mind, emotions and will of man, the seat of personality (Luke 1:46,47; Hebrews 4:12).

The "body" is the material part of man; it is what carries the immaterial part of man, the spirit and soul.

No part of our spiritual existence escapes the impact of God upon our lives. God must sanctify each of the three aspects of our being. Then, we avoid every category of evil.

be preserved blameless

The word "preserved" means to watch over, keep. The Lord will watch over our entire spirit, soul and body, the complete person. God will guard our blamelessness even up to and including the point of the coming of Christ. He is the one who keeps us saved.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:3-5).

A "blameless" person is someone against whom no one can lay a charge. The Lord will preserve us in such a way that no one can lay a charge against us. The Christian in this sense is without fault, innocent.

at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ

No one can point an accusing finger at us, even at the coming of Christ.

It is not simply "until" the coming of Christ but "at" His coming. When Jesus comes, no one will point a finger at us. Not only will holiness stand the test of life's trials and temptations but it will have a permanent, real existence that Christ will recognize when He comes.

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Principle

God sanctifies us at three levels.

Application

Thank God, He saved us perfectly in the person and work of Christ.

There are three kinds or times of sanctification:

Positional – we hold the same status that Jesus holds before God when we believe in the death of Christ to forgive our sins whether we are carnal or spiritual. This is perfect sanctification in God's eyes, not in our experience (4:3,4,7). Progressive – we become more and more like the Lord Jesus as we yield to the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives (John 17:17; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Ephesians 5:26). This is a relative sanctification. Permanent – ultimately we will be just like the Lord Jesus without a sin capacity in the eternal state (Romans 8:29,30). We will not have the capacity to sin ever again.

God saved us positionally when we believed on His Son's death on the cross as the only way He will accept us into His Heaven.

When it comes to our progressive sanctification, God may have to discipline us to get our attention. The more we yield to the Spirit to enable us to apply more and more of the principles of God's Word to our experience, the more we will become like the Lord Jesus in time.

One day, God will sanctify us totally, absolutely, completely. God will perfectly sanctify us in the eternity. As far as God is concerned, our eternal sanctification is as good as done.

Jesus saved us from the penalty of sin. He is saving us from the power of us. Eventually, He will save us from the presence of sin.

1 Thessalonians 5:24

"He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it"

In verse 23, Paul prays for the Thessalonians that God would sanctify them. In this verse, he asserts that God will faithfully do this.

He who calls you

God brings certain people to Himself in salvation by His call. This is God's first work in us but He does not leave us at the point of initial salvation.

is faithful,

God's character ensures He will fulfil that to which He calls us. God will faithfully complete His work. God is faithful to His promises so He is faithful to those people whom He elects. The Greek puts emphasis on the word "faithful." God's faithfulness to His sanctifying work stands on His integrity. God is reliable and trustworthy when it comes to finishing what He starts.

"...being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ..." (Philippians 1:6).

God cannot be unfaithful to Himself. It is impossible for Him to call us and then not preserve us. Since God's character is immutable, He must be true to His commitments. God cannot go back on His promises whether they are promises about time or eternity. He will faithfully forgive every Christian who confesses his sin (1 John 1:9). God will keep us saved (2 Timothy 2:13). He is faithful to sustain the believer through temptations (1 Corinthians 10:13). The Christian's present and future depend entirely on God's faithfulness.

"Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:22-23).

Principle

Once God calls us, His faithfulness will see us to the end.

Application

Just as we can trust God to save us eternally so we can trust Him to sanctify us completely. We can trust God for our personal growth. What

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God does will continue into eternity. This is a far cry from our feeble and frail attempts to sanctify ourselves. God both calls and sustains us. He calls us to His ends and He enables us to reach those ends.

No one will point an accusing finger at us because God is faithful in bringing us to a point of absolute sanctification in the eternal state. God preserves us through and through. God will fit us for Heaven as well as earth.

The reason Job could say, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him," is that God is faithful to Himself. Job could stand up under unimaginable pressure because He understood something about the character of God. He knew God always keeps His Word.

Christians who have confidence in God's faithfulness to Himself can trust Him with anything that may come their way.

"Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator" (1 Peter 4:19).

who also will do it

Grace means that God does the doing. Legalism means that we do the doing. If God does the work, He will sanctify the believer initially, progressively and ultimately. God will preserve us and present us blameless at the coming of Christ (5:23). He will not waver in this. He is credible because He is faithful to Himself and His promises.

Principle

It is God's responsibility to preserve our eternal life.

Application

If our salvation or Christian life depended on us, we would be Christians one day and not the next. We would be spiritual Christians one day and failures the next. We cannot do what only God can do. These issues are all up to God. If He does not do it, we are in trouble.

We want a share in becoming Christians. We want a share in our spiritual lives. We cannot save our souls; neither can we sustain our souls. Everything is by God's grace.

"And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen!" (2 Timothy 4:18).

God consummates our salvation. We cannot do this. Our salvation or sanctification does not depend on our faithfulness. They depend on His faithfulness. I am not faithful, He is. Nothing nullifies His faithfulness.

"For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39).

"And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him..." (Hebrews 5:9).

"Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25).

"Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:1-2).

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away,

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reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:3-5).

"Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, And to present you faultless Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, To God our Savior, Who alone is wise, Be glory and majesty, Dominion and power, Both now and forever. Amen" (Jude 24-25).

1 Thessalonians 5:25

"Brethren, pray for us"

This verse brings us to the conclusion of First Thessalonians (5:25-28). Paul advises three concluding recommendations upon the congregation and then gives a final blessing.

Brethren,

The word "brethren" is emphatic in the Greek. Paul strongly pleads for the Thessalonians to pray for him. Paul clearly understood the pitfalls of ministry. He knew he could not go into ministry naked, without the help of God.

pray for us

The word "pray" is in the present tense indicating continued prayer. No one can do God's work without prayer. Those who want prayer and who pray understand that they are not sufficient in themselves to do God's work. They know they must depend on God to do it. Paul clearly understood his need for prayer (2 Thessalonians 3:1; Romans 15:30; Ephesians 6:18-19; Colossians 4:3.). Paul asked for prayer at the close of six of the thirteen letters he wrote.

The "us" here is the gospel team of Paul, Silas and Timothy that came to Thessalonica (1:1). Paul closes this letter as he began with an emphasis on prayer. He says in effect, "I prayed for you so you pray for me. We will pray for each other." This is mutual Christianity.

"We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers..." (1 Thessalonians 1:2).

Principle

If we understand our role in the brotherhood of Christ properly, we would pray for our brothers in Christ more regularly.

Application

How strong is your supportive tie to those in your church? Can they depend on your prevailing prayer for them? We fulfil God's purpose in our lives through the prayers of our fellow Christians.

Living the Christian life depends on teamwork. If we play on a team, we depend on our teammates to fulfill their role. Soldiers depend heavily on other soldiers in their company. Their lives are at stake if others fail to fulfil their function. Every area of life needs teamwork. This is no less true in the church. Part of our teamwork is praying for one another. This is something that everyone can do.

"Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me, that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you" (Romans 15:30-32).

"...praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints— and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak" (Ephesians 6:18-20).

"Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; meanwhile praying also

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for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains, that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak" (Colossians 4:2-4).

1 Thessalonians 5:26

"Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss"

Paul gives one final expression of his love for the Thessalonians. He wanted to extend a greeting with a "holy kiss."

The word "all" indicates that Paul extended his love even to the "disorderly" brethren. He excludes no one in his love.

The "holy kiss" in the first century was a physical token of welcome or farewell kiss, a token of brotherhood in Christ (Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:12).

The term "holy" guards against anything untoward in the kiss. In the Mid East, the kiss was a form of greeting and took place between members of the same sex. They kissed on the cheek, not the mouth.

Societies where the kiss is not a greeting can find trouble with the "holy kiss." Practicing the "holy kiss" in a Western culture can create some problems. This verse is no justification for establishing a "Lonely Hearts Club" in the local church!

Principle

Christians are to show public affection for one another.

Application

The "holy kiss" in Western culture is more like a handshake or hug. Church members do not kiss the same way lovers kiss each other or family members kiss each other.

The biblical kiss signifies personal affection, not romantic passion. When we give a public sign of spiritual oneness, equality and mutual dependence in the household of faith, we demonstrate biblical love.

God does not want us to extend sticky, saccharin sentimentalism. Our physical love toward one another is to have a "holy" dimension to it. We love each brother in Christ with no strings attached.

Christians should show love to one another publicly.

"Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace to you all who are in Christ Jesus. Amen" (1 Peter 5:14).

1 Thessalonians 5:27

"I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read to all the holy brethren"

Paul's final exhortation of the three in the conclusion is that the leaders of the Thessalonian church read First Thessalonians publicly to the congregation.

I charge you by the Lord

The word "charge" literally means to put under (or bind by) an oath, to adjure. Paul demands or commands that the leadership at Thessalonica take an oath that First Thessalonians be read in the public assembly. This is stronger than a suggestion or exhortation.

The phrase "by the Lord" indicates that Paul gets his authority to put them under an oath from the Lord.

that this epistle be read

Paul wants the leaders at Thessalonica to read First Thessalonians publicly thus acknowledging its place in the Bible. Most people in the early church did not read. They got their Bible from public reading. Most likely, this was more than just reading the text. It involved explanation and exposition of the text.

"And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up.... ...helped the people to understand the Law; and the people stood in their place. So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and

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helped them to understand the reading" (Nehemiah 8:5-8).

to all the holy brethren

Note the word "all." It is imperative that everyone in the local church be exposed to the exposition of God's Word, whether men, women or children.

Principle

Exposition of Scripture is central to worship.

Application

The strength in Paul's command to read the Bible publicly indicates that the Word of God was central to local church worship. If Paul believed vehemently that the leadership should read the Bible publicly, should not our churches today put great emphasis on Bible exposition as well?

"But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 1:14-17).

1 Thessalonians 5:28

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen"

First Thessalonians does not fade away insignificantly. Paul invokes the matchless, amazing grace of the Lord Jesus Christ upon the Thessalonians.

There is nothing the Thessalonians need more than the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. They needed sanctifying grace that strengthens the spiritual life.

Notice this grace comes with the authority of the full title of the Lord Jesus Christ. We have the full ineffable authority of Christ for this grace. This grace is grace that comes from the work of Christ.

be with you.

Grace is not for the elite but for anyone in the local church. Paul ends as he began with the grace of God (1:1). It is one thing to know about grace but it is something else to have it as a partner.

Amen

The word "amen" means so be it. It is a word of faith. Paul says in effect, "I agree with the idea that God's grace abides with believers for their sustaining power to live out the Christian life."

Principle

Grace can be our partner as we walk through life.

Application

If we go through our Christian life without the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, we go it on our own. If we appropriate His grace, it will abide with us and give us strength we would not otherwise have. Sanctifying grace strengthens our spiritual lives.

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen" (2 Corinthians 13:14).