
a ***Grace Notes*** course

1 Thessalonians

an expositional study
by Dr. Grant Richison

Lesson 6

1 Thessalonians 5:1-15

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1 Thessalonians 5:1

"But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you"

Chapter 4 gave us the blessed hope of the believer, the rapture of the church to Heaven. This chapter gravely warns us of the coming Day of the Lord that deals with Israel and Gentiles (5:1-11).

The first three verses warn of the coming Day of the Lord.

But concerning

The words "but concerning" is a signpost showing that Paul now shifts to a new topic. These words are his usual formula for moving to a new line of thought (4:9,13; 1 Corinthians 7:1; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1). In chapter 4, Paul discusses the Rapture but in this chapter, he turns to the Day of the Lord, which comes immediately after the Rapture.

Apparently, Timothy, in his report from his visit to Thessalonica, indicated to Paul that the new church needed further clarification about the Day of the Lord. The Day of the Lord is the next prophetic event after the Lord Jesus comes to rapture the church to Heaven.

The Day of the Lord is a period of 1007 years. The first part of this era is judgment on the world for a seven-year period. In the Tribulation, God will judge proud Gentiles and apostate Jews. However, He will deliver a faithful Jewish remnant and Gentiles who put their trust in Him. Following these seven years, Jesus will reign on the earth for one thousand years, fulfilling the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants (Genesis 15-18; 2 Samuel 7).

the times and the seasons, brethren,

Paul now expands God's prophetic plan. He moves from the Rapture to the time after the Rapture – the Day of the Lord.

We get the English word "chronology" from the Greek word for "times." "Times" refers to the

succession of events, the chronology of events. This word as well as "seasons" refer to dispensations.

The word "seasons" refers to the "events" of the Tribulation and Millennium. The word "times" denotes quantity whereas "seasons" carries the idea of quality – kinds of time. Thus, Paul deals with end time events following the Rapture. There are two kinds of "seasons" following the Rapture – the Tribulation and the Millennium. These are different and unique features of the Day of the Lord.

All of this is just the opposite of the Rapture, which is a signless timeless event. The Rapture could happen at any moment, in a twinkling of an eye (1 Corinthians 15:51-52). The "times and seasons" are related to earth (Daniel 2:21; 7:12; Ecclesiastes 3:1). The Rapture, however, will snatch the church entirely away from the earth to glorious scenes in Heaven.

A "dispensation" is not primarily a period of time but a way of life. It is an economy of God. God dealt with Israel by a system of laws because she was a national entity. God deals with the church in an entirely different way because she is an organism, not an organization like Israel.

Every believer in the church has the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. In the old economy, only certain special people had the privilege of the indwelling Spirit such as David and only for periods in his life. That is why he prayed, "Take not your Holy Spirit from me (Psalm 51:11)."

The distinction between Israel and the church is very important because there is a massive difference in mode of living the godly life. In the church, every believer is a priest, therefore, he or she does not need a priest. We have the right to offer our own sacrifices to the Lord. We do not need to go through a mediator. The church has the prerogative of a right standing before God, earned by Christ. We have an eternal relationship with the Son of God.

you have no need that I should write to you

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Paul previously taught the Thessalonians about the Day of the Lord when he established the church a year prior to writing this epistle so they did not need instruction on that doctrine. They did need instruction, however, on the Rapture.

Principle

God wants us to change the character of our lives by knowing prophetic truth.

Application

God gives us no date to circle in our Daytimer (Acts 1:6-8) as to when the Rapture will occur. He wants us to live with anticipation that He might come back any day. No sign needs to be fulfilled before He comes. He could come at any moment. Living in the light of His imminent coming sharpens our spirituality.

The purpose of prophecy is to comfort (4:18), edify, encourage holiness and give hope. Christians who do not understand prophecy are unstable. They do not understand the counterfeiting schema of Satan. Thus, they cannot distinguish the Devil's plan from God's plan. These Christians will buy into globalism and one-world government.

Prophecy distinguishes Christians from non-Christians. We live for a different purpose and with a different hope. The character of the sons of light stands in complete contrast to the coming dark Day of the Lord (5:1-11).

1 Thessalonians 5:2

"For you yourselves know perfectly that the Day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night"

Someone told the Thessalonians that they were in the Tribulation because they suffered such persecution. Paul writes chapter 5 to clarify this point.

For you yourselves know perfectly

The Thessalonians knew "perfectly" that the Day of the Lord would come as a thief in the night. The word "perfectly" indicates that they

gained knowledge of the Day of the Lord from the accurate teaching of the Old Testament by Paul. Paul was careful in his interpretation of the Old Testament. The root for "perfectly" means pointed. Paul accurately, exactly, pointedly and precisely expounded the Bible. He paid close attention to details when he read the Bible. He conformed strictly to norms and standards of detail when it came to the Word. Since Paul taught the Bible accurately, the Thessalonians understood it "perfectly," or better, precisely.

that the day of the Lord

The Day of the Lord refers to both the Tribulation period of seven years and the Millennium [1000 years], thus; the Day of the Lord covers 1007 years. This is the time when the Lord will sovereignly and directly intervene into the affairs of man. Old Testament prophets expounded this day (Isaiah 13:9-11; Joel 2:28-32; Zephaniah 1:14-18; 3:14-15). This time will commence after the Rapture.

The Day of the Lord does not necessarily come immediately after the Rapture but it follows as the next event in God's prophetic plan. We know the Day of the Lord occurs after the Rapture because, sequentially, chapter 5 follows chapter 4.

so comes as a thief

Every time the New Testament refers to the Lord's coming as a thief, it refers to the Day of the Lord or the Second Coming, not the Rapture. The Day of the Lord will come like a thief who does not send an engraved invitation that he is coming. We do not say, "I understand that a thief is coming tomorrow morning at 2:00 am. We better prepare ourselves." A thief is different from a robber. A robber openly takes what he wants by brute force. A thief steals in secret or by fraud. The thief does not openly announce his designs. He comes unexpectedly when his victim is totally unprepared. Paul adds shock to the unforeseen.

in the night

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<p>A thief comes when people are asleep. This day will be both a surprise and sudden to those living at that time. The New Testament describes both the Rapture and the Day of the Lord as sudden comings.</p> <p>Paul does not concern himself with what happens in the Day of the Lord as such over this period of 1007 years. His sole interest is how it begins. That is why he refers to this period as beginning in the same manner as a thief in the night. The way it will come is very important for its manner of coming determines what sort of day it is. The way it comes also tells what it has to do with the church, if anything!</p> <p>Principle</p> <p>The church will not enter the Tribulation period.</p> <p>Application</p> <p>The arrival of the Day of the Lord is quite different from the Rapture. In the Day of the Lord, a hostile, unknown thief comes to destroy. In the Rapture, the Lord Himself comes to deliver the church.</p> <p>No one ever gains by the call of a thief. There is only loss and grief. The Bible flatly contradicts any notion that the Lord Jesus will come to the true believer as a pillaging thief (5:4). The Rapture will be eternal gain, not loss. However, when the Day of the Lord comes, unbelievers stand to lose everything they hold dear. All their material gains will be lost (Revelation 17,18).</p> <p>1 Thessalonians 5:3</p> <p>"For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape"</p> <p>Paul now explains in what sense unbelievers left on earth after the Rapture will resemble unsuspecting victims of a thief. Just at the moment they least expect it, judgment will fall upon them.</p> <p>For when they say, "Peace and safety!"</p>	<p>Paul does not include himself among those in this verse. He views them as "they." This third-person pronoun refers to those left in the Tribulation after the Rapture. The church will not experience this "sudden destruction." Paul contrasts believers with non-believers in the next verse (4:4).</p> <p>Elsewhere, the Bible tells us what brings this delusion of peace. In the Tribulation, a world ruler signs a seven-year contract (Daniel 9:27) wherein the world expects world peace. This is a peace of outward social and political conditions such as will exist at the first part of Daniel's 70th week. It will seem that mankind achieved inward peace of mind and outward one-world stability.</p> <p>In the beginning of the Day of the Lord, that is, in the beginning of the Tribulation period, people will say, "Peace and safety!" This slogan spreads around the world.</p> <p>Peace refers to inward tranquility of mind. The word "safety" means not liable to fall, to be firm. They are under the delusion that man has come to a place of world peace so they are safe from any form of danger.</p> <p>The word "when" indicates that non-Christians will say this right up to the moment of disaster. While they repeat their slogan "Peace and safety!" destruction comes on them.</p> <p>Principle</p> <p>World peace is a delusion without Christ.</p> <p>Application</p> <p>Political and religious organizations that pawn off the idea of world peace will delude the world at the beginning of the Day of the Lord. They will attempt to disarm the world. Man left to human nature in the raw will reap the pain of that fantasy.</p> <p>World peace has always been the pipe dream of man without God. There is no true peace without peace with God. Legislation cannot change the heart of man. The only way to</p>

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change the world is to change the heart of man. Any other approach is an illusion.

The delusion of world-peace is the great apostasy throughout the world at the beginning of the Tribulation period. There will be an attempt not only to disarm people by state and nationally but there will be an attempt to disarm people worldwide. People will utter maudlin platitudes about peace. There is no peace apart from the person of Christ.

"For they have healed the hurt of the daughter of My people slightly, Saying, 'Peace, peace!' When there is no peace" (Jeremiah 8:11).

then sudden destruction comes upon them,

"Destruction" means come to ruin. This is a state of utter ruin but not annihilation, a loss of all that humans think makes life worthwhile. It is not destruction of being but of well-being. Destruction ruins peace and safety. In our verse and in 2 Thessalonians 1:9, Paul uses "destruction" for ushering in the Day of the Lord. Destruction will come suddenly. God's wrath will come to the world when they least expect it.

Operating under the myth that they have come to a place of "peace and safety," humans will suddenly face "destruction." This destruction "comes upon" them. The words "come upon" mean to stand over, to set upon. The idea may be that this destruction is at hand but has not fully arrived. Destruction is near, imminent, approaching and impending.

as labor pains upon a pregnant woman.

Destruction will come upon the world like pangs of a pregnant woman giving birth. The idea is that this is great pain. Calamities will come upon men in Day of the Lord. When the Day of the Lord comes, the world will be pregnant with pain.

And they shall not escape

No one will be able to escape judgment in the Day of the Lord. The word "escape" means to flee out of a place. No one will escape the

judgment of God. They will find no safety in flight. There is no place to go. There is no refuge from God.

The word "not" is strong in the Greek so to flee will be futile. There is no way to avoid God's judgment. They can no more escape destruction any more than a pregnant woman can escape the pain of delivering her child.

Jesus warned us that people would not listen to warnings of the Day of the Lord (Matthew 24:34). We have a warning of prophetic pain in this passage. The coming Day of the Lord will be terrible for those without Christ.

Principle

Non-Christians live under the delusion that man by man's means will give them peace and safety.

Application

In the Tribulation, the world will be shocked at the instability of human answers. Humanism, not humanitarianism, is the idea that man can get along without God. Man can find answers in himself. He does not need God. "The idea of God is for the feeble-minded and for those who need a crutch to lean upon. We know how to control our destiny. We know how to solve the world's problems without God. We do not need Jesus Christ to save us from our sins. All we need to do is believe in ourselves." Man lulls himself to sleep with these delusions.

About the time that man comes to a place of complete confidence in himself, a fancied fool's paradise, then all his ideas for peace and safety come crashing down in complete destruction. They will face judgment of God and that without escape.

All of this stands in diametrically opposed to the Rapture. Christ will catch Christians up and away from this destruction (4:13-18).

1 Thessalonians 5:4

"But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief"

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But you, brethren,

Christians stand in stark contrast to those without Christ [the "they" of verse 3]. The coming Day of the Lord will not surprise them.

are not in darkness,

Paul previously told the Thessalonians about the coming Day of the Lord so they were not in the dark about that day. God takes Christians into His confidence about future things. Non-Christians live in deluded darkness about that day.

so that this Day

Christians will not participate in the beginning of the Day of the Lord, the Tribulation (5:9-10).

should overtake you as a thief

The word "overtake" properly signifies to lay hold of; then, to lay hold of so as to possess as one's own, to appropriate, apprehend, overtake. Jesus will have already raptured the church by the Day of the Lord (4:13-18). That is why this day will not overtake them.

"Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial [the seven year Tribulation] which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth" (Revelation 3:10).

Principle

God discriminates between what He does with believers and non-believers.

Application

God always makes a distinction between His people and the non-Christian. We cannot emphasize this distinction too strongly. God will translate the Christian to heaven at the Rapture. God will leave non-Christians on earth to go into the Day of the Lord.

The children of the Light have knowledge about the coming dark day. They are in the light about God's purpose.

The Day of the Lord is when the Lord returns to earth in great glory to judge the world. He will

make things right in that day. First, He will bring great judgment on the earth during the Tribulation. Then, in His Second Coming, He will come back with the saints to establish His Kingdom on earth for 1,000 years. The Day of the Lord includes both the Tribulation and Kingdom.

"...and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed" (2 Thessalonians 1:7-10).

1 Thessalonians 5:5

"You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness"

You are all sons of light and sons of the day.

Note that Paul does not say, "You are all sons in light and sons in the day" but "of the light" and "of the day." The issue is not where they are but who they are. It is not a matter of environment but of origin and source. The Christian lives in the orb of light and day. Status as sons of light and of the day carries privilege.

"Sons of light" denotes that a person partakes of and possesses the character of his origin or derivation just as a child takes after his parent. God characterizes sons of light as to their nature. Christians are inevitably light. Sons of light are also sons of day when light rules supreme.

God deems "all" Christians as light, not just some.

We are not of the night nor of darkness

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The coming Day of the Lord is a day of darkness, a day of wrath. Christians will not participate in that day.

Paul changes from "you" to "we." We were sons of the night and darkness.

Principle

Christians are inevitably light.

Application

Regardless of the state of the Christian, he is the personal responsibility of the Lord Jesus Christ. Every Christian is a personal representative of the Lord Jesus on earth. We are here for the purpose of glorifying Him through the witness of our life and lips. Every believer is in full-time service, a priest of the Lord Jesus. We are here to represent the Lord Jesus.

We might say, "I have failed Him and do not deserve to serve Him." However, we represent Him for good or bad. We remain His ambassadors here. We are lights in the world (Matthew 5:14) because He is the "light of the world" (John 1:1-9; 8:12; 9:5). Jesus was the light as long as He was on the earth.

"...that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world..." (Philippians 2:15).

Many Christians do not give out very much light. That is why the world is so dark.

"For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light..." (Ephesians 5:8).

God illumines Christians. Some of us give out more light than others. Christians are lighthouses that war against of the shoals of hell and shine light on eternal life.

1 Thessalonians 5:6

"Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober"

Paul now turns to the practical implications of the day of the Lord.

Therefore

Now we come to the punch line for prophecy. The word "therefore" draws an emphatic, inescapable conclusion to the doctrine of the teaching on the coming Day of the Lord. Paul draws the upshot of this truth to our personal lives. It is out of character for the believer to live in the night (5:5) because darkness is foreign to his character.

Paul now gives a number of directives to the believers in Thessalonica that the Holy Spirit intends for us today.

let us not sleep,

The first exhortation of how a believer should carry himself is to stay awake spiritually. "Sleep" here refers to carnal indifference to spiritual things by believers (Ephesians 5:14; 1 Thessalonians 5:6). This is a condition of insensibility to God's values.

as others do,

The "others" are those who do not know the Lord (4:13). They do not have a single ray of light from the Lord to beckon them on. They live their lives in hopeless despair and indulgence. They live as if Christ will never return and that they will never experience the awful day of wrath. Like the foolish virgins of Jesus' parable they sleep in spiritual unpreparedness (Matthew 25:5). They are indifferent due to stupor and sloth of sin.

Principle

Staying alert to prophecy enables Christians to stay spiritually alert.

Application

Carnal Christians are usually dull to prophetic things. They show little interest in things to come. However, the Bible has much to say about the correlation between prophecy and godly living. We cannot help but be sensitive to God's values when we anticipate what God is going to do in the future.

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but let us watch

Paul sets "watch" in contrast to "sleep." "Watch" signifies not simply absence of spiritual sleep but a determination to keep awake spiritually. Instead of indifference to spiritual things, the believer should vigilantly stay alert to God's plan. Those who fail to watch will suffer loss (1 Corinthians 3:15; 9:27; 2 Corinthians 5:10). Like a sentinel, Christians are to be on alert. Determined wakefulness alerts us to the dangers and urgency of God's plan.

"Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong" (1 Corinthians 16:13).

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

Principle

Determination to stay on top of prophecy will impact our spiritual lives.

Application

The antithesis to spiritual stupor is a spiritual determination to stay in tune with God's plan for the future. Christians should be fully awake to the dulling effects of immorality, indulgence, carnality, corruption and covetousness of a dying, God-defying age. They refuse to succumb to the opiate of materialism.

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8).

and be sober

Spiritual apathy to God's program for the future will bring spiritual instability. The idea of "sober" is to be free from excess and imprudence. This well-balanced and self-controlled person is circumspect about God's viewpoint on life. A sober person refrains from carnality. When it comes to spiritual things, a believer must be in control of his thought processes and freedom from irrational thinking. Self-control is at the core of spiritual strength. Christians need to know how to restrain and moderate themselves.

"But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfil your ministry" (2 Timothy 4:5).

Christians should never lose sight of God's prophetic program but should live in the light of the reality of what God is doing in the world. Satanic movements and influences do not seduce a sober-oriented believer.

Spiritual poise refuses to be rattled by a unsteady age fast getting out of control. This is the sane perspective of those not clouded by scholarly rationalism, theological compromise or worldly orthodoxy. Many Christians today buy into the world system. They believe they can fulfil themselves by self-indulgence.

Principle

Spiritual-minded believers maintain a sane viewpoint on life.

Application

Pseudo security of spiritual sloth will put us in danger. Be on guard against spiritual indifference. A believer who has the viewpoint of God on prophecy has a sane outlook on the future. He knows that God has a plan. He knows everything is in control.

God expects believers to behave in keeping with their prerogatives and status as Christians. God gives to us special revelation about the Rapture and the Day of the Lord in the Bible. Prophecy is not for the carnal or curious. All prophecy has a practical, spiritual lesson to teach.

1 Thessalonians 5:7

"For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night"

Watching God's prophetic program is no mysterious or obscure truth (5:6). It is profound because it is so simple. As a universal principle, it is evident in the everyday life of men as we seen in this verse.

For those who sleep, sleep at night,

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The sleepers here are those without Christ. Sleeping by day was a sign of great laziness in the first century. Non-Christians are night people. They live in the dark.

and those who get drunk are drunk at night

Both sleepers and drunkards operate in the night because of shame. They are people of the dark.

Christians are people of the day, not night people. Our behaviour bears the light of day. Therefore, the Christian must stay alert to God's program. The Christian anticipates what God will do in the Rapture and the Day of the Lord.

Principle

Believers must orient to God's prophetic program.

Application

Non-Christians have a commonality. They are night people. Operating in the night is a natural analogy to parallel spiritual truth. Only with the exception of those who throw away all decency to the winds choose to carouse by daylight (2 Peter 2:13). Those without Christ are nightlife people. They may not actually go to all the parties but their hearts do.

Night people will enter the Day of the Lord, a day of darkness. The church will not go into that day. The believer must orient to his own dispensation, a day of light. He expects the Rapture and the coming Day of the Lord. The very fact that the Christian is of the day, in the nature of the case, compels him to be sober, to maintain a cool and collected attitude so that he stands on guard in a wicked world.

1 Thessalonians 5:8

"But let us who are of the day be sober,
putting on the breastplate of faith and love,
and as a helmet the hope of salvation"

Paul now introduces the metaphor of the armor of a soldier to establish the believer's spiritual

armor (Romans 13:12; Ephesians 6:10-18; 1 Timothy 6:12; 2 Timothy 2:3-4; 4:7).

But let us who are of the day be sober,

Paul appeals to the Thessalonians on the basis that they are "of the day." Christians live according to the norms of the Christian day, not the Devil's night.

The idea of "sober" here refers to spiritual stability. Paul repeats this idea for emphasis (5:6), not for padding. Being of the day is not enough for Christians to withstand darkness. They must understand the importance of having a cool and collected attitude toward temptation. Being "sober" has nothing to do with being gloomy and sad. There is nothing in the Bible against humor.

putting on

Christians must don their spiritual armor. The words "putting on" are the normal words for attiring oneself with clothes. If we are going to institute stability into our lives, we must put on our spiritual armor. God will not do this for us. This is our responsibility.

the breastplate of faith and love,

Paul argues for putting on two pieces of armor in particular: the breastplate and helmet. The "breastplate" consists of two parts in front and back, that protect the body on both sides, from the neck to the middle of the body. This piece of armor protects the chest against blows and arrows. In ancient times the breastplate covered a soldier's vital organs. The modern-day equivalent is the bulletproof vest.

Paul's breastplate has two features: faith and love. "Faith" and "love" may allude to the two parts of the breastplate. The first piece of armor is the faith that protects the affections or heart. Unbelief strikes hardest at the heart, so Paul mentions it first. The downfall of those without Christ is that they "believed not the truth" (2 Thessalonians 2:12). If we live by faith, this will keep us "sober" -- spiritually stable in spiritual war. Faith will enable us to

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stand against those who would undermine what we believe.

The other side of the breastplate is love. God pronounces a curse on those without Christ, because they love not the Lord (1 Corinthians 16:22). Believers, on the other hand, have a very special reward because they love Christ's appearing (2 Timothy 4:8). A heart full of love will arm us against broken relationships. It will stabilize relationships and promote accountability, thus reducing the chances that people will steer into apostasy.

"And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light" (Romans 13:11-12).

Principle

God provides two pieces of spiritual armor to protect us vertically and horizontally.

Application

Faith and love protect believers against vertical problems and horizontal problems. Faith protects our ability to trust God when we're in difficulty. Love protects our relationships. If we trust God, we will love people. These two graces will enable us to fortify ourselves in the Christian life. Faith and love are our armor against satanic influences.

and as a helmet the hope of salvation

The protective armor for the head is the "helmet." This helmet is the hope of salvation. The lost have no such covering. Our hope is in the coming of the Lord Jesus at the Rapture for the church.

Those without Christ have no hope, but believers look forward with anticipation to the blessed hope, the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13). This is the hope directed to ultimate salvation.

"Hope" does not mean that Christians simply yearn for eternal life. The Greek word "hope" does not carry the same meaning as the English. In English the word has the idea of a wish as in, "I hope it does not rain tomorrow for our picnic." The Greek word incorporates the idea of confidence in God's promise.

"...in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began..." (Titus 1:2).

"...looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ..." (Titus 2:13).

"...that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:7).

"Salvation" here is that future deliverance for which believers hope at the coming of the Lord Jesus in the Rapture. Negatively, it means they will be rescued from the wrath of the Day of the Lord (1 Thessalonians 1:10; 5:9; 2 Thessalonians 1:8,9). Positively, it means the perfect redemption of their physical body (Romans 8:23) and their sanctification and glorification (1 John 3:2).

The hope of salvation in the future is the best safeguard for the here and now. No team ever gave up, no matter how bad the reverses, if they were confident of victory in the end. The hope of salvation is an indication of our eternal security in Christ.

"And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God..." (Ephesians 6:17).

God links these three pre-eminent graces of faith, hope and love in a number of places in the New Testament. They are a blessed trilogy (1 Thessalonians 1:3; 1 Corinthians 13:13).

Principle

Christians must give strict attention to donning themselves with the armor of faith, hope and love if they're going to have spiritual stability.

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Application

Both the breastplate and the helmet are defensive equipment. A Christian needs defensive equipment as well as offensive. To go to spiritual war without defense is to incur deep spiritual trouble. God designed a specific armor for spiritual battle (Ephesians 6:11). This is God's equipment but it is our responsibility to put on the gear.

The breastplate and helmet protect against harm to vital areas of the human body. Both the head and heart need protection against the assault of the enemy. That is why Christians must give strict attention to faith, love and hope.

Believers are not ignorant of prophetic issues. They understand their hope in Christ. They are confident about their marvelous future with the Lord. Nothing or no one can destroy that. If believers arm themselves in anticipation of spiritual war, they will prepare themselves for any eventuality.

1 Thessalonians 5:9

"For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ..."

For

Paul gives both a negative and a positive reason as a basis for the hope of salvation (5:8).

God did not appoint us to wrath,

First, the negative reason. Paul here alludes to God's sovereign placing of the church in a situation whereby she will not go through the Tribulation [the Day of the Lord].

"...and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come" (1 Thessalonians 1:10).

"Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole

world, to test those who dwell on the earth" (Revelation 3:10).

God constructed the last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation, chronologically. We can decipher the plain strokes of prophecy by studying the argument of the entire book. First, Revelation deals with the church, then the Tribulation, the Second Advent, the Millennium and finally the eternal state. Almost two-thirds of the book expounds the tribulation period.

but to obtain salvation

Secondly and positively, God appoints believers to "obtain salvation." The word "obtain" literally means to make around. The idea is the obtaining of something in its completeness. God obtained salvation in its completeness for us. It is our possession because God did everything to acquire it (Ephesians 1:14; 1 Peter 2:9). Because God acquired it, it is a complete and full salvation. He keeps it safe.

Note that the word is "obtain" and not "attain" salvation. We can do nothing to attain salvation. We rest on the finished work of Christ for that. Salvation is a gift with no strings attached. We cannot work for our salvation in order to merit brownie points with God.

through our Lord Jesus Christ

Jesus merited our salvation, not us. We owe our salvation to Him. We cannot acquire salvation for ourselves. Jesus died on our behalf. His work on the cross is the means of our salvation. Jesus is the only way of salvation. No one can do business with God apart from the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me'" (John 14:6).

"For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time..." (1 Timothy 2:5-6).

Satan invents religious works to appeal to the pride of people. People can do nothing to work

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for salvation. Religious works are a satanic imitation of salvation. This is difficult for most people to swallow, because they think that people must pay the price for eternal life. All of this is to blind people to the true way to Heaven -- believing in the death of Christ on the cross for our sins. Salvation is free, but not cheap. It cost the Lord Jesus His life on the cross.

Principle

God makes appointments for us in His eternal calendar.

Application

There are certain divine appointments that God ordains for every believer. There are appointments God does not want us to keep. One of them is the Tribulation. Christians in the church not will go through the Tribulation. God will rapture them first.

God does appoint trial for the believer's life. Sometimes He does this for remedial reasons. He does this to build our faith, but not for punishment. At other times, He does this for many other reasons such as glorifying Himself, building our character, witnessing to those without Christ and many other reasons.

"For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake..." (Philippians 1:29).

1 Thessalonians 5:10

"...who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him"

The foundation of our assurance before God is the person and work of Christ.

who died for us,

The phrase "who died for us" modifies "through our Lord Jesus Christ" of the previous verse. Paul points to the sweeping scope of salvation we have in Christ.

The word "for" in the phrase "for us" means in our behalf. Jesus died in our behalf on the cross. He suffered all that needs to be suffered for our sins.

that whether we wake or sleep,

The idea of "wake or sleep" in this context refers to spiritual vigilance versus spiritual softness (1 Thessalonians 5:6,7) rather than to life and death.

we should live together with Him

It makes no difference whether we are spiritual or carnal, the Lord will rapture us into His presence. This argues against the partial rapture theory that claims that God will translate only the spiritual at the Rapture. The Rapture will shock some carnal Christians living in sin, as God translates them to Heaven right in the act of their sin.

Principle

We owe our salvation exclusively to the death of Christ on the cross.

Application

God will not judge us, because He has already judged Christ for our sins. We owe our salvation exclusively to the work of Christ on the cross. Christians will never face the judgment of God.

"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. "Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live" (John 5:24-25).

"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit" (Romans 8:1).

1 Thessalonians 5:11

"Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing"

Therefore

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Paul appeals to the Thessalonians to comfort and edify one another because of the truths in verses one through eleven.

comfort each other

Christians are to care for the pain of other Christians (1 Thessalonians 4:18). God comforts us so that we might comfort others. This is a clear responsibility for every Christian.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

As Christians see the rapture coming, they are to exhort one another even more.

"...not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:25).

Principle

A responsibility of every Christian is to encourage other Christians.

Application

Many Christians come to church discouraged and defeated. Some come disenchanted about life. Our warm encouragement might be just what they need that day. When the pastor announces the benediction, do you charge for the nearest door or do you head for people who need encouragement?

The blessing of the Rapture is for every believer. This is a common blessing that all can share. This is a basis for mutual edification. Because of this hope, Christians will develop a strong sense of comfort.

and edify one another,

The word "edify" is literally to build a house, to erect a construction of some kind.

Metaphorically, it means to edify the character of believers by teaching or example. This word implies progress in developing an edification multiplex of strength in other Christians.

The words "one another" means one another of the same kind. Christians can build up other Christians because they have a common faith. Christians cannot build non-Christians.

just as you also are doing

The Thessalonians were already comforting and edifying one another, based on Paul's teaching the year before. Now they are to continue to do this, based on 1 Thessalonians. Truth needs reinforcement.

Principle

A responsibility of every Christian is to build up other Christians in the faith.

Application

God expects believers to care for other Christians. Cain's statement "Am I my brother's keeper?" is not Christian.

"Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another" (Romans 14:19).

Our responsibility to edify other Christians is not something we should take lightly. This passage indicates that we should "pursue" this. The idea is to hotly pursue the edification of others.

Christians must constantly reinforce the Word of God in each other. We do this through our pastor's teaching and through Bible studies and personal conversation. Christians who go to church strictly for themselves miss God's will. Church is a place where we both receive and give something.

"For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister" (Hebrews 6:10).

We do not want to be a weight; we want to be a wing. It is easy to tear others down. It is more

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difficult to build them up in their faith.
Criticism and slander tear others down.

1 Thessalonians 5:12

"And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you..."

We come now to the conclusion of 1 Thessalonians, which goes from verse 12 to 24. Paul changes the subject from prophesy to present issues in the church. This verse shows their accountability to leaders.

And we urge you, brethren,

Respect for church leadership is a matter of urgency. The word "urge" means to ask. Evidently, there was some disrespect for the leadership at Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 5:14) so Paul asks them kindly to respect their leaders. This is a plea, not a demand.

In his two epistles to the Thessalonians, Paul addresses them twenty-one times as "brethren." The emphasis is upon Christians in relationship to one another. The children of God need the family of God for mutual encouragement.

to recognize those

Church members are "to recognize" leadership in the local church. They are to value the role of leaders. Leadership deserves esteem, not for its own sake but for the sake of the work of Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:13). Church members must recognize the authority of leaders if the church is going to function properly.

Literally, the word "recognize" means to know. Know your leadership. Do not take them for granted. Respect them by yielding to their leadership.

Principle

Respect of church leadership is essential for the health of individual believers and the congregation as a whole.

Application

One of the greatest problems in the local church today is lack of good leadership. Aggressive leadership is a threat to many weak people in the local church. Some folks are quick to put the label of "autocrat" on leaders. It seems that churches do not have the capacity to recognize good leadership.

Many pastors are subject to the whim of a board that has little understanding of what makes a church tick. It is possible to read the Bible and not see the truths that are in it. It is possible to watch a professional golfer and not recognize the techniques he uses. It is possible to belong to a local church and not recognize what it takes to lead a congregation.

Church members who recognize the true character and position of their pastor see the spiritual gifts and graces that God gave their leader. It takes a follower with discernment to recognize God's leader. When a person becomes a member of a congregation, it takes a time of discerning transition to come to honor God's leader.

who labor among you,

There are three qualities in leaders the congregation is to "recognize."

The first feature is those "who labor among you." The Greek word indicates that the church leaders at Thessalonica labored to the point of exhaustion. Someone said about his pastor, "He is incomprehensible on Sunday and invisible during the week!" Most evangelical pastors I know work hard. They put in far more than forty hours a week. Jokes about working one hour a week are just not true. On the contrary, most pastors give many hours to their ministries.

Principle

Pastoring a local church is hard work.

Application

Pastoring a church is hard work. As a pastor, I spent at least twenty to thirty hours a week in study, not counting administrative duties and

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meetings. If you are thinking about the pastorate as a career, you need to evaluate that decision very carefully. It will take sacrifice and deep commitment to do the job properly. It will not be easy, but it will be the most gratifying career in the world.

Pastors see much heartache. They see the problems of people up close and personal. This is a grievous task, but a necessary part of their job. To watch people go through divorce, get on drugs and deal with alcohol, breaks the heart of pastors that care about people.

Pastors' main labor is in the Word and doctrine. Many pastors no longer labor in these areas. Many modern pastors labor in almost anything but the Bible and especially the theology that comes from the Bible. (1 Timothy 5:17).

and are over you

The second quality of a leader that the congregation is to respect is the ability to lead. The words "are over" mean to preside, rule. Literally, they mean to stand before, hence to lead, direct. The Greek word occurs eight times in the New Testament (Romans 12:8; 1 Timothy 3:4 [twice], 5:12; 5:17; Titus 3:8, 14). Church members have a responsibility to their spiritual leaders (Hebrews 13:17).

"...he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness" (Romans 12:8)

"...one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?)..." (1 Timothy 3:4-5).

"Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine" (1 Timothy 5:17).

God sovereignly designed the church so that it has hierarchical leadership. Most Christians think that they have no human spiritual

authority over them. The Bible clearly teaches that every believer is a priest equally with every other believer. Every Christian has equal access to God and stands perfect before God because of the work of Christ. That is one thing. However, the issue of leadership in the local church is another. God does not lead everyone into leadership of the local church. God endows certain people with leadership gifts to direct large groups of believers in doing the work of God. Those who have these gifts have commensurate authority to exercise those gifts.

in the Lord

This qualifying prepositional phrase is important in this discussion. Leadership of the local church does not extend beyond the local church. Some church leaders invade every aspect of their people's lives. National, state and city officials have authority over our function within society. The pastor has authority within the local church.

Leaders "in the Lord" come from the Lord. God appoints these leaders to lead. The church is to deem them as His leaders.

Principle

Congregations are to recognize the authority of their leadership in the local church.

Application

There has never been a church anywhere that amounted to anything where there was little leadership. A congregation that runs over leadership will never amount to much. Everyone in that church suffers from lack of leadership.

There is no such thing as a perfect church. We must respect leadership even if leadership lacks direction.

"Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct" (Hebrews 13:7).

"Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls,

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as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you" (Hebrews 13:17).

"Greet all those who rule over you, and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you" (Hebrews 13:24).

Many Christians have the attitude, "I will not submit to any human authority. I will not stand for it." This is an issue of pride. Eventually, these people make a mess of their lives. They will not take advice from anyone.

The Bible does not present the doctrine of the infallible pastor. Nor does the Bible set forth the idea of an infallible church. Both pastor and church can fall into error. But we believe in an infallible Bible.

and admonish you

The third type of leader we should respect is the one who has the ability to address problems in the local church. "Admonish" means to put in mind, warn, instruct. The idea is to provide instruction to correct behaviour and belief. This is to put good sense into the head of a person who lacks sense. The responsibility of the pastor is to put certain ideas into the minds of his people. He points out the foolishness of our generation. He directs the congregation to God's viewpoint about life.

A wise leader does not issue edicts from the pulpit or in small meetings. There is a difference between leadership by position and leadership by influence. There is a difference between dictating and indicating. Leaders are not "lords" (1 Peter 5:3) but their authority is "in the Lord."

Principle

Congregations have the responsibility to accept the authority of their pastors so that they will be open to accept the admonishment they need.

Application

The Bible clearly spells out the responsibilities of both pastor and people. A congregation has

the responsibility to obey their pastor. The pastor as the responsibility to "admonish" the congregation. What does this say about people who never commit to a local church?

In combat, if you do not know who your leaders are, you are in deep trouble. If you are in a local church without leadership, you will not win spiritual battles.

No one likes other human beings to admonish him. No leader of a local church has the right to admonish someone else based on his or her own authority. True admonishment must come from the Word of God if it is going to carry authority.

There is no authority in "It is my opinion that...." Our authority comes from "Thus says the Lord, chapter, book and verse." Admonishment is a thankless task. Most leaders do not enjoy this aspect of their responsibilities but they must be faithful to their Lord or the congregation will suffer.

"Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn [admonish] everyone night and day with tears" (Acts 20:31).

"Him we preach, warning [admonishing] every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus" (Colossians 1:28).

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Colossians 3:16).

1 Thessalonians 5:13

"...and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves"

and to esteem them

The word "esteem" primarily signifies to lead before the mind, guide the mind, then to account, consider, esteem. God wants us to hold

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a high view of church leadership. As church leaders are to rule over the congregation, so the congregation is to rule over their mind when it comes to esteeming it's leaders.

very highly

Congregations are to hold their leaders in high esteem. It is easier to hold leaders in lower esteem than higher. The words "very highly" mean exceeding abundantly. When it comes to esteeming church leadership, the Word of God uses superlative terms.

Principle

Christian leaders deserve superlative distinction for the sake of their office.

Application

Leadership has the right of superabundant respect. This is an area where we can legitimately go beyond measure to an extraordinary degree. "When it comes to respect for church leadership, go to an extraordinary degree." Congregations who hold leaders to this measure of degree will have dynamic ministries.

in love

The congregation has the responsibility to "love" their leaders. It is one thing to hold them in high regard but it is something else to "love" them.

Principle

It is not enough to respect our leaders; we must love them.

Application

It is not enough to respect your leaders; you must love them. We do not love our leaders when we criticize and malign them. "Roast preacher" for Sunday dinner is a direct violation of this passage. If we debunk and belittle our leaders then there is not much hope for that local church.

for their work's sake.

No doubt some leaders do not command respect but we must respect them for their "work's sake" – for their office. Respect and love for leaders are not for their sake personally but for their "work's sake."

Principle

Respect for local church leadership is important, not for the individual, but for the ministry of the church.

Application

There may be no earthly reason to respect your leader except for the purpose of what they do but we respect them for their ministry. The nature of the work of the local church should motivate us to love and respect leaders.

David would not malign King Saul although Saul was an unfaithful king. David understood something about the anointing of kings. Kings had the stamp of God's authority upon them. (Psalm 105:15).

No doubt, many abuse their authority in ministry today. There are biblical ways to deal with this.

Be at peace among yourselves

If a congregation respects and loves it's leaders, it's members will have "peace among" themselves. Dissension in local churches primarily revolves around disrespect and lack of love for leaders. Churches that respect their leaders are generally free from friction.

Peace in the church depends on our perspective of our leader's office. Peace permits Christians to get along with each other, to co-operate with one another.

"Salt is good, but if the salt loses its flavor, how will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another" (Mark 9:50).

Principle

Disagreements, quarrels and enmities in the church root themselves in disrespect and lack of love for leaders.

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Application

Are you carrying on a running feud with leaders in your church? Life is too short for that. This will tear your spiritual heart out. Do you avoid your pastor or some other leader? This will cast a pall on your church and inhibit the cause of Christ from moving forward.

"If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men" (Romans 12:18).

"Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another" (Romans 14:19).

A church not on speaking terms with its leadership will not have answered prayer, win people to Christ or build believers in the faith. These are the bald facts of a church in disarray. Bury the hatchet but not in your brother's back!

A critical, contemptuous and contentious attitude toward church leaders creates discord and disharmony. Peace within a congregation depends on respect for leadership. Each of us lists our leaders in some pecking order. We have an estimation of their leadership capacities in our mind. We know whether they have an adequate vision, strategy, and goals, or not. We know whether they will keep their word and follow through with their plans. Whatever our perspective on their ability, we give them respect for their office.

If you do not have confidence in your pastor, find a pastor that you can trust. Why undermine a ministry by criticizing its leadership? Get into a ministry where you can give your entire support. Consider giving your full support to your pastor, staff, board and leaders of your church. It is God's will. A united church has the greatest opportunity to move forward for the cause of Christ.

"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is For brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Psalm 133:1).

1 Thessalonians 5:14

"Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all"

This verse shows that there are different strokes for different folks. Different methods apply to different needs. Paul encourages us to use four different methods with four different people.

Now we exhort you, brethren,

The word "exhort" carries the idea of appeal to, urge. The entire church "brethren" is to accept the following challenges. Maintenance of order within the church is the responsibility of each person in the church. All believers must exercise a concern for the corporate family testimony.

Principle

No man is an island; we need each other.

Application

Will you come to the assistance of helping your church develop a corporate testimony? It is easy to find people who experience spiritual difficulties. You can be either a help or a hindrance.

"For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself" (Romans 14:7).

We deal with each person according to his individual need. We find the people catalogued in this verse in every church. People are people wherever you find them. There is no perfect church. If you move to another church, you take your problems with you.

"Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted" (Galatians 6:1).

"Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the

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error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins" (James 5:19-20).

warn those who are unruly,

Again, Paul uses the term "warn" meaning to put in mind, admonish. He issues a warning to the "unruly."

The word "unruly" signifies to not keep order. Secular Greek used this term in the military for someone who did not keep rank, an insubordinate. Certain church members did not keep rank in Thessalonica. There is a rank of leadership and these believers did not honor that rank. They carried an insubordinate spirit and knew little about the discipline of following leaders. Some Christians are lawless in the local church.

It is wrong to act disorderly in the local church so leaders in the local church must admonish people who disrupt unity in the church. The context implies that some Thessalonians did not respect their leadership (5:11-12). They were out of step with the vision and goals of the church.

Principle

It is the responsibility of the mature to admonish those who rebel against the leaders of the church.

Application

We need to warn those who break rank in the congregation. Leadership must deal with people out-of-step with the direction and vision of a local church. Individual church members must support their leadership in doing this. A good church member follows his or her leadership. Only a person who is in-step can set the pace for others!

Some people will not hold still for correction from others. They reject any authority over them. They emphasize the priesthood of the believer to the exclusion of God-given authority in the local church. If these people persist in breaking rank with the leaders of a local

church, we are to withdraw ourselves from them.

"But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you..." (2 Thessalonians 3:6-7).

If church leaders do not deal with those who gossip and meddle in other people's business, there will be trouble in that church. It matters not if they do not take kindly to warning. They are out-of-step and they could not care less what others think about it. They expect the detachment to get in step with them. They are not team players. They have the idea that "I am right and everyone else is wrong." To get back in step with a local church is a humbling experience. It means that we must concede that we were wrong.

It is easy to identify the person out of step in a parade. That person wants to think that everyone else is out of step. The unruly, who do not accept human authority, usually have a problem with God's authority in their lives. They know better than anyone else does. They will allow no one to rule them for they are a law unto themselves. These people warrant a warning.

comfort the fainthearted,

The word "comfort" means to soothe, console, encourage. The "fainthearted" need the stimulation of encouragement (2:11). "Comfort" comes from two Greek words: alongside, with and counsel, advise. Paul is saying, "Come along-side discouraged Christians and stimulate them to move on."

There are always those Christians who lose heart. They need special attention. A despondent person needs consolation. The word "fainthearted" comes from two words: small and soul. A "fainthearted" person is a

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small soul who discourages very easily. A discouraged person has limited motivation for living up to the goals of Christianity.

"The spirit of a man will sustain him in sickness, But who can bear a broken spirit?" (Proverbs 18:14)

"For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: 'dwell in the high and holy place, With him who has a contrite and humble spirit, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the contrite ones'" (Isaiah 57:15).

Principle

Downhearted people need encouragement.

Application

Fainthearted people require entirely different treatment than the "unruly." Downhearted people discourage quicker than others do. Such people are of such a makeup that it does not take much to dishearten them. They give up at almost any obstacle in their path. They will throw in the towel at the slightest provocation. They will quit on you. These types need encouragement from other Christians. They do not have the ability to live the Christian life independent from mature Christians.

Are you there for people discouraged from moving ahead in their Christian life? A person of encouragement helps people through bewildering troubles. They know what it means to possess staying strength so they can share it with others who do not have that strength.

"If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,' is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body,' is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. And if they were all one member, where would the body be? But now

indeed there are many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you'; nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you'" (1 Corinthians 12:15-21).

Our body is in accord with every individual part of the body. If we hit our finger with a hammer, our entire body feels it. Our eyes look to see the damage. Our other hand reaches for a bandage. That is joint effort. People in the family of God help each other when they are down.

Many people cave into their problems when God wants them to tackle their weakness. There are always those who want to quit and give up. They get their feelings injured easily. We handle them with kid gloves or they take offense at the smallest slight. Mature Christians will not allow them to wallow in sensitivity. They will encourage them to move out of this victim mentality.

The Christian life is full of obstacles and obstructions. We cannot give up at the least resistance. Things do not always go as we think they should. To assume that everything will always go right is a perfectionist mentality. Perfectionism is a self-defeating proposition. There is no such thing as perfection this side of Heaven. Perfectionism is a tool of Satan.

The Devil loves nothing more than to discourage a Christian because a discouraged Christian is a defeated Christian. The evil one will use criticism to discourage you. If politicians quit every time someone criticized them, we would not have any politicians left. If your pastor quit every time someone criticized him or her, you would have no pastor. No one can get through life without criticism. This is part and parcel of God's plan for our development. It is an over-simplification to quit. God wants us to take on the challenge and face our problems, not run from them.

uphold the weak,

The word "weak" comes from two words: without and strength. A weak person is without

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strength. These people are immature in their Christian walk.

The word "uphold" means to join with and to maintain loyalty to. "Weak" people need someone to come alongside and "uphold" them until they can mature in their faith. People have different weakness in the areas of sexual lust, financial integrity and vulnerability to criticism. Whatever the weakness, strong Christians are to move alongside them and stick to them like glue to carry them through their weakness.

Principle

Mature Christians are to be there for immature Christians.

Application

Some people neglect their spiritual lives, so mature believers should stir them to action. There are many Christians who are spiritually weak. Usually, these are people who do not know the principles of the Word of God so that they can apply them to their experience. These people are vulnerable to the slightest enticement. They will quickly wander off into compromise or sensual sins.

"For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Hebrews 5:12-14).

There is a proclivity to push the weak away from us in exasperation with their weakness. The mature Christian, however, holds up the weak until they can get on their feet. We do not denounce or desert them. Instead, they need mature Christians to help on the way. God places the strong in the church to help the weak. Maturity can sustain immaturity.

"We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves" (Romans 15:1).

If soldiers fall injured in war, they need someone to come alongside to give support until they can make it to the medic. Mature Christians can transform immature Christians. We have a responsibility to other members of the household of faith.

be patient

There are two main words for "patient" in the Greek. One means patience with circumstances and the other means patience with people. Our term is the second word – patience with people.

"Patient" comes from two Greek words: long and temper. This person has a lo-o-o-ong temper, not a short temper. A "patient" person can put up with people. They can "bear with" obnoxious people because they are long-tempered. They can exhibit patience in spite of difficult people. Patient people are slow to react because there is a delay mechanism built into their attitude.

"Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up..." (1 Corinthians 13:4).

"And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise" (Hebrew 6:15).

"Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain" (James 5:7).

with all

Everyone knows an annoying person. There is a tendency to show our ire toward these jerks. The difficulty with this attitude is that we are to be patient with "all" people, jerks included.

The word "with" means face-to-face and implies fellowship. It is easy to isolate people we do not like.

Principle

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All Christians need patience from every other Christian.

Application

Christians must not only bear with people they like but with people they do not like. We are to bear with other people but we must also forbear against reacting to them. Mature Christians do not retaliate against every wrong against them. Immature people feel that they must take affront at every injury against them. Mature people try to bring stability to every tense situation.

How do you react when someone provokes you? Mature people do not react in the face of provocation. Instead, even in the face of that aggravation, they are there for people, even maddening people. Not only do they not strike back but, to the contrary, help those who hurt them.

It is one thing to show a long temper to our families but it is something else to show it to "all men." We improve the situation with no exceptions. We do not render evil for evil but, on the contrary, blessing. The patient person goes the extra mile in the face of aggravation. We make the extra effort to help others. Patience is one thing that we cannot borrow from others. That is why we must not run short of it.

God does not ask us to agree with every cockeyed idea that comes down the pike from other Christians. We do not have to share others opinions, but we must free ourselves from resentment toward them. They may snub us, ignore us and treat us with disrespect but God expects us to carry a long temper toward them. We give them the benefit of the doubt. We construe what they say in the best light. This will prevent much heartache.

1 Thessalonians 5:15

"See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all"

See that

In this context, "see that" is a warning against the attitude of revenge. Not only must the church as a whole display longsuffering [5:14] to one another but also they must not pay back an injury with an injury.

no one renders evil for evil

The word "renders" signifies to give back, to restore, return, render what is due, to pay, give an account. The New Testament uses this term for paying back a financial debt. It also carries the bad sense to pay someone back for a wrong. The idea in this case is revenge or retaliation.

"Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men" (Romans 12:17).

"...not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing" (1 Peter 3:9).

to anyone,

Mature Christians do not retaliate against the Christian or the non-Christian, people we like or people do we do not like.

Immaturity repays evil with evil and good for good. Maturity repays good for evil. The mature person can place justice in the hands of God. It is the responsibility of mature leadership to repay good for evil.

Principle

Vengeance usurps the place of God.

Application

Some Christians will take nothing lying down. The law of the jungle is kill or be killed. "I will pay you back for this if it is the last thing I do." This attitude usurps the place of God. The sovereign execution of vengeance belongs to God.

"Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live

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peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord. Therefore

'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.'

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:17-21).

But always pursue what is good

Paul now gives the other side of the coin of retaliation. The word "but" is the "but" of strong contrast in the Greek. In contrast to retaliation "pursue whatever is intrinsically good [Greek] for the other person." "Instead of seeking to injure someone, put great effort in seeking their good."

The word "pursue" in this passage means to follow after, strive for, to pursue the "good." The idea is to put some earnestness in going after the good of other people. "Don't be half-hearted when doing them good." Paul used this term in Philippians.

"Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.... I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:12-14).

Paul uses "pursue" in the sense of a foot race in the above passage. "Run after the good. Don't stroll along after the good for you will not win the race for good. The goal is to win the race, not just participate in it. Chase it down, don't saunter along." This takes energy, intense effort, quickness and a definite goal.

The word "always" is an easy word to miss. The principle of pursuing the intrinsic good of other people is not something we do occasionally but something that we must "always" pursue. There are no exceptions.

both for yourselves and for all

The church at Thessalonica faced protracted persecution from the non-Christian community. It would be an easy reaction to retaliate against them but this would not be intrinsically good for the Christian or the non-Christian. Persecution can cause Christians to turn on one another as well.

Principle

God wants us to put full effort into helping people.

Application

Many of us put a half-hearted effort into what we do. This always yields half-hearted results. We will revert to type quickly if we are not earnest about pursuing the intrinsic good of other people. Our spiritual reflexes are so poor that if we do not train them to react when the time comes, they will revert to basic instinct. We respond in kind.

People can say some untrue and cruel things about us. This may stab us like a spear. It is not enough to stuff this in our soul. We must deal with it by "pursuing the good." We cannot be half-hearted about it or we will never make it. We will open our mouth and put our foot in it.

It is tempting to avenge ourselves. "If someone injures me, I injure them. After all, I am justified in doing this because they did it to me first." The heat of passion can get us into trouble but if we have the idea of pursuing the good no matter what happens to us then maturity will have the upper hand.

"But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, 'that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. 'For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 'And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? 'Therefore

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you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:44-48).

The law of the jungle is to give evil for evil. When we give evil for evil, we behave like animals. When we pay back evil for good, we function like the Devil. When we give good for evil we conduct ourselves like God.

None of us can get through life without a mountain of unfair treatment by others. How we respond to unfair treatment depends on whether we pursue the good.

"Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:

"Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth"; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls" (1 Peter 2:18-25).

Eternity is too long and life too short to get into a mode of revenge. If we move into this mode, it will sour our soul. Married folks get into verbal duels that end worse than the beginning. Harsh remarks bring harsh replies. If they do not have the maturity to stop this cycle, they will infuse attitudes of antipathy into their souls. They will begin to hold grudges. Grudge builds on grudge. Someone must become mature somewhere and break the deadlock.