

STUDIES IN I AND II THESSALONIANS

BY GLENN PEASE

INTRODUCTION

These messages are among the first I ever did in my first full time church. They were preached in the evening service. They do not have the depth that I would put into them were I doing this study today, but they are still relevant studies of this portion of what God has revealed to us through the Apostle Paul.

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1. THE MASTER MOTIVE Based on I Thess. 2:3-4

How should a Christian defend himself when his character and motives are attacked in an effort to belittle the Gospel which he proclaims? Paul had to face this question everywhere he went, for the Judaisers were hot on his trail trying to destroy the fruit of his labors. From the defensive nature of this chapter it is clear that they had arrived at Thessalonika as well, and they were trying to discredit the whole revival experience. You can imagine the subtle attacks they would use to undermine these new converts and cause them to question.

They would say something like, “O you say that Paul was the man who got this new movement going. Isn’t he the man with the prison record going around stirring up trouble everywhere? He is a brave man doing what he is doing, but then a man would do almost anything if there is enough money in it. Just get a few good speeches together and you can make a mint feeding people fancy ideas about religion. I wouldn’t mind starting my own religion either if I was free, like Paul, to be able to hit and run.” Others would be far less subtle, and they would just accuse Paul outright of being a religious racketeer out to get all he could from anyone sucker enough to fall

for his deception.

We need to keep in mind that this was a new thing. Paul appeared on the scene with the Gospel. They believed and then Paul had to move on, and they had no Bible or long history to fall back on. Attacks like this would be serious. Paul was worried about how they would hold out under tribulation and these attacks on the one who brought them the Gospel. In this chapter we see him defending himself, and we want to look at the two fold approach he uses in his defense.

I. HE REJECTS THE FALSE CHARGES.

Paul just flatly rejects any such charges that he was trying to trick them with impure motives. Peter likewise had to defend himself as he wrote, “We have not followed cunningly devised fables.” Men do not go around defending themselves unless there is an attack on them, and so these verses reveal the constant battle the Apostles had with public relations. This has been a major area of conflict through the ages. Christian schools and organizations need public relations offices constantly keeping people informed that the charges against them are false.

In Paul’s day many false prophets were already active, and as things went on they got worse. John later says that anti-Christ is even now already at work in our midst. In such a situation you have counterfeits at large that men can point to as examples of falsehood and deceit. Paul could do what many evangelists since could not do. The whole profession of evangelism has been given a black eye by the false and deceitful methods by which some get decisions. Paul used no such methods, and yet he was of the greatest success. He respected people and did not take them for fools. There were no tricks when Paul preached. He presented the Gospel in its simplicity.

We never read of Paul trying to get hands up and then pressuring those people to come forward. Paul believed in the sovereignty of God when it comes to evangelism. You do your best and let the Holy Spirit do the rest. This is why I appreciate Billy Graham. He gives the message and offers those who want to receive Christ the opportunity to come. There are no tricks or pressure. If God does not move them there is no point in trying to get a decision. It is only a Spirit induced decision that is a saving decision. Knowing that, Paul avoided all appearances of evil. He could say in perfect confidence that he has rejected all deceit.

Even if deceit can sometimes get more results, honest dependance upon God is the only way to go. You might wonder about what practical value this is to us. I can't speak for everyone, but my experience has been that a good many Christians feel that the end justifies the means. They feel that when it comes to getting a person to decide for Christ anything goes. I use to think it was very clever of a student I knew to think up unique ways of witnessing. He would go into a restaurant and sit down by some man. Then he would have a friend come in and sit by him. He would begin to witness to his friend as if he was a stranger, and do so loud enough to make sure the other man heard.

Such a method is highly unlikely to be effective, and the whole thing is based on deceit and the philosophy that the end justifies the means. Since the motive is worthy, it is felt that deception is legitimate. Scripture says this is not so. Such a method could possibly lead someone to respond to the Gospel, but they would find out that they were involved in a plan of deception, and they or friends would accuse us of being fanatics and deceivers. We would be in a position of being tempted to carry on further deception, or admit it and give the unsaved ground to stand on in their charges. We would leave the convert in a very troubled and dangerous state.

Deception is of the devil, and it cannot play a part in the communication of the Gospel. Paul knew it from the start, and with a clear conscience before God he could write to his converts and reject all such charges as false. His attitude was like that of the noble who was asked by his King to practice deceit. His response was, “O King! Believe me, rather much would I fall by virtue than rise by guilt to certain victory.”

II. HE REVEALS HIS TRUE MOTIVE.

We sometimes think we are pretty sharp with all our studies in modern psychology. We have learned that the best way to treat a so-called bad boy, or anyone who has rebelled against the standards imposed on him, is to take him into your fellowship and confidence and give him responsibility. God, of course, did not need to wait for modern psychology to discover this before He put it into practice. He took the man who was out to crush the advance of His kingdom and made him chief ambassador for His kingdom. He entrusted Paul with the Gospel. He went from antagonist to ambassador, from enemy to emissary, from persecutor to preacher. God not only gives us the gift of salvation, but He trusts us to carry the gift to others. This is an amazing fact, for every time a person puts their trust in Christ, Christ puts His trust in them. He trusts them to share the good news with others.

There is a story that Jesus was asked before His ascension, “What are your plans for the spread of the Gospel?” “I shall leave that to my disciples.” “But what if they fail you?” “I have no other plans.” Our part in God’s plan is tremendous. He intrusts us with the Gospel, and if we don’t circulate it, it will be of no more value to others than is the misers treasure. We are not to be Gospel collectors, but Gospel communicators. We are not to be Gospel misers, but Gospel messengers. How can others hear it if we have it

but hoard it?

The Gospel falls into Aristotle's category of the undiminished giver. It is of such a character that the more you give it away the more you have. Anything material I would share with others would leave me with less, but to share ideas and truths not only leaves my stock undiminished, but increases their strength by repetition. For example, I have an idea right now, and I am the only one here with it. I will share it with you. In verse 4 Paul uses the plural we. He is taking Silas and Timothy in with himself, and by implication includes all of us who have received the Gospel. I have now multiplied that idea by as many as are here, but I still have all of it, and plus it has been more deeply impressed on me for having shared it.

Paul says that God trusted us with the Gospel, and we are honoring that trust when we speak it and share it. The reason we do not use any deceitful means to get it across is that our own master motive is to please God. Even success through deceit would not be pleasing to God. Here is the motive that explains the conduct of Paul, and of all who give their lives to be used for His glory. Someone wrote,

**Not for the eyes of men may this day's work be done,
But unto thee, O God, that with the setting sun,
My heart may know the matchless prize
Of such approval in your eyes.**

With this as a driving motivation, life takes on a consistency and unity that nothing else can produce. One author said, "We found out to our grief that in a world in which anything goes, everything is soon gone." When our master motive is to please God, then only that which is pleasing to Him is allowable. In verse 1 and 2 we see that Paul received courage from God for communicating

the Gospel, and now we see that the means must correspond with that end. Not only is it important to reach people, it is also important how to do it, for that how must be pleasing to God.

It is a worthy end to want to support your family, but to sell dope as a means to attain that end is so unworthy of the end that the whole plan is evil. It is having this master motive of Paul of desiring in all that we do to please God that keeps our means worthy of the ends we seek. Without it we cannot tell a Christian from a non-Christian, for many non-Christians do good deeds, but they have no desire to please God necessarily. Their master motive is to please self. If the Christian does not have the master motive of pleasing God he may do much good, but the motive is selfish. T. S. Elliot said, “The last temptation is the greatest treason, to do the right deed for the wrong reason.”

Most of our problems as Christians are related to our motives. The reason we often face frustration and anxiety, just as the world does, its because we lack a definite conscious of just what we are doing and why. If things don’t go well, we feel like giving up, but Paul didn’t, and neither would we if we were constantly conscious that the purpose for which we do anything is primarily to please God. It pleases God that we study His Word, and so we should be doing so constantly, even if it is difficult, and we do not always grasp its meaning.

This is the secret of Paul’s constant drive, for even with all of his trials and frustrations, he could rejoice in the Lord always because his master motive was to please God. George A. Coe in his book *The Motives Of Men* wrote, “The disillusionment that creeps over 20th century man concerns, not the ability of the universe to supply what he desires, but his own capacity for really desiring anything greatly significant.” Only the person with a master motive greater than life itself can find ultimate satisfaction and purpose to

life. That is why there is no greater goal for the Christian than to follow Paul in developing his motive for living as our master motive.

2. AN APOSTOLIC ATTITUDE Based on I Thess. 2:5-6

We have all heard it said that it doesn't make any difference what you believe as long as you are sincere. This is true only if what you are talking about doesn't make any difference. If you sincerely believe that white potatoes are better for you than red potatoes it will not make any great difference if you are right or wrong. If, however, you are as equally sincere in your belief that rotten potatoes are as good for you as fresh ones, it can have a great deal of difference on your health. Whether corn or wheat would be the best crop to raise can be debated by farmers, and men can have sincere convictions either way, but when it comes to the matter of the best time to plant-January or April-one might be sincere in his conviction that January is best, but the consequences will be tragic. The point is, sincerity is only enough when the question involved has no great significance one way or the other. Are dogs or cats the best pets is a good example.

If the consequences of our belief are important it is not enough to be sincere. We must also be right or suffer the consequences. This conclusion holds true on the natural level, and is even more significant in the realm of the spiritual. No body with an ounce of conviction can believe that sincerity is adequate in our theological beliefs unless he is willing to conclude that the consequences of being wrong are insignificant. In other words, are theological issues on the same level as opinions about red and white potatoes?

As evangelicals we are ready to say in a moment that sincerity is not enough, for you can be sincerely wrong. We are so on the defensive against the idea that sincerity is enough that we neglect the positive truth that though it is not enough, it is still essential. Water is not enough to get your clothes clean, but we do not ignore it on that account. We just add soap. Sincerity is not enough to save us, but salvation without sincerity is just as inconceivable. Sincerity means being in reality what one appears to be. It means to be genuine and honest in intention. It is the opposite of hypocrisy.

Paul in his defense to the Thessalonians stresses the fact of his sincerity in all areas of his conduct among them. Paul would not have deified sincerity as Lady Chudleigh did when she wrote,

**Sincerity's my chief delight;
The darling pleasure of the mind;
Oh, that I could to her invite,
All the whole race of human kind;
Take her, mortals, she's worth more than all your glory,
All your fame,
Then all your glittering boasted store,
Then all the things that you can name.
She'll with her bring a joy divine,
All that's good, and all that's fine.**

Paul would not give sincerity the place of the Savior, but he would, no doubt agree with Mencius who said, "There is no greater delight than to be conscious of sincerity on self-examination." Paul does just that as he reviews his life before them and notes 3 specific areas in which sincerity characterized him.

I. IN THE MATTER OF SPEECH. v. 5

Almost every man of literature from the ancient Greeks on down

had something to say about the dangers of flattery. The power of words does not depend upon their truth. There is great power in falsehood when that falsehood is pleasing, or in accord with what people want to hear. Hitler proved that a big lie told often enough can sway a nation. Flattery played a part in the first sin, for Satan appealed to Eve's pride by suggesting, "Surely you realize you are capable of being like God, knowing good and evil. Such capacity should not be held back. Exert yourself and become the great one that you are." Eve was the first, but far from the last, to be flattered into thinking they could disobey God and come out on top.

Man is an easy target for flattery. Robert McCracken says there are praise records that tell you how good you are. Man has such a craving for acceptance and praise that he is capable of believing anything good said about him. He does not like flattery as such, but he likes to believe that what is said about him is simply stating the facts. The Roman Emperor's stated Emperor worship just to unite the people, but some of them got to the point where they believed they deserved worship. The power of positive thinking works even if it is not true. Because this is the case, it is a powerful means of persuasion for gaining allegiance.

Paul could have come to the Thessalonians and gained a greater following if he had flattered the people and told them how truly pious they were, and that God would certainly welcome such good people as themselves. But he appeals to their memory and reminds them that he said no such thing. The implication is that Paul preached that all were sinners, were lost and the only hope was in Christ who was crucified and risen again. There was no flattery, but just the pure Gospel that flowed from his tongue. He never used flattery in his teaching. It can never be a proper means for any goal in the Christian life, for it means false, and insincere praise. There is a true praise, and we ought to exercise it constantly. We ought to express appreciation, but we must avoid trying to build the kingdom

of God by use of insincere speech.

What Shakespeare said of a character in Two Gentlemen Of Verona fits Paul perfectly, and we need to pray that we fit this description as well.

**“His words are bonds, his oaths are oracles;
His love sincere, his thoughts immaculate;
His tears pure messengers sent from his heart;
His heart as far from fraud, as heaven from earth.**

II. IN THE MATTER OF SUPPORT.

For Paul, Christianity made good armor, but not to be used as a cloak. The idea of the cloak gives the thought of insincerity, or of seeming one thing on the outside, but underneath the facade, something different. Let us remember that a number of the upper class received Christ at Thessalonika, and so the standard charge of Paul’s enemies in such a situation would naturally be that he comes with all this sweet talk of good news because he has an eye on your purse strings. He is out finding lost sheep alright, and the woollier the better, for under his cloak he carries his shears.

This is as contemporary as today’s paper. You hear every once in a while of someone in the church who runs away with all the funds, or that people are threatened into giving. We must be prepared to face such stories with an answer. We can point out that it is never proper to judge anything by a poor example. You do not judge a rose by a wilted one, or the taste of milk from a sour carton. The folly of men does not take God by surprise. He knew the corruptions that would enter the church, and that is why He warned in II Peter 2:1-3: “But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign

Lord who bought them-bringing swift destruction on themselves. Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.”

Covetousness and greed cover over with flattering words would play a large part in the history of the church, and the very fact that it was known from the start assures us that we need not be shocked, for we are not ignorant of Satan’s devices. This makes it all the more important that we be completely sincere in all matters of financial support. Billy Graham recognizes this. All evangelists have been accused of making a haul by preaching the Gospel, and so he publishes his income in the papers of the cities where he has crusades. He follows Paul’s example of complete honesty in avoiding all appearance of evil.

There is a fable of the fox who was flattering the crow for her lovely singing because he wanted what she held in her mouth. If Christians cannot make it plain that this is not our motive in trying to reach people, we shall fail. The world has evidence galore that this is the motive of so many who approach them, and so only honest and open sincerity can convince them that this is not our motive. Only the sincere Christian really has an offer of this kind to the world. There are motives of greed to one degree or another in every appeal that comes to men. Even the salesman who has a good product and knows it will be for your benefit has another motive besides concern for you, and that is that there will be gain for himself. But we have the privilege of offering good news with the power to save without asking any price.

The tragedy of many money making schemes in the churches is not only that they brainwash people into thinking that the end justifies the means, but they also convince the world that the end,

which is salvation, is not free at all, and like everything else it is going to cost you. What the world hears is not justification by faith alone, but justification by faith, plus cash, and especially the cash. Paul avoided all possibility of such charges, even if he had to work nights to make a living. He wrote in Acts 20:33, "I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel." In II Cor. 12:14 he wrote, "I will not be burdensome to you, for I seek not yours, but you..." His complete sincerity in all matters of speech and support was the Apostle's attitude, and it must be ours.

III. IN THE MATTER OF SUCCESS.

Success never went to Paul's head. He could have stood on his dignity as an Apostle, and from a pedestal of superiority thrown his weight around, but he never did. Here again we see Paul's absolute sincerity, for he knew he only had the position he did by the grace of God. He was the chief of sinners in his own eyes, and honesty with the facts demanded that he not use his position of power for self-advancement.

It was said of Leonard Bacon of Yale, "Dr. Bacon's idea of heaven is a great debate in which Dr. Bacon had the floor." The same motives that operate in Hollywood often operate in the church, and unless a Christian is characterized by the attitude of sincerity in all that he does, he can forget he is a servant, and begin to think he has some claim to honor.

Goodspeed translated, "We might have stood on our dignity." Luccock wrote, "More institutions have died of dignity than for any other cause. Or, if they have not actually died, they have been so crumpled up with rheumatism that they could not get up from an invalid's chair. The church has had tragic seizures of the paralysis of dignity, when she has been unable to rise, gird herself, take a towel like her master, and follow him in lowly service."

Success is dangerous to the insincere person, for he cannot say with Paul that to please God is his highest motive, or that he seeks not the glory of men. The danger is that his dignity will lead to the decay of his devotion to Christ, and self will again take the throne. Many of the problems in the Christian life, and in the relationship of the Christian with the world would be eliminated if the apostolic attitude of sincerity in all things became the attitude of all believers.

3. GOD'S GENTLEMAN Based on I Thess. 2:7

History is the record of the battle of competing ideas and philosophies that clash with one another in their effort to gain the allegiance of men. The whole world is under the pressure of such competing ideologies. Is theism or atheism the truth? Is liberalism or conservatism the way to go in politics and theology? The whole question of force or freedom is ever with us all the way from international relations to our own family relations. The question is, which is best, which is right, which is most effective in a given situation? Is it ruthless self-assertion or gentle self-sacrifice? Which is most effective in dealing with a nation you have defeated, or in dealing with a criminal or a person with anti-social behavior?

The natural tendency of man is to choose force, for any thing else is a sign of weakness. Peter was a good man, but he was persuaded that the sword was the best way to handle things in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus rebuked him and told him that those who lived by the sword will perish by the sword. Paul was a Pharisee of the Pharisees, and he was zealous for God. He was throughly convinced that force was the best policy. He persecuted and arrested Christians. He was involved in the stoning of Stephen. Paul received authority to do this, and he asserted that authority. Might is right was the philosophy controlling him, but he met a

greater master on that road to Damascus, and he received a new heart and new instructions. He was now given the authority to go to the Gentiles with the good news that Jesus Christ died for them, and if they would believe they could be released from the chains of sin and darkness. We want to look at the way in which Paul carried out these new orders for his life. In contrast to his old ways, we see him being God's gentleman for the Gentiles.

The first thing we notice in this statement is the contrast from what he was as a faithful Jew. Paul did not come to the Thessalonians with an army, and with a sword in hand. What has happened? Is Paul less zealous for Christ than he was when he was against Christ? Has he lost his zeal? No! He has gained a new and greater zeal and power, and it is the power of gentleness. He has discovered that you only win a person when you convince them, and not when you coerce them. Many have tried to force people into the kingdom of God, but it is folly, for it does not work. People only really become a part of the family of God by choosing to receive God's gift in Christ. You cannot force people to love Jesus.

Jesus had all power, and He sent disciples into all the world to teach and preach. Paul was under that same commission, but he was no longer to go with a sword of steel, but with the sword of speech. He was not to go with weapons to cut and blast, but with words to convince and bless. He was to go, not with soldiers to compel, but with the Spirit to convince. Paul was to enter the Gentile kingdom of darkness with the gentle weapon of light. Jesus, the captain of our salvation, holds us each responsible for the use of this weapon. He said, "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven." The Gospel is to spread by the power of gentleness and not force.

When the church has forgotten this, and began to use physical

force to compel people to believe, it became corrupted by paganism. Force has always failed to advance the faith, but love has never failed. This is a principle in history that the philosopher Locke observed as applying to all of men's efforts. He wrote, "Gentleness is far more successful in all its enterprises than violence; indeed, violence generally frustrates its own purpose, while gentleness scarcely ever fails." We see this principle illustrated in so many ways Western and gangster films. The bad guys are often defeated by their own greed for power and possessions. They double cross and betray one another. Little do the producers of these films realize that they are promoting the principles of God.

Paul and many others since have proven the same true: "Gentleness wins more hearts than sternness." George H. Colvert said, "The gentleman is a Christian product." The whole idea of persuading men and winning men by the gentle process of enlightenment and friendship is foreign to men outside of Christ. Force was everything in the ancient world, and still is in much of the world. The Auca Indians, for example, could not even conceive of such a thing before they came to know Christ. Force and the impulse to kill was their natural reaction to other people. Communism was devoid of gentleness. Forceful destruction of the enemy was the foundation of their philosophy. They learned that you can force people to do your will, but you can only win their love and loyalty when they are free to give it.

Napoleon was amazed at the fact that Jesus never used force to build His kingdom, and yet He had millions who would die for Him. Alexander the Great, the Caesars and himself lost all they had built by force, but Jesus has a kingdom that never ends, and keeps on growing through the power of love and freedom. Does this mean that Paul never exerted his authority? Not so, for he often did, and even with this church when he commanded them to not let those eat who were lazy and would not work. Paul could get tough, and he

was no weakling, but his basic attitude toward others was always gentleness and kindness.

Henry Martyn the famous missionary said, “The power of gentleness is irresistible.” Force is powerless against it, for all the power of Rome could not halt the unarmed army of Christians marching as to war, with only the cross of Jesus going on before. If the Christians would have taken the sword, they would have been crushed, but instead they loved their enemies, were kind to them, and they defeated their foes with love.

Paul stirred up a lot of trouble wherever he went, but he never hurt anyone. He never picked up stones or threw them back. He never used a weapon. When he made converts he did not treat them like a tyrant who had conquered them, but he was gentle and treated them like his own new born children. This was no easy task. These people were pagans, and they would be very ignorant of morality and Christian doctrine, and so it would take great patience. There would questions galore on superstitions, and there would be arguments about old beliefs that would lead to quarreling. We get something of the picture of what Paul went through by his counsel to Timothy in a similar situation.

Paul wrote in II Tim. 2:23-25, “Have nothing to do with stupid, senseless controversies: you know that they breed quarrels. And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to everyone, and apt teacher, forbearing, correcting his opponents with gentleness.” If a Christian wins an argument by being rude, he loses more than he gains, for though he wins the debate he loses his Christian testimony which is worth far more. Paul urges Titus to teach the Christians to be gentle in their relations with the world. In Titus 3:1-2 he writes, “Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for any honest work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect

courtesy toward all men.”

Where did Paul get this idea of gentleness being so basic in human relations? He tells us in II Cor. 10:1 where he writes, “I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ.” Jesus was called a friend of sinners because He could relate to the worst of men and women and treat them kindly. The great contrast in Paul’s life from being a zealous Jew using force to an even more zealous Christian out to spread the Gospel by gentleness came about because Christ dwelt within. Paul accepted the truth of Christ that only the Holy Spirit silently working in the heart can ever win a soul to Christ. Soul-winning is not by might or power. We don’t win people by overwhelming them, but we win as Christ did by letting His love, kindness and compassion or through our lives in gentleness. Mrs. C. M. Sawyer wrote,

**If a man thou wouldst redeem,
And lead a lost one back to God;
Wouldst thou a guardian angel seem
To one who long in guilt hath trod,
Go kindly to him—take his hand
With gentlest words within thine own,
And by his side a brother stand,
Till all the demons thou dethrone.**

This might seem superficial and sentimental, but when we are constrained as Paul was by the love of Christ, and seek to communicate the simple Gospel of Christ’s death and resurrection, we will discover it is the most potent force in life. I am more convinced every day that true power is in gentleness. Like the silent gentle rays of the sun are the most potent factors in natural life, so the gentle kindness of the Christian is the most potent factor in spreading the spiritual life.

In almost every case of a skeptic or hardened person I have talked to there is some point in their life where the church failed them. Christians were indifferent or cold toward their need, and this set them against Christ. I have seen it in a woman who told me that if some Christians would have stuck with her when she discovered her baby girl was mentally deficient she might have kept her faith, but they didn't. Several women have told me of attempts to seek Christian help when they had a deep need, but they were given a cold shoulder.

All of the common virtues of kindness seem so weak and inadequate, but people are always hungry to be accepted, and so the gentle virtues have a greater impact than we realize. Every person needs to be respected, and that needs to come through clearly when we relate to them. If they do not feel this, they will not be open to the Gospel. Medical missions are based on the philosophy that a man you have helped cure or save from some disease will have an open heart to what you say. Because he has benefitted by your compassion and skill he will be open to what you believe.

Paul faced a self-centered society, and though we may be on a higher level than those people of his day, we still live in a basically self-centered society. The theme is to assert yourself, and throw your weight around. The one time top play called Stop The World-I Want To Get Off is about a man who lived the self-centered life. In the end he wakes up to realize he has paid too high a cost and he sings, "What kind of fool am I who never fell in love? It seems that I am the only one that I have been thinking of." As servants of Christ we must love these kinds of people just as He did. It is only when we love them in their sin that we can love them out of their sin.

This must not be interpreted to mean that we approve of sin. Paul was forceful in his condemnation of the old life. Gentleness is not weakness. La Rochefoucauld said, "It is only people who possess

firmness who can possess true gentleness.” Paul was certain about God’s will, and so he could be truly gentle. It is only when we really believe in the power of Christ and the operation of the Holy Spirit that we can be gentle in our relationship with all men. It is lack of faith that drives people to harsh measures, and plans based on self-assertion. All coercion and pressure in winning men is based on self-will and not faith.

Emerson said, “We do not believe, or we forget, that the Holy Spirit came down, not in the shape of a vulture, but in the shape of a dove.” The dove is a symbol of gentleness, and the Holy Spirit works through gentleness in the world. He gains entrance into the sinner’s heart by the door of love, and not through the door of force. Shakespeare wrote in As You Like It, “Your gentleness shall force more than your force move us to gentleness.” Paul would agree and also say amen to that poet who wrote,

**Who misses or who wins the prize?
Go, lose or conquer as you can,
But if you fail, or if you rise,
Be each, pray God, a gentleman.**

4. BLAMELESS BEHAVIOR Based on I Thess. 2:8-12

These 5 verses conclude Paul’s defense of himself to the Thessalonians, and in them we see clearly that one of the basic secrets of success is to love your work. Paul’s work was reaching people with the Gospel and seeing them mature in the Christian life. He loved this work more than life itself. Paul was the servant of all, and that is why he was so great. He was saved to serve, and he served to save.

Oliver St. John Gogarty, the Irish poet, was an ear and throat specialist in his early days. When someone asked him why he left that profession to take up poetry he said, “I got tired of looking down people’s throats and listening to them say ah, and then looking into their ears.” H. Luccock said in response, “What did he expect? Did he imagine that in his service he would have an endless succession of fresh bewildering surprises?” Service can often be monotonous, and that is why Christian service calls for total commitment and self-sacrifice, for without it the frustrations force people to give up. We want to examine these verses and see what kept Paul on the path of blameless behavior in spite of all the problems he faced.

Verse 8: Paul’s love for these people was evident in his behavior, for he says he was willing to give himself to them. Paul had no cold impersonal presentation of the Gospel. He entered into it with his life. This is an amazing statement when he says not the Gospel of God only. What does he mean when he says the Gospel only? You mean there is more? Yes, there is, and there must be if the Gospel is to be effective. But what can you give more than the Gospel? You can give yourself. The Gospel costs you nothing. Freely you have received, and freely you are to give. But to give of yourself, and to give up what is yours will cost you something, and this is the plus factor of success. Being a Christian was no mere profession for Paul, but it was a passion.

Paul had no contract with God. He had no 40 hour week and retirement funds and health insurance. He had a message to proclaim, and he was constrained by the love of Christ to give himself completely to the task. Service that costs us nothing personally will likely bear little fruit.

Verse 9: Paul made a special effort not to be a burden to people. He was a burden bearer and not a burden bringer. He worked

nights so that he could spend the days preaching the Gospel. Fortunately he knew how to make tents. Every Jewish boy was taught a trade. Gamaliel said, "He that teacheth not his son a trade, doth the same as if he taught him to be a thief." Paul was taught a trade and he used it rather than seek support from his Gentile converts. He avoided all possibility of misunderstanding by offering the Gospel "Without money and without price."

The fact that Paul was so cautious about money and support in dealing with his converts indicates that tithing is a commitment of mature Christian responsibility. It is no part of the saving Gospel, and Paul did not mention the idea to these people. This is interesting because failure to follow Paul's wisdom has led to much superficial and materialistic Christianity. In my limited experience I have met a number of professing Christians who were fed up with the church because of its demands for money. What has happened is that these people were burdened with financial commitments to the church before they were spiritually mature and committed to Christ and the work of the church.

These people had no joy in giving because there was no sense of involvement and no sense of delight in sharing a common goal. Paul was more concerned about getting mature believers than in getting givers, for he knew that in the long run the mature believers would become the greatest givers. Failing to follow Paul's method has led many churches to produce flocks of discontented sheep who feel that the main reason for the existence of the church is to keep them sheered.

Verse 10: What a statement! No man would dare to make it unless it was true. Paul appeals to their memory, and to God also to bear witness. His behavior was holy, righteous and blameless. Paul never claimed to be perfect, and he admitted he had not yet attained, but was always pressing on. He makes it clear, however, that for all

practical purposes the Christian can live a blameless life before the world and fellow believers. Paul is not making himself a special case, for he uses the plural to include Timothy and Silas also.

Trapp wrote, “Happy is the man who can be acquitted by himself in private, in public by others, in both by God.” Here were three men who could take such a stand. What a powerful testimony they are to what Christ can do in us and through us if we are completely committed. F. B. Speakman, once pastor in Pittsburgh, said of a skeptical friend, “I often suspected that his only real difficulty with religion is that he has known too many clergymen too well. That can be a road block in any Pilgrim’s Progress.” Layman can be included also, for many Christians are convinced that the way to impress the unbeliever is to show him you can be just like him rather than showing him you can be what he cannot.

I saw this philosophy being worked out in action. I saw a Christian business man meet with a group of unemployed men, most of whom were not Christians. The leader began the meeting with a sincere prayer as the smoke from his cigarette rose with it. He then proceeded to show that Christians are not narrow minded sheltered people who don’t know how the world lives and talks. He proved it by introducing a curse word here and there, and making a specific effort at one point to use a violent expression. He justified this by referring to Samuel Shoemaker’s testimony that he did not want to go deep into heaven but to stay by the gate to help others in. When he finished that story he said he too wanted to stand near the gate. One of the skeptical men at my table said, “Don’t you think it would be better if he stood on the inside?” All of his buddies had a good laugh at that.

After the meeting I talked to some of these young men and it was made clear that non-Christians are not impressed at all when you show them you can be like them. Their whole problem in

believing is that they cannot see enough difference to convince them there is anything to it. They had no respect for that man who could pray to Christ one minute and then use foul language the next. Such behavior is not holy, and certainly not blameless. Jesus never hinted that conformity to any practice of the world would be effective in winning the world. He was holy, undefiled and separate from their behavior, even while he ate with sinners. He was the friend of sinners, and Paul followed him in that, but he proved that purity of life is the greatest power to persuade men.

Verse 11: Paul now refers to his fatherly concern for them. In verse 7 he referred to the gentle care of the mother, and now he refers to the father's guidance. A father exhorts his children. He gives guiding principles for life, and when the going gets tough he comforts and encourages the child to go on, even when the opposition is great. He lays before them their responsibility and obligation before God to stand fast.

He stresses that he dealt with each of them as a father. The idea here is of individual concern. Paul did not treat people on a package deal basis. Personal recognition is essential. F. B. Speakman told of his experience of seeing well-dressed parents and a little boy in a fancy restaurant. The waitress took the order of the parents and then said to the little boy, "What would you like?" The boy responded fearfully, "I want a hot dog." Both parents barked at once, "No hot dog!" They told her to bring him potatoes and beef with vegetable and a hard roll. The waitress was not listening to them, and she said to the boy, "What do you want on your hot dog?" He flashed an amazed smile and said, "Ketchup-lots of ketchup, and bring me a glass of milk." "Coming up," she said as she turned and left two parents in stunned silence. The boy turned and in excited voice said, "You know, she thinks I'm real." Paul treated people as if they were real, and it is a Christian obligation to do so, for each person is precious to God.

Verse 12: Here is the goal of all Paul's loving, self-sacrificing and blameless behavior. Does Paul actually expect these people to be able to walk worthy of God? Yes he does. The Great Commission says, "Teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you." We can learn to live a life that is pleasing to God. It is not automatic, however, and it takes exhortation, encouragement and urging from a loving Apostle. Men cannot be saved by their efforts, but this is totally the work of God. They can and must, however, cooperate with God to grow in grace and be sanctified. Paul teaches that it is possible to walk like the child of a king. It is possible to live with a dignity worthy of the calling that is ours, and do so to the glory of God.

H. Luccock stood on the dock in England while Queen Elizabeth was boarding a ship for a trip to Europe. He noted a large pile of trunks with the label "Not wanted on voyage." These were things not needed until they arrived, and so they could be put in storage. He said that it caused him to think of professing Christians who feel this way about Christian ethics. They figure that they do not have to walk worthy until they walk the streets of gold, and so they mark many virtues "Not wanted on the voyage," and they store them away, and do not walk worthy.

Maclaren calls living lives worthy of God "The law of Christian conduct in a nutshell." Whatever is not worthy is not right. This principle cuts across all of life, and it does not allow for a compartmental Christianity. People get the idea that your conduct only has to be worthy when you are being religious, but at other times it is not necessary. They think that life is in compartments where you have one for science, one for sports, one for news and one for religion. You take your choice. Some people like sports and others like religion and so religion is just one aspect of life in which you have a strong interest. Paul repudiates such an idea. He makes

it clear that the whole of life is to be Christian, and conduct in every aspect of it is to be pleasing to God. All of life is to be lived worthy of a citizen of the kingdom of God.

Looking back over this defense of Paul, it is no wonder he was used of God the way he was. His courage in severe struggle; his master motive of pleasing God; his attitude of complete sincerity and gentleness, and his blameless behavior all add up to one of the most Christ-like lives ever lived. The source of his life he identifies clearly when he says, "Be ye imitators of me as I am of Christ."

5. FRUITFUL FRUSTRATION Based on I Thess. 2:13-20

Joe Bayly had a chance to stay in the luxurious Hilton Hotel in Chicago. It was going to be a treat of a retreat, but then he was hit again by the x-factor. That is what he calls Murphy's Law-the law that says, if anything can go wrong it will. The hot water in his room would not work. He was frustrated, but not all that surprised, for the x-factor is everywhere. It is like the law of gravity. It starts in childhood with getting the mumps on Thanksgiving. Then when you wear your new shoes, you get a deep scratch in them the first time, which you can't even remember happening to your old worn out pair. Then you move up to breaking an arm just as summer vacation begins. Later on, the night before your first date you get a big pimple on your face. Some people do grow out of the pimples, but nobody ever grows out of the x-factor. Bayly says, when he finally gets a chance to sleep in late, that is when some unusual event will wake him up an hour before his usual time.

Dr. R. F. Gumperson began serious research on the x-factor back in 1938. He made some discoveries that led the x-factor to be called

Gumperson's law by many. Some of his discoveries were-

- 1. That a child exposed to a disease for weeks without catching it will then without exposure come down with it the day before the family vacation.**
- 2. That the dishwasher is most likely to break down on an evening in which you are expecting guests.**
- 3. That good parking places are most often seen on the other side of the street.**
- 4. That a man who can't start a fire with a box of matches and the Sunday paper will start a forest fire when he throws a burnt match out of his car window.**

There is no telling what other discoveries his genius may have yielded had he not been killed in 1947. He was walking along the highway one evening facing the traffic as wise walkers do, when he was struck by a visiting Englishman who was driving on the shoulder. The x-factor got him. It gets us all at sometime or another, and the reason I am preaching on it is because it has recently gotten us. As we were going through a very frustrating time, it suddenly dawned on me that this is a major cause of suffering in the world, and it would fit right into my series on suffering. I knew the Bible would have something to say about an experience so universal, and so when I began to search, it was not long before I discovered that it is a major factor in Biblical revelation.

Let me share some of our experience to show what motivated me to study the subject of frustration. Lavonne and I always look forward to May because that is our anniversary month, and for many years it has been our month for a special get away. This year it was even more important to us because Lavonne had been ill so much with a strange virus that would come and go. It came more than it went, and left her weak and bedridden. I have had to do things I have seldom or never done in cleaning, cooking, and taking care of her. She was getting better, and the Sunday before our

vacation she was in both services and felt good. But then the x-factor got us. Monday she was ill again, and the first two days of our vacation we were going to specialists. On the third day she was admitted to Bethesda Hospital, and that is where we spent Wednesday to Saturday.

It was the most frustrating vacation we have ever experienced. This deep taste of frustration made me realize just how powerful a force frustration can be in people's lives. I know everybody gets frustrated, but when it is a prolonged experience, it has all kinds of potential for being destructive. I better understand the battle of those who endure long range frustration. And I better understand why it is one of Satan's most powerful tools to damage the Christian life. I realized how important it is for Christians not to be ignorant of Satan's devices, and I became determined to find out what God's Word had to say about this serious subject. We can't begin to cover it in one message, but what we can cover is enough to help us be aware of some basics. The first thing we want to look at is-

I. THE FACT OF FRUSTRATION.

By this I mean, it is a part of our fallen world, and it goes with the territory. There is no escape. To be human is to experience frustration. It is not sinful to be frustrated, for Jesus was sinless, but He did not escape frustration. He may have had more than His share even, for the more ideals and goals you have, the more you will be frustrated. That is why Paul had so many frustrations. In our text, Paul says he wanted to come to see the Thessalonians, and he tried time and time again, but Satan stopped him. The word for stopped in the Greek is the word for frustration. Satan is the great frustrator of the Christians goals. The word means to hinder, to impede, to thwart, and thus, to prevent the achieving of a goal by being an obstacle. The military used the word to refer to the practice of making deep ruts in the roads to hold up a pursuing

enemy army. You can imagine the frustration of a chariot driver in a hurry with deep ruts in the road.

Satan is a master at blocking the way to God's best. He prevents blessings just as we are to prevent suffering. All through history this has been his strategy-to frustrate the believer in trying to reach his objective, and cause him to give up in despair. When Ezra records the attempt of God's people to rebuild the temple of God, he tells us of the strategy of Satan in chapter 4:4-5, "Then the people's around them set out to discourage the people of Judah and make them afraid to go on building. They hired counselors to work against them and frustrate their plans during the entire reign of Cyrus king of Persia." It is one of the facts of life we have to face, even if we hate it, and would rather not be aware of it. If we try to do something that we know is the will of God, we will have to expect frustration.

Be not weary in well doing says Paul, and why? Because he knows from experience that well-doing is not a piece of cake. It is hard work, and often will not lead to the results you hope for. That is why Jesus had to experience so much frustration. He was perpetually going about doing good, but was it all greeted with gratitude? Not so! The Pharisees treated Him like a criminal for loving people so much that He would ignore their laws to heal people. It frustrated Jesus that those who were supposed to represent God cared more about rules than about people. Jesus was frustrated with His own disciples because they were so much like the world, and they quarreled among themselves for status. He was frustrated over Jerusalem, for He loved the people and wanted to protect them from the wrath to come, but they would not listen and open their hearts to Him. Jesus wept over the city in frustration.

We could do a whole study just on the frustration of Jesus, but the point we need to stress is that frustration is just a fact of life. It

is not wrong to be frustrated. It is just a reality that needs to be recognized. It makes a world of difference to know this, and that Jesus and Paul, and all God's people, are in this together.

Frustration, or the being hindered from reaching goals, is a normal experience for all who are in the will of God. It is not a sign that you are failing God, or that you are on the wrong path. If Satan can get you to feel this way, his strategy will be effective, and frustration can lead to failure. When Christians lose their cool because of frustration, they do all kinds of meaningless or destructive things.

The poet Homer, in his epic The Odyssey, tells of how the Greek General Olysses was leading his army toward Troy, and came unexpectedly upon a flooded river he could not cross. He was so frustrated by this obstacle that he went out into the river up to his knees and began to thrash the water with chains. As might be expected, the river gave no response to his rage. The nervous energy created by frustration needs to be channeled toward constructive ends, and we will look at this in a moment, but we first need to get it in our heads that frustration is a fact of life, and something we all need to cope with, even in the will of God.

Edwin Erickson, our Conference missionary in Ethiopia, wrote of the many frustrations he and his wife faced as they returned to Ethiopia. He writes, "A home that sometimes seems like a dorm. City water that occasionally disappears when it is most needed. A basement that sometimes floods after a heavy rain. A guest house for our Ethiopian brothers and sisters that has plumbing problems. People needing medical attention. We need patience to find our niche, try to be ourselves and at the same time be God's servants. Pray for us that we will not be overwhelmed or frustrated by human expectations as we discover what God expects from us."

Frustration is a common battle on the foreign field, but it is the

same on the home field. Listen to Gary Odle, who is a home missionary trying to get a new church started. His testimony represents thousands of Christians in their struggle to be used of God. He writes, "We tried everything. We did door-to-door survey work and evangelism. No results. We organized a neighbor barbecue at the community swimming pool, personally inviting over 500 people and handing out flyers. No results. We promoted neighborhood information meetings for those looking for a church home. Many said they were sincerely interested-but no results." He goes on with more efforts that got no response, and he concludes, "By December I was frustrated: All this work and expense with little to show for it. Doubt assailed me. Maybe I am the wrong man for the job. Maybe I am going about this in the wrong way. Maybe I'm not spiritual enough. Maybe I should quit."

Doubts and depression are the common results of frustration, and if they are allowed to become the dominate emotions in one's life, they lead to becoming weary in well doing. Thousands of Christian soldiers go AWOL, and do just that-they quit. But Paul did not quit. He faced the fact of frustration frequently, but he refused to fail because of it. He was thrown in prison, and run out of town. He was unjustly punished, and had to endure all kinds of frustrating delays, and being let down by fellow Christians who, like Demus, forsook him. Then, on top of the Satanic obstacles in his path, and the human hindrances to his goals, there was also the God caused frustrations. God's ways are not our ways, and the result is, Paul had goals and ambitions that God prevented, and thus, frustrated.

In Acts 16:6-7 we see God guides sometimes by closing doors we want to go through. He forces us to go through doors He wants us to go through. In other words, frustration can even be a part of God's providential leading. Dr. Luke writes, "Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the Word in the province of

Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to." Paul went West instead of East, and Christianity became predominately a Western rather than an Eastern movement, because Christ hindered Paul's plan, and promoted his own.

So frustration can be both demonic and divine, and to round it off, we need to see it can also be self-caused. Paul was frustrated with the Galatian Christians for listening to the Judaisers, who would drag them back under the law. But he blamed external forces on their being obstructive, and he writes in Gal. 5:7, "You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth?" Cut in on is the same Greek word for frustrated. This word is also used by Peter to refer to self-hindrane. In I Pet. 3:7 he writes, "Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers." Unanswered prayer is one of the great frustrations of the Christian life, but you can't blame the devil for it all, for Peter says we frustrate our own goals when we refuse to relate to our mate in the way God desires.

Paul recognized the danger of self-frustration also, and that is why he put up with a lot of things that were not the best, because he did not want to frustrate the plan of God. He writes in I Cor. 9:12, "If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more? But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the Gospel of Christ." Paul is saying, he would rather endure frustration of his rights than cause the frustration of the Gospel. We have not begun to cover all the reality of frustration, but we have established that it is a fact of life that is inevitable, and has its source in-

1. The Satanic.

2. The Spirit.

3. The self.

There's no escape from the fact of frustration. All we can do is respond wisely or unwisely to this fact, and that leads us to consider our second point which is-

II. THE FRUIT OF FRUSTRATION.

Even bad responses to frustration can lead to getting your own way, but these do not produce the fruit of the Spirit, which always be the Christian goal. A child is the prime example of how to cope with frustration in an immature manner. We should expect this of a child, but there bad example is not be our guide. A child responds to frustration with anger, and then a tantrum if the frustration is not quickly relieved. It is wonderful that children are the weakest segment of society. If they controlled power, history would be a short story. Block a child from getting his own way, and you often create a monster. Fortunately, their fangs and other weapons are not yet fully formed.

Fruitful frustration calls for acceptance and adjustment. It does not make any difference if the blocked goal is a result of Satan, the Holy Spirit, or the self, for the only way you can be creative in your use of frustration is to accept the reality of it, and adjust your goal. That is what Paul did. He did not stand before closed doors and pound until he was bloody. He walked away and entered other doors. He did not say, if I can't have it my way, I quit. He accepted the fact that his way was not possible, and he would have to go a different direction. He knew how to retreat as well as advance. A strategic retreat has saved many an army, and wise is the general who knows when retreat is the key to victory. A stubborn inflexible determination to have your own way regardless of the consequences is not a Christian virtue. It is like childish rebellion against reality. Paul did not like it that he could not get to the Thessalonians or to

Romans, for he was hindered, but he did not devote his life to grieving or to rebellion. Instead, he went elsewhere and did the will of God.

I am sure Paul did not like the experience of being thrown in prison, but he did not, in frustration, bang his head on the bars, or go into a vegetative mood of depression. He got out his pen and wrote letters that changed the course of history. He accepted his limitations, and adjusted to the situation, and did something else other than his plan A, and God used plan B to accomplish even more than Paul ever dreamed of doing with plan A. Even God's frustrating no can be a blessing if we accept it and adjust to doing something other than what we planned to do.

Nobody gets their own way all the time. Look at king David, for he had a deep desire to build a temple for God. It was one of the great dreams of his life. But God said no. God put the block before him, and hindered him from achieving this great goal. God said to David that Solomon his son would do it, and it would be known as the temple of Solomon, and not the temple of David. What a frustrating development, but David did not say, if I can't make the rules of the game, I won't play. He accepted the fact that he could not do all he wanted to, and he adjusted to this reality and said, I can at least collect all the materials needed for the project, and that is what he did. Someone said, "If you can't do all the that you want, you can want to do all that you can." That is what frustrated people do who do what is wise to do in frustration.

Paul was so frustrated when the Jews would not respond to the Gospel. He loved them and longed for them to be saved, but when they rejected the Gospel, he did not give up and quit, but went to the Gentiles and became the apostle to the Gentiles. Abraham Lincoln wanted people to love and support him for his fight against slavery. Instead, he got letters threatening his life. They came on a

consistent basis, and they were a frustration to him, but he finally adjusted, and recognized he could not stop other people's folly. He could only choose to go on with his goals, and that is what he did. He wrote, "I long ago made up my mind that if anybody wants to kill me, he will do it. If I wore a shirt of mail and kept myself surrounded by a bodyguard, it would be all the same. There are a thousand ways to getting a man if it is desired that he should be killed." He did not stop the assassin who finally got him, but he also never let the frustration of that threat keep him from doing the best he could to stop slavery.

Doctors face frequent frustration because of the complexity of medicine and the body. What cures one kills another, and every cure is also a potential cause of other problems. Dr. S. I. McMillen, college physician of Houghton College, a well known Christian institution, tells of the 35 year old Mrs. Cheryl Wilkins who had the dread disease of Lupus. She was put on high dosages of Prednisone. It probably saved her life, but her eyes bulged, her blood pressure was high, and she had headaches and emotion problems. She became a walking medical museum. This is frustrating to doctors when causing suffering is the only way they know how to help people. They have terribly frustrating limitations, and they get plenty of flak because of it, but thank God they don't give up. They have to face up to the reality of their limitations, and press on doing what they can.

Paul could not choose where he would be all the time, so he chose to start a church wherever he happened to be. He could not choose to be well off all the time, for sometimes he was forced to be poor and do without. Since he could not choose, he came to the ultimate adjustment and writes in Phil. 4:11-13, "...I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or

hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through Him who gives me strength."

I never saw it before, but this famous saying of Paul, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me," is directly related to frustration. He is not saying he has some kind of plug into omnipotence and can do whatever he pleases. He is saying, when I can't do what I please, and when I can't be where I want, and when I can't have what I wish, and life refuses to go my way, I can, by the power of Christ, be content. I can adjust to the fact of frustration, and I can make it fruitful by accepting it, and choosing to refuse to let it get me down and discouraged.

Satan could not defeat Paul, because Paul learned the secret of victory over frustration. If your way is blocked, go a different way. If you can't, then stop where you are, and do something different. Adjust to changing circumstances, and be content in the state you are in, regardless of what goals are being frustrated, for that is the key to being fruitful. The popular idea that says, if life gives you a lemon, make lemonade, is not off the mark, for it fits the mind of Paul. Keep in mind, we do not always know if our goals are being frustrated by God, Satan, others, or even ourselves, but the response on our part has to be the same if we are to make them fruitful.

When my granddaughter was brought to the hospital to visit Lavonne, she had some very specific goals in mind. Two of them especially stand out. The goal of ripping the Guidepost Magazine out of the lounge, and the goal of pulling the plug for the TV out of the socket. My goal was to frustrate her two major objectives. The score was a tie, for I only partially prevented it, and she only partially achieved it. The point is, I was being frustrating to her for her own safety, and for the benefit of others. Everyone would have been the loser had she been free to do as she pleased.

Frustration is not all bad, and so we have to accept it with that in mind. It could be the obstacles in our way preventing us from fulfilling our will are really beneficial. But even if they are not, and are of the devil, or have their source in human folly, there is only one intelligent response to frustration. It is the response of Paul at his conversion, and for the rest of his life. Jesus stopped him cold in his plan to arrest Christians, and Paul knocked from his horse, blind and frustrated, said to Jesus, "Lord, what wouldst thou have me to do?" His response of obedience made this one of the most fruitful frustrations of history, and he had many more to come.

One of the most famous works of art in the world is the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome. When the pope asked Michelangelo to paint it, he protested. He was a sculpture not a painter, but the pope would not take no for an answer. He started this colossal task in frustration. He had to paint ten thousand square feet of ceiling with pictures that would form a unified design. It took 343 figures, some of them 18 feet high. To make it more impossible, the five artists hired to help him were all sent home, and their work destroyed. He would have to do it as a one man project.

He felt it is was too difficult and beyond him. He did not feel like a genius, but was tormented by frustration at the difficulty of the task he was forced to do against his will. The first scaffolding had to be torn down and rebuilt. The first section he painted developed a mold and he begged the pope to let him quit, but he refused. So, month after month he lay on back 68 feet up in the air doing a job he did not want to do. After about four and a half years of this agonizing labor the work was uncovered in Oct. of 1512, and for over 450 years it stands as one of the wonders of the world of art. The point is, Michelangelo was frustrated with this task from start to finish, but he did not, because of his frustration, blow it, and do a poor job. He did his best in spite of frustration, and made it one of the most fruitful periods of his life. He couldn't do what he wanted,

but he wanted to do what he could, and he did.

Frustration is not eliminated by a wise response to it, but it can be elevated so that the negative energy is used for positive purposes. The most frustrating thing in life has to be living without assurance of one's destination. It is frustrating not to know for sure if you are going into eternity as God's friend or foe. This frustration can be the most fruitful of all, if it moved you to take God's gift, and to receive Jesus as your Savior and Lord, and, thereby, have assurance of salvation. This would make it life's greatest fruitful frustration.

6. THANK GOD IT WORKS Based on I Thess. 2:13

In his book God's Word In Man's Language, Eugene Nida tells of young Belgian parachutist who was dropped into this country during World War II to work in the underground against the Germans. He was captured by the Gestapo and put in solitary confinement. In the cell next to him was a Belgian pastor, and the two men discovered that they could communicate with each other by tapping the Morse Code on the wall. On one occasion the parachutist tapped, "It is hell to be alone with oneself." The pastor replied, "It is heaven to be alone with one's Lord." The pastor knew the young man had deep spiritual need. He arranged with members of his congregation to send a Bible to him. The Bible came, and with it came the Living Word, for before he was taken to be executed he tapped this message through the wall: "I am going out to life and not to death."

What evidence did he have for such confidence? All he had was the testimony of a man and a book, and yet he was transformed and experienced what men have been experiencing down through the centuries every since Jesus died on the cross. The thief on the cross

had less evidence to go on than anyone. All of his evidence was negative except for the word of Christ, but that alone was enough to give him the same assurance and confidence that has come to all who believe in Christ.

Even though we have tons of evidence for the historical accuracy of the Bible, this is still not the basic reason for believing it to be the Word of God. Neither can we say it is the Word of God because it says so, for a thing is not what it claims to be simply because it claims it. The primary proof that the Bible is the Word of God is practical. All who truly believe it and have perfect confidence in it experience its power. Paul in verse 13 gives us the three steps that the Thessalonians went through to come to the point of assurance concerning the Word of God. These three steps are the three which all must pass through if they would arrive at the place of perfect confidence.

I. THE WITNESS OF THE WORD TO THEM.

The thief on the cross, the Belgian youth in his cell, the Thessalonians and everyone who has ever trusted in Jesus has first of all received a witness. The Word of God must always be communicated in the language of people before they can respond. The communication need not be by sound, as was the case with Paul and these people. When Paul came to them there was no New Testament. There was no written record of the good news to hand out, and so all was verbal. Since the word has been put into writing, and especially since the invention of printing, the Gospel has gone into most of the world in the language of the people. The Bible has been translated into well over a thousand languages, and people are working on the many hundreds left because they know that it is in the Word of God that there is power, and where there is no witness of the Word there is no power.

The tragedy of history and of many lives is that they do not receive the witness at all, or not soon enough. Katherine Mansfield in her journal tells of coming on a Bible in her mature years while she was in the mountains fighting a losing battle with tuberculosis. She wrote, “I feel so bitterly that I never have known these facts before. They ought to be part of my very breathing.” The providence of God often works, however, even when men fail to take the Word where it is desperately needed. There are thousands of cases on record similar to the experience of Vicente Quiroga. In 1878 after a violent earthquake in Northern Chile he was stationed to guard a beach littered with rubble from boats which the tidal wave had wrecked. Among the rubble was a few pages torn from a book. After drying them he read them and was amazed at the message. He was confused and showed a friend who told him the pages came from a book called the Bible. He searched for a missionary and got the whole Bible. He read it and received Christ, and he went on to spread the word until 20 years later that whole section of Chile had received the witness of the Word.

General Lew Wallace, author of Ben Hur, which is one of the most popular novels ever written by an American, never had any interest in Christianity before he began to prepare for writing his book. In his autobiography he confesses, “At that time I was not in the least influenced by religious sentiment. I had no convictions about God or Christ. I neither believed nor disbelieved in them....Indifference is the word most perfectly descriptive of my feelings.” It was not until he was confronted with the Word that things changed. He read the Gospels and as he did a light illumined his darkness and he said, “Long before I was through with my book I became a believer in God and Christ.” The first step in coming to a conviction and a confidence in the Word of God is to be confronted by the witness of it.

II. THE WELCOME OF THE WORD BY THEM.

Paul says they received the Word and accepted it. Some versions have embraced it or welcomed it. Without this act of reception there can never be any assurance. It is the connecting link between the witness of the Word to us, and the working of the Word in us. Without it there is no channel through which the power of the Word can flow. We have all had the experience of flipping on a switch and getting no response. Right away you think there must be a burnt out bulb, or a blown fuse. If neither of these prove to be the problem, you know something must be wrong with the switch or the wiring. You never doubt the power of electricity. You always assume that the problem is somewhere in the connections. Your faith in the power of electricity is not shaken in the least, for you know that its power operates according to certain conditions, and when they are not fulfilled it just will not work.

So it is with the Gospel. When it does not work in the lives of those who hear it we recognize that it is just like electricity. It does not operate without rules. If it is not received, accepted and welcomed it cannot enter the life and transform one into a child of light from a child of darkness. Witness without welcome is worthless. That is why Paul is thanking God because these people welcomed the witness. Reception of the Word is what releases its power. Jesus said you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free, but truth must be received before it can set anyone free. We become what we receive. If we receive the influence of the world we will express the values of the world. If we receive the Word of God, we will express the values of the Word in our lives.

Robert Beverly Hale of the Metropolitan Museum of Art gave this explanation of modern art: "If our art seems violent, it is because we have perpetuated more violence than any other generation. If it deals with weird dreams, it is because we have opened up the caverns of the mind and let such phantoms loose. If it is filled with broken shapes, it is because we have watched the order

of our fathers break and fall to pieces at our feet.” In other words, art expresses the artists concept of reality, and reality is a mess. The world only offers confusion, but the Word offers Christ, and He is the Lord of order and harmony. When we welcome His Word into our lives as good news we will reflect that good news in the order of our lives.

III. THE WORKING OF THE WORD IN THEM.

Pragmatism is not the only test, but it is a test. Pragmatism is the philosophy that asks, does it work? That is the main thing. It is not of any value unless it works. It is not an adequate philosophy, however, because a thing can work and still not be the best, or even a good thing. But the fact is, if something doesn't work, it certainly does not merit consideration. The point is, the Word of God works. That is why Paul, when he heard that they stood firm in the faith, even when they were persecuted and had their faith challenged, gave thanks to God. He was thanking God because the Word was working.

Charles Crowe tells of an experience back in 1947 when the New York harbor was fog bound. All traffic was stopped. And ocean liner was delayed 13 hours from reaching a dock just a mile away. A harbor ferry was lost for 7 hours. Forty ships sat waiting to enter the harbor. They did not dare to move in the thick and dangerous fog. There was only one ship moving, and that was a tugboat that was being guided by new radar equipment. It moved 302 railroad cars on schedule. What radar did for that tugboat, the Word of God did for the Thessalonians. It guided them through troubled waters when their own powers and reasoning would surely have led to shipwreck.

David said, “Thy Word have I hid in my heart that I might sin against thee.” Someone has said that the Word keeps us from sin, or

sin keeps us from the Word. Without the Word we do sin against God. We sin in being ignorant of His will, or we sin in not being able to find and give guidance. We sin also by giving false guidance. There is no end to the ways we can fail God by not receiving the Word and allowing it to work in our lives. We are blind to so much until we gaze into the mirror of the Word. Wilbur Smith said he could wash his hands ten times a day and not need a mirror. He could wash his feet and not need a mirror. He could take a whole bath and not need a mirror. But if he wanted to see if his face was clean, he needed a mirror. The face cannot be seen, and none of us has ever seen our own face apart from a reflection. There is no other way to see it. The most public part of our body is that which everyone else sees but us. We can only see it with a mirror.

So it is with our soul. We have no natural capacity to know how we look in the sight of God apart from the mirror of His Word. It is by the Word that we are cleansed, and by the Word that we are kept clean. Paul knew the Word was working in the lives of these people he wrote to, and this caused him to thank God. Blessed is the man who can look into the mirror of the Word and see how it is actively working in his life, and then give thanks to God because it works.

7. FIGHTING GOD Based on I Thess. 2:14-16

The first act of aggression by which one man attacked another with intent to kill was motivated by religious intolerance. Cain could not stand to see Abel in better harmony with God than himself, and the result was murder. This attitude of intolerance is found all through the Old Testament. Israel could tolerate false gods, but could not tolerate the prophets of the true God, and so they killed them. We come to the New Testament and see that one of

the biggest factors in the crucifixion of Christ was the religious intolerance of the Jewish leaders. This intolerance was focused on the church also. In spite of Gamaliel's warning that they might be fighting against God, they went on persecuting Christians, and they did all they could to stop Paul. As Paul write to the Thessalonians he is glad that they have stood firm in the midst of persecution. Paul then seems to release some of his feelings toward the Jews, an in so doing he opens for us an interesting study in religious intolerance and righteous indignation.

I. RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE.

The Jews became exceedingly narrow minded, and they failed to realize that God had chosen them to be servants in the world. They had the idea that they were chosen to be privileged characters, and that God only loved them and had no concern for the rest of the world. The prophets, of course, made it clear that God had a universal love, but the people paid no attention to the prophets. Having this attitude caused them to fail in being God's servant in reaching the rest of mankind. When Christ came as a suffering servant rather than a conquering king they killed him. Their bigotry made the idea of being servants to the Gentiles very distasteful. They were intolerant of any religious teaching that did not conform with their own misconceptions.

Paul would be the last man to encourage anti-Semitism, but he gives us here a list of facts that we cannot ignore. First of all the Jews killed the Lord Jesus as he says in verse 15. The Catholic Church has been debating whether or not to make this fact less forceful. Some want to make it clear that all men killed the Lord Jesus, and in fact this is true. Jesus died for all of our sins, and it was the sins of all people's that put Him on the cross. Historic accuracy, however, demands that we recognize that the anger, intolerance and prejudice that nailed Him there was of the Jews.

The Romans were only involved incidently because of the circumstances of that day. There was no malicious forethought on the part of any but the Jewish leaders.

To despise Jews, as many have done through the ages, and to hate them for this is totally non-biblical. Jesus forgave them on the cross, and Paul in Romans says that he could wish himself accursed if it would mean the salvation of the Jews. We do not have to deny or distort the facts to love the Jews, and to feel love toward them, as all other men without Christ. To try and deny that the Jews killed Jesus is not biblical, and it serves no useful purpose. Since it has no bearing on how we treat them or anyone else today, it is just a fact, and not the basis for any attitude or action.

H. G. Enelow in the book A Jewish View Of Jesus tries to reverse the whole account as it is biblically stated. He writes, "The Jewish trial described in the Gospel's is so full of irregularities and improbabilities that we may well assume that it represents a later assumption rather than an actual fact." He goes on, "On the other hand, it seems most probable that Jesus was seized by the Roman government and tried and executed by the orders of Pilate." He gets the Jews off all together, but honesty demands that we accept the record as it is, and that we see the bigotry and religious intolerance of the Jews that lead them to kill their prophets and their own Messiah.

Paul says they also drove us out. The Jews hated Paul after his conversion, and it was basically because they could not tolerate the truth. If Paul had become a quiet Christian he probably would not have had any trouble, but he became zealous for the truth. In Acts 9:22-24 we read, "But Paul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ. An after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took council to kill him...and they watched the gates day and night to kill

him.” From that time on the Jews were out to get Paul.

This is how far wrong people can go who are most sure they are right. Everybody but us is wrong. Unfortunately, such ridiculous religious intolerance has not been monopolized by the Jews. John Wesley wrote, “The thing which I was greatly afraid of all this time, and which I resolved to us every possible method of preventing, was a narrowness of spirit, a party zeal...that most miserable bigotry which makes many so unready to believe that there is any work of God but among themselves.”

F. B. Speakman said there are two kinds of people: Those who bring happiness wherever they go, and those who bring happiness whenever they go, and the bigot fits the latter category. Paul in verse 16 says they did want the Gentiles to be saved. Such narrowness is almost inconceivable. Jonathan Swift has put it into poetry.

We are God’s chosen few
All others will be damned;
There is no place in heaven for you,
We can’t have heaven crammed.

Such was the extent to which religious intolerance carried the Jews. Now let’s consider the other factor in these verses.

II. RIGHTEOUS INDIGNATION.

Paul could not tolerate such intolerance. It is the Gentiles who are persecuting the Thessalonians, but Paul, who has suffered so much from the Jews, only mentions the Gentiles, but goes into detail as to the bigotry of the Jews, and the wrath that is theirs has a result. The words of Ralph Korngold in a different setting would fit well in the mouth of Paul at this point. “On this subject, I do not

wish to think, or speak, or write with moderation. No! No! Tell a man whose house is on fire to give a moderate alarm. Tell him to moderating rescue his wife from the hands of the ravisher. Tell the mother to gradually extricate her babe from the fire into which it has fallen-but urge me not to use moderation in a cause like the present.”

There is a point where we cease to be tolerant and become intolerant. A. W. Tozer writes about Jesus and says, “The most intolerant man that ever walked this earth was Jesus Christ our Lord. He wouldn’t tolerate the devil, He wouldn’t tolerate sin. He wouldn’t tolerate unbelief. He wouldn’t tolerate Pharisees with their hypocrisy. He wouldn’t tolerate the Saducees and scribes with their learned pride. He tolerated harlots and babies and publicans and sinners and bums and beatniks and scrubs off the street corner, but He wouldn’t tolerate religious prissies and religious hypocrites.”

Paul was fed up with the attitude of the Jews, and he says God is fed up as well, and in righteous indignation wrath has fallen upon them. Paul was practicing what he urged others to do, and that was to be angry and sin not. In other words, there is a legitimate place for anger. The Christian cannot tolerate evil indefinitely. We must be intolerant toward intolerance. The danger, of course, is in being angry and becoming as wicked as those with whom you are angry. The hatreds that caused persecution of others are of Satan. Paul was indignant, but he never fought back with physical force. His attitude was like that of the man in the poem:

An when religious sects ran mad,
He held, in spite of all his learning,
That if a man’s belief is bad,
It will not be improved by burning.

Paul knew that judgment was not the task of the church. The purpose of the church was to win men, and that is why he practiced and preached love and gentleness. But now his subject has changed. He is talking about judgment and the wrath of God, and the means to accomplish this purpose are completely different. Jesus never used force to save men. He is the Good Shepherd, and He leads the lost back to the fold. But when we see Him in the role of judgment, we see the whip in His hand, and He is driving men out of the temple. It is important to remember that Jesus used force to drive men out of the temple, but never to drive them in. Judgment by its very nature cannot be done gently.

What Paul is saying in verse 16 is that the killing of Christ by the Jews was not what brought the wrath of God upon them. It was the fact that after He had risen, and the church was carrying the Gospel of good news to all the world, that they still opposed it and tried to stop it. Paul says that this build up the measure of their sins. This was the last straw, and God could no longer tolerate their intolerance. The Berkeley Version has it, "But divine indignation has at last overtaken them." The Amplified Version has it, "But God's wrath has come upon them at last-completely and forever."

There is a point beyond which the tolerance and longsuffering of God cannot go. They killed the prophets and His Son, and yet He gave them a chance to repent, and many did at Pentecost. But for those who went on to oppose God's final plan in history, which was the plan to carry the Gospel into all the world, the wrath of God fell finally and completely, and the old Israel was cut off.

Only a few years after Paul wrote this the nation of Israel was uttering defeated and Jerusalem was totally destroyed. What Jesus had predicted came to pass, and not one stone of the temple was left on another. There has arisen a system of theology that demands that the Jews face a great tribulation after the church has been

raptured, but both Paul and Jesus made it clear that they have already suffered God's wrath to the uttermost. When the Jews cried out before Pilate, "Let His blood be upon us and our children," God granted that request to the very people who made it. Listen to Jesus denounce the Jewish leaders for killing God's prophets and Apostles in Luke 11:50-51: "That the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation: From the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, which perished between the alter and the temple, verily I say unto you, it shall be required of this generation."

When women wept as Jesus was led to the cross He said in Luke 23:28 "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children." Why? It was because the wrath of God coming upon them to the uttermost. Rabbi Samuel Moraccanus said back in the 11th century, "I would fain learn from thee, out of the testimonies of the law, and the prophets, and other Scriptures, why the Jews are thus smitten in this captivity wherein we are, which may be properly termed the perpetual anger of God, because it hath no end. For it is now above a thousand years since we were carried captive by Titus, and yet our fathers, who worshiped idols, killed the prophets, and cast the law behind their back, were only punished with a 70 years captivity, and then brought home again; but now there is no end of our calamities, nor do the prophets promise any."

From 70 A. D. on the Jews have been cut off as the people of God, and God's righteous indignation has come upon them in wrath and judgment. Why? Why does even a righteous, lovely, longsuffering God act in wrath? It is because of intolerance and bigotry. What a warning for the church, for Paul says in Romans that as the Jews were cut off so can the Gentile church be cut off because it is only grafted in. We cannot face a wicked world and not be indignant at its wickedness. We cannot tolerate religious

intolerance, but we must fight it with love and the sword of the Spirit, but let us beware of becoming bigoted and intolerant of others lest we too be found to be fighting God.

8. SATAN'S HINDRANCE Based on I Thess. 2:17-20

Children are constantly coming up with that profound argument that they feel is an infallible guide to what ought to be—"But I wanna." I remember explaining to Steven one time that we don't always get to do what we want, and Cindy felt that was good advice. So the next time he was refused and hollered out his most powerful argument, "But I want to!" Lavonne and I were delighted when in all seriousness Cindy said, "But Steven, we don't always get what we want you know." That advice, like most advice, is only remembered to be given away and not to be applied, for Cindy herself became convinced that "I want to," is the ultimate argument.

Adults have the same problem. We have desires and wants we would like to fulfill, but we are hindered and frustrated and we wonder why? Paul had this problem also. He was eagerly trying to get back to Thessalonika. His desire to do was great, and he wanted desperately to get back there. But when he couldn't fulfill that desire, he did not say it must be the Lord's will, but he said instead that Satan hindered him. We want to consider this adversary of Paul and the attitude he had about this adversary.

I. PAUL'S ADVERSARY.

The first thing we see from the context is that Paul did not use Satan as a scapegoat for all evil. He had just given a blistering denunciation of the Jews without mentioning Satan. He did not doubt that Satan was the instigator of it all, but those who follow

Satan are guilty by their own choice, and the blame cannot be thrown off of them. Satan caused the fall of Adam and Eve too, but they were punished and were not excused on the basis of a scapegoat. We need to have some understanding of this adversary, and so we will look at a few facts.

A. HIS ORIGIN.

The church has always agreed that Satan is a created being, and that he was created holy. E. M. Bounds wrote, “We have no genesis of the devil in the Bible as a direct statement.” The Bible is only concerned with his history in relation to humanity. The curtain is drawn and the main actors are already on the stage. Isa. 14: and Ezek. 28 are passages often used to get information about Satan. The text actually refer to the king of Babylon and Tyre. When we were assigned to do research on Isa. 14:12 in the Seminary, which reads, “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning.” Not one of the great commentaries saw a reference to Satan. Those who feel these texts do refer to Satan say that this was before he was cast out of heaven. They see this as yet future just before a great tribulation.

In spite of the lack of a definite statement the tradition of the church has been that Satan was a perfect angel, and possibly even the highest angel. It was because of pride that he rebelled against God, and others followed him and were cast out of heaven. Jude 6 says, “And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the last day.” In the Jewish tradition man played a major role in the fall of Satan and his angels. In The Books of Adam and Eve Satan gives his own account of why he fell. God created Adam and Eve and then commanded the angels to worship them. The following is Satan’s response:

“Michael also brought thee and made us worship thee in the sight of God; and God the Lord spoke: ‘Here is Adam. I have made thee in my own image and likeness.’ And Michael went out and called all the angels, ‘Worship the image of God as the Lord God hath commanded.’ And Michael himself worshiped first; then he called me and said, ‘Worship the image of God the Lord.’ And I answered, ‘I have no need to worship Adam.’ And since Michael kept urging me to worship, I said to him, ‘Why dost thou urge me? I will not worship an inferior and younger being than I. I am his senior in the creation, before he was made was I already made. It is his duty to worship me.’”

The result was that he was cast out with others, and in revenge he tempted Eve and got them cast out of Eden. It is a case of misery loving company. This idea has been held by some Christian theologians, and a number feel that it was Satan’s aggravation with man in some form that lead to his rebellion.

B. HIS OCCUPATION.

Jesus went about doing good, and Satan goes about devouring good. Jesus came to serve, but all that Satan does is for the disservice of man. In his pride Satan hates the concept of service. Milton puts these words in his mouth: “Better to reign in hell then serve in heaven.” Only three times does Satan speak in the Bible: To Eve, to Job and to Jesus. Most of his destructiveness is through action. Being a spiritual being he cannot affect us directly, but he can use means. He can inspire and encourage that which is immoral, and by external means cause men to chose evil rather than good.

Charles Moeller, a Catholic author, wrote, “The sanctuary of free will, of the spirit, remains entirely inaccessible to the devil; he

can never act directly upon the spiritual faculties of man, but only indirectly by disturbing from outside the sensible equipment (the body, the senses, material objects and so on) used by the soul for the realization of spiritual activity.” This is why he failed to tempt Christ to sin. Jesus did not respond to any of his lures. Eve did, and every time we sin we chose to respond to something external. Paul’s being hindered by Satan was some external force that did not affect Paul’s inner man at all. And we want to consider Paul’s attitude toward this adversary.

II. PAUL’S ATTITUDE.

Paul was no pessimist. He was hindered by Satan, but he never sat down and gave up. He didn’t get to do what he wanted, but he did not, like an immature child, say, “But I want to.” Paul rejoiced in spite of his frustration because in spite of the hindrance he had perfect confidence that ultimate victory would be his. He bypasses Satan’s present hindrance, and he sees beyond to the glorious day to Christ’s coming. He knows whether or not he ever sees the Thessalonians again before that day, he will see them then, and they will be his crown and joy. What a day that will be for Paul, and what a day for all of us, for we will recognize one another and rejoice together.

It is no wonder that though he was bothered by Satan Paul was never beaten. Satan was his foe in the battle for men’s souls, but Paul knew that Satan could not halt the Gospel, even if he could hinder it. Why did he have such assurance? It was because he had the word of his Lord who saved him and commissioned him. We read in Acts 26:15-18, “Then I asked, who are you Lord? “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” the Lord replied. “Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to open their eyes and turn them from

darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.”

The most important thing we can know about Satan is that Jesus has defeated him. All the teaching of the Bible about Satan centers in the Christ event, which includes His life, death, resurrection, ascension and second coming. This means that we must find a middle ground between the view that sees Satan cast out of heaven in the ancient past, and the view that sees this event in the future. We find this middle ground just where we should expect to find it. It is at the central event of all time-the cross. Jesus said that if He was lifted up He would draw all men to Him, for the power of Satan over them would no longer be unbreakable.

Consider some primary passages from the words of Christ. Luke 10:17-20 says, “The seventy-two returned with joy and said, ‘Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.’ He replied, ‘I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.’” How was it possible to invade the domain of Satan? It was because Jesus had already defeated Satan in the wilderness, and he invaded his domain over sickness and disease. On the cross Jesus would enter Satan’s realm of death and personally bind him. In Matt. 12:26-29 we read Jesus saying, “If Satan drives out Satan he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand? And if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your people drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. But if I drive out demons by the spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man’s house and carry off his positions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can rob his house.”

Paul uses strong language to emphasize the victory of Christ. He writes in Col. 1:13, “He has delivered us from the control of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of his love.” In 2:14-15 he writes, “Blotting out the handwriting of ordinance that was against us...nailing it to His cross, and having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.” John wrote in I John 3:8, “For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.” In Heb. 2:14 we read, “That through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil.”

All of the biblical writers recognized that Satan still has power, and that we are to be cautious in our battle with him. All our confident that with the whole armor of God we can not only resist him, but defeat him, and even invade his kingdom of darkness with the light of the Gospel and rescue those who are bound by him. Satan is bound right now in the only sense that the New Testament says he will ever be bound until his final doom. And that is in the sense that he can no longer deceive the nations. That is why the Great Commission of preaching the Gospel in all the world can be fulfilled. It is confidence in the power of Jesus to gain the victory that motivates the world wide program of the church. Greater is He that is in us than he who is in the world.

Paul knew where he was going, and though he did not always get what he wanted, he knew God would accomplish all that He wanted, and with that attitude even the devil cannot rob him of his joy in the service of Christ. If you cannot accomplish what you want for the Lord, never be discouraged, but look beyond to the assured victory when you experience Satan’s hindrance.

9. APPOINTED TO AFFLICTION Based on I Thess. 3:1-4

One of our neighbors had a common but nerve wracking experience. Her little girl did not come home from school at noon. She got worried and went out to look for her, but she was no where around. The mother was just sick with worry as the worst possible thoughts went through her mind. She sought the help of a policewoman at the school, and she drove her through the area and they found the little girl playing at a friend's house. It all ended well, but the mother was so upset she could not eat for the rest of the day.

Was her attitude of anxiety a sign of the lack of faith? Not at all, for it was a sign of the presence of love. Persons and things are in two different categories. It is a virtue to have great concern for persons. Jesus wept for them and died for them. It is a vice only when we transfer such deep concern to things. It is when we get upset and anxious about the rug, the car and the golf clubs that we are in danger of sin, but to feel deep concern for persons has all the weight of Scripture to support it as a virtue. Jesus made it clear that we are not to worry about tomorrow, or about any of the necessities of life. Paul said we are to be anxious for nothing. Both of them, however, made it clear by example and exhortation that we are to have care for persons. We want to examine our text to see Paul's anxious affection and the cause of his concern, which is appointed affliction.

I. PAUL'S ANXIOUS AFFECTION.

In chapter two Paul said that he was gentle like a mother to them. He exhorted, comforted and charged them like a father. Now he carries on the role of an anxious parent who does not know what is happening to his child in a dangerous situation. With all of Paul's assurance of eternal security, he never used that doctrine as a basis for indifference. He was concerned about these new converts, and

verse 5 shows just how concerned he was. With all of his assurance he never underestimated the power of the enemy. He believed the message of the parable of the soils that Jesus taught, which made it clear that Satan can snatch the seed away. Even where it begins to grow it can be destroyed before it becomes fruit. Jesus said that persecution made some wither before they became fruitful, and Paul was concerned that this could happen to his converts.

Paul was anxious about them. He was no “love them and leave them” evangelist. He knew that his work was not completed until they were established and able to meet the enemy and conquer. He believed in a strong followup program. Most of the New Testament is followup literature. Paul is writing this letter to strengthen them so that they might be grounded in the faith. It is this kind of anxious affection that drives us to care to the point of sacrifice. This should characterize all believers, for there is always danger that fellow believers will fall back.

Paul says that he couldn't stand it any longer not knowing how they were standing up under affliction. He chose the difficult path of personal loneliness in order to send Timothy to help them and bring word back to him. It was no small sacrifice to give up his only Christian companionship and be left alone in Athens. Paul was a man who counted a great deal on his companions as he traveled about in a pagan world. He always had a Titus, a Timothy, or a Silas at his side. Jesus taught that disciples should go two by two, for our relationship to God has a social aspect as well as the personal aspect. He said that where two or three are gathered in His name He will be present. Paul was willing to give up this fellowship and suffer loneliness that he might aid these new Christians. Calvin put it, “He chose rather to be left alone than that they should be deserted.” What was it that made Paul so concerned about them? It was-

II. THEIR APPOINTED AFFLICTION.

It is the appointed lot of the Christian to suffer affliction, or as the same word is translated in verse 4, tribulation. This does not mean God arranged it and brought it to pass, but that it is the inevitable result of standing for a minority concept that clashed with the prejudice of the majority. As far as possible the Christian is to live peaceably with all men. The ideal is progress without persecution, but the world will not tolerate the Christian conviction, and so there will be tribulation, and we must be prepared to face it if we stand for the truth as we ought.

The hope of the Old Testament saints was for a land of plenty and peace, but the promise for the New Israel is that in the world we shall have tribulation. This contrast is seen in the fact that all 12 patriarchs of the Old Testament died of old age in peace, but all 12 Apostles died the violent death of martyrs. The word tribulation is used 21 times in the King James Version of the New Testament. The word affliction is used 17 times, and all of them are translations of the Greek word thlipsis. Out of these 39 uses of the word 35 of them refer to the lot of the believer. How can this be reconciled with the concept that the church has a promise to escape tribulation?

In verse 4 Paul says that he told them before what to expect if they took a stand. Paul never told his converts that the battle was over, but rather, that it was just the beginning. He never slapped them on the back and said everything is going to be great from now on. He warned them in all seriousness that they might have to pay with their lives for the sake of the Gospel. The Apostle John said that the anti-Christ is already working, and this implied that Christians will have to face all the forces of hell before the battle is over. Jesus and all of the Apostles warned the church beforehand that there is no promise of escape from tribulation. Instead, they make it clear that we are appointed unto affliction.

Jesus said to His disciples in John 15:18, “If the world hates you, you know that it hated me before it hated you.” In verse 20 he said, “If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you.” Why did Jesus spend so much time telling His disciples of the dangers ahead? It is for the same reason that Paul told them, and that was so they might be prepared to face them. Jesus said in John 16:1-4, “All this I have told you so that you will not go astray. They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God. They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. I have told you this, so that when the time comes you will remember that I warned you.” Then he says in verse 33, “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

In the discourse of Matt. 24 Jesus talks of the great tribulation, the like of which has never been and will never be again. This is that wrath of God that fell upon the Jews that Paul referred to in 2:16. The parallel passages in Luke and Mark will leave your mind in no doubt that this was the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. The Christians were involved in this because the Jews were persecuting them, and that is one of the reasons the wrath of God fell. The same word Jesus used of the great tribulation in Matt. 24 is used to describe the Jewish persecution of the church in Acts 11:19, where we read, “Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen traveled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus etc.” What kind of persecution was this? It was a great tribulation.

In Acts 8:1-3 we read, “On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the Apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.” Paul was a part of it, and he knew from

experience the hate of blinded men to the truth. The two words great and tribulation are connected again in reference to the churches of Macedonia in II Cor. 8:2, which says, “Out of the most severe trial...” In spite of this trial they sacrificed to help others in their trouble.

If you look up tribulation and affliction in a concordance you will have abundant proof that the promise of escape from tribulation is a product of wishful thinking, and not a message you get from the Word of God. Paul was dealing with Christians in all honesty by forewarning them that we are appointed to affliction.

10. A STEADFAST FAITH Based on I Thess. 3:5-8

To make no gain for one's labor is a perfectly natural cause for disappointment. Jesus knew this feeling often as His disciples failed to grasp His teaching, and especially when Judas betrayed Him. Paul knew it well when he wrote with a saddened heart that Demas had forsaken him. Many have trained up a child in the way he should go, but then see them depart from it. Many are those whose labors have been in vain because those with whom they labored did not have a steadfast faith.

It is important that we recognize that proverbs are not the same as promises. Our faith will be weakened if we assume that following a proverb is a certain thing. The proverb about training up a child in the right way as the best insurance of a good adulthood is obvious wisdom, but it is no guarantee of the result in every case. The best example of an exception was the very man who wrote the proverb. Solomon departed far from all he was taught, and this wisest of men became a fool. The Bible could not be clearer on the matter that a

good start without a good finish is of little value. Christ is the alpha and omega, and he who starts with Christ must end with Christ, and so the challenge to persevere runs all through the New Testament. It is he who endures to the end that shall be saved.

This concept is obvious in other realms of life. It is not the marriage ceremony that determines the value of a marriage. It is the perseverance to the end that counts. The good start is easy and everyone can make a good start. Many, however, cannot persevere to the end, but become matrimonial apostates. It is easy to start the race, but the finish is what really matters, and so it is in the Christian life. It is one thing to start on the way, and another thing to keep going all the way. What we really need is not starting power but staying power, and Paul makes it clear in these verses that the source of that staying power that perseveres regardless of circumstances is a steadfast faith.

In the whole book of I Thessalonians Paul uses the word faith 8 times, but 5 of those 8 are all packed into chapter 3:2-10, where he deals with their trials, and the victory gained by steadfast faith. If you read this section carefully, noting the use of the word faith, you will see how significant Paul felt it to be. It was his object of concern, and Satan's object of attack. It was their cause for victory, and Paul's cause for rejoicing. We want to look at the basic characteristic of a steadfast faith that is brought out in these verses.

A steadfast faith is an overcoming faith. The very idea of a steadfast faith implies that it is being attacked, and that there is some power trying to overcome it. This is also what makes faith a living thing rather than a lethargic thing. As Gerhard Ebling said, "Faith would cease to be faith if it were not threatened." A faith which can be taken with no struggle and no cost is not likely to play a vital role in one's life. It is in this sense that God uses affliction for good by making our faith a living and steadfast faith. It is for this

end that He allows Satan to tempt us.

It is never the external circumstances, but the internal response that makes the difference between a strong and a weak faith. Paul did not know how the Thessalonians reacted, and this was what was causing his anxiety. He didn't ask Timothy to go and find out how bad things were, but to know their faith, because that is the deciding factor. If it is strong, nothing can make any difference. If it is weak anything can cause them to fall. It is important to recognize this. We have mentioned it before in our study of Satan that there is nothing he can do directly on our will to cause it to choose evil. He can only use means to influence the will. God's promise to the believer is that He will not allow us to be tempted above what we are able to endure. This means that there is nothing that can happen to the Christian that in itself as the power to cause him to fall.

God will never permit anything that would certainly defeat His child. Where then do we look for the cause of casualties in the battle with Satan? We look at the nature of the faith in a person, just as Paul did, and if it does not exhibit a power to overcome temptation, trial and discouragement, we know that such a person is at a great disadvantage against Satan. The power to overcome is basic to a good finish in the Christian race. The basic Greek word for overcome, which is used all through the New Testament, means to gain the victory. It is used by Jesus in Luke 11:22 in reference to His victory over Satan in casting out demons. In John 16:33 Jesus said, "Be of good cheer. I have overcome the world." Paul in Rom. 12:21 writes about not being overcome of evil, but to overcome evil with good.

The Apostle John uses this word often. All of the blessings to the 7 churches in Rev.2 and 3 are promised to those who overcome. In I John 2:13 he writes, "I write unto you young men because you have overcome the wicked one." When he writes of the spirit of

anti-Christ he says in 4:4, “You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because great is He that is in you, then he that is in the world.” And then there is that well known verse that brings us back to faith from where we started. I John 5:4 says, “For whosoever is born of God overcomes the world, and this is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith.”

All of this is conclusive evidence that a steadfast faith is the most basic factor in the defensive warfare against the world, the flesh and the devil. It alone can bring us across the finish line. Paul says in verse 5 that he is bothered lest by some means the tempter has tempted you, and your labor has been in vain. The crisis comes when faith is challenged, and how it reacts will either weaken it or strengthen it. That is why it is so important to recognize the means by which Satan seeks to ensnare us. Ignorance is always on the devil’s side. An example out of my own experience will be of great profit to all of us in quenching the fiery darts of devilish deception.

An obsession is a powerful psychological means by which Satan can attack the believer. An obsession is an idea that thrusts itself upon your consciousness against your will. It might be something like the thought of going around in a revolving door, or over and over again in a swing going around a limb. You have to grit your teeth and by sheer will power force it out of your consciousness. I have little doubt that such obsessions lead to many of the horrible and brutal acts of people. I had a friend in the ministry who was almost overcome by an obsession. He woke up in the night in a cold sweat. He couldn’t shake the idea out of his mind of taking his hunting knife and cutting his children. He never had such an experience before, and he was scared to death. He thought he was losing his mind.

I had some experience with obsession concerning my fear of

heights. I assured him when he came to me for counseling that there was nothing abnormal about an obsession. I did some study on the matter and discovered it to be very common. The circumstances of his life, and the pressures he was under, plus his fatigue made the possibility of his obsession perfectly normal. Satan uses such circumstances to his advantage, and he no doubt wins many victories because believers lack the faith necessary to stand fast and conquer. He gets many believers obsessed with the fear that they have committed the unpardonable sin.

If a very evil obsession should grasp your consciousness, there is not the least reason to try and suppress it in fear. An overcoming faith recognizes that God knows all. He knows that this is not in my consciousness by choice. He knows that in the depths of my heart that I love Him, and that I know He loves me. Instead of suppression, which can lead to all sorts of neurotic ills, the believer enters the presence of God with his obsession, and observes the activity of the mind. Then he asks God to cleanse the mind. You renew your commitment and forget the obsession. Absolute honesty in the presence of God is what keeps you mentally healthy.

If it seems I have labored a point which is irrelevant to you, it is only because you are one of those whose emotional makeup does not allow Satan to use this means against you. Recent studies, however, indicate that one of Satan's greatest weapons within the church is psychological warfare. We are assured that God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, of love and of a sound mind. If it is true that the faith of many is being weakened by psychological warfare, it is an indication that they are ignorant of Satan's devices. They are being overcome when informed faith could enable them to gain the victory.

The Thessalonians faced this inner battle as well as the outward persecution. The foundations of their faith were challenged with

arguments against Paul's character, but Paul had the delight in seeing them come through with a steadfast faith. It was like a new breath of life to him, because he had been so weighted down with the suspense of not knowing how they reacted. If this was Paul's attitude, let it be ours as well. Let us not be content with a good start. Training is one thing and actual combat is another. Let us not be deceived into thinking that a child is able to combat the foes of darkness because he knows that David was a shepherd boy who became king, and Daniel was protected from lions. They must be trained to withstand the dangers that face them. Whether we like it or not our young people will mix with non-Christian youth whose language, thoughts and attitudes will be expressed. Paul only had several weeks to prepare his converts for the battle, and though he was worried sick, he succeeded. May God help us as a church and as parents to equip our youth with an overcoming faith that will be a steadfast faith that will take them all the way to the end of the race.

11. THE IMPOSSIBLE IS INDISPENSABLE I Thess. 3:9-10

The concept of the impossible changes from generation to generation. Much of what we do today was once thought to be impossible. Because of this, we are more cautious today in what we include in the category of the impossible. We are no longer quick to say it can't be done. What is apparently impossible no longer causes a defeatist attitude in which no attempt is even made. Men go ahead and often discover that what was thought to be impossible is not only possible, but even indispensable to further progress. To attempt the impossible is essential for growth in the scientific, social, and spiritual realms, for in each we find that what is apparently impossible is absolutely indispensable.

We know for example that deadly poisons such as sodium and chlorine are incompatible with life, and yet, their combination which makes salt is necessary for life. In other words, the very elements that can make the ongoing of life impossible are indispensable for the ongoing of life. We know that oxygen is highly flammable, and is essential to the existence of fire, and that hydrogen will also readily burn. A commonsense conclusion based on these facts would be, that it is impossible to put out a fire with two such flammable gases, but in reality, they are the two most indispensable fire fighting elements, for their combination makes H₂O, or water. So we add two poisons and get life preserving salt; we add two flammable gases, and get a fire extinguisher.

Physical reality is filled with mysterious paradoxes, and so it ought not be surprising when we find them in the spiritual realm. The cross is the most magnificent of paradoxes. This greatest of man's acts of evil and hatred is the means whereby God redeemed us from evil and hate. It is both a symbol of man's sin, and of God's salvation. Life from death would seem to be impossible, but the death of Christ was indispensable if we were to have eternal life. In all realms of reality we find that the paradoxical and apparently impossible are very real. In verse 9 Paul is speaking of an indispensable impossibility in the Christian life, for in this verse he brings out the fact that-

I. IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO EXPRESS AN ADEQUATE THANKS TO GOD.

Alfred Plummer in his study of the Greek says, "The question implies that an adequate thanksgiving is impossible." When Paul heard the good news that these Christians did not lose their faith when confronted with temptation and tribulation, he was so overjoyed he was tongue-tied in the presence of God. He didn't know what to say because he was so thankful.

Certainly all of us have had the experience of not knowing how to express our gratitude. Thanks sometimes seems so inadequate, and even when we add thanks so very much, and thanks a million, it leaves us with a sense of having very poorly expressed how we feel. How much more impossible is it to express our thanks to God for His mercy, love, and blessings? Paul had this experience time and time again, and on one occasion when he was considering the greatest of all God's gifts, he burst out with a shout, "Thanks be to God for His inexpressible gift." The point is, Paul knew it was impossible to ever thank God enough. He knew there was no way that human language could adequately express the thanks due unto God, but he did not let the fact that it was impossible stop him from making the attempt. On the contrary, thanksgiving was an indispensable part of his life.

The gift of God was inexpressible, but that did not stop Paul from spending his whole life trying to express it. Paul could never thank God enough for the way He used him to establish churches and win men to Christ, but he never ceased to try.

Rom. 1:8, "I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all...."

I Cor. 1:4, "I thank my God always on your behalf..."

Eph. 1:16, "...Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers."

Phil. 1:3, "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you."

Col. 1:3, "We give thanks to God....praying always for you."

I Thess. 5:18, "In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God...."

Paul knew it was impossible to be thankful enough, but nevertheless, it is indispensable in the life of one who loves Christ. Paul was a grateful man, and that is why he was a great man. Paul was never complaining in spite of all the problems he had. He was so busy attempting to express the inexpressible, and do the impossible, there was no time left for negative trivialities.

**When thou hast truly thanked thy God
For every blessing sent,
But little time will then remain
For murmur or lament.**

Some years back a young man in Germany was laying on an operating table. The surgeon approached him and said, "My friend you have now an opportunity to say something, but remember, they shall be the last words you will speak. He had cancer of the tongue, and was about to lose that organ of speech. After some thought, his lips parted, and his words brought a visible emotional response from those listening. He said, "Thank God for Jesus Christ." Here was another attempt at thanking God for his inexpressible gift. All the words of a lifetime cannot do it adequately, but what could be more appropriate than using one's last words in an attempt.

The very fact that it is impossible to thank God enough is what makes it indispensable that we thank Him all we can. This impossibility is to be a challenge that pushes us on, not a crushing idea that paralyzes us into inactivity and frustration. It is impossible to gain all knowledge of the Bible, but that ought not to cause us to give up in despair, but rather to be all the more ambitious in learning all we can. In the face of the impossible task of thanking God for what He has already done, Paul does a very interesting thing in verse 10: He asks for further blessings. Paul did not say, Lord I'll never be able to thank you for what you have done, so I'll never ask you for anything again. You have heard of people in desperate need say something like that. Lord, here me now, and I'll never ask you for another thing. This is sheer nonsense. Paul reveals the true spirit and says when his cup is overflowing, give me a larger cup, for I want even more of your blessings.

Paul wasn't worried about going over his head in debt to God. He knew he would be eternally in the red anyway, and so with true

wisdom he concluded the best way to attempt the impossible task of thanking God is to increase his capacity to receive more of God's blessings. The poet expresses the feelings of many Christians.

**My cup is full; yet oft I think
It holds scarce anything at all!
Not because life lacks abundance,
But because my cup is small!**

Paul's prayer is, Lord help me to thank you by being of greater service, and, thereby, expanding the cup. Helen Keller said, "There is no lovelier way to thank God for your sight than by giving a helping hand to someone in the dark."

Another major attitude of Paul's thanksgiving is the sense of humility that underlies it. Paul had done all the work among these Christians. He did the preaching, and it was his labor that he feared could be in vain. Yet, when the good news of success came, he did not congratulate himself on his good work. He knows he only planted and watered, but that it was God who gave the increase. Sometimes Paul seems to almost be bragging when he defends himself as to his character and conduct, but when it comes right down to the ultimate source of their steadfastness, he takes no credit, but thanks God.

J. C. Ryle wrote, "Thankfulness is a flower that will never bloom well excepting upon a root of deep humility." Humility recognizes that we have received what we do not deserve, and that produces the spirit of thankfulness. This is why the proud are not thankful. Grace is not in the vocabulary of their experience. They feel they merit all they have, and owe no one any thanks. Pride leads to ingratitude, and ingratitude leads to all other sins. That is why Shakespeare says,

**I hate ingratitude more in a man
Than lying, vainness, babbling drunkenness,
Or any taint of vice whose strong corruption
Inhabits our frail blood.**

Ingratitude turns the child against his parents, society, his country, and God, and leaves him totally self-centered, and capable of betraying anyone or anything. On the other hand, humility that recognizes that all he has done equals nothing without the grace of God, leads to a grateful heart. And one whose heart is grateful to God will be a trustworthy person, for he will attempt in every realm of life to express his thankfulness to God. Gratitude leads to happy people, families, citizens, and servants.

In 1519 Cortez landed in Mexico, and left a bloody trail as he conquered many Indians with 500 men who were seeking gold. In 1620 the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth seeking freedom to worship God, and their hearts were filled with thankfulness. The history of the two countries is an illustration of the difference between building on selfishness or thankfulness. A little girl at a banquet paused before she told what she was thankful for, and then she said, "I'm thankful that I'm thankful." May God help us to recognize with Paul that though it is impossible to thank God adequately, it is indispensable that we thank Him always, and like the little girl, be thankful that we are thankful.

12. DIVINE DIRECTION Based on I Thess. 3:10-13

A common saying that has become well-known is, "Truth is stranger than fiction." When one begins to study what has really happened in history he discovers that reality is just as amazing and

interesting as anything that could be invented. For example, I read the story of a drifter in Australia who saw an ad in a year old American newspaper he found in the desert. His name was Tom Ellis, and the ad was about a correspondence course in electricity. He had no money, but he wrote explaining his situation and interest. His need appealed to the chief engineer of the school, who was Fenton L. Howard. He taught Tom Ellis through the mail for several years without any payments.

Seventeen years later during World War II Fenton Howard was a naval electrician aboard a U. S. ship in the Pacific. A generator blew apart and he was critically injured. An SOS was sent out and answered by an Australian ship whose electrician installed a motor so the American ship could limp home. It did just that in time to save the life of Fenton Howard. The amazing fact in the story is that the Australian electrician was none other than Tom Ellis, whom Fenton Howard had taught across thousands of miles. The payment was long in coming, but when it came, it came with interest, for the student saved the life of the teacher.

You can call such an experience luck, chance or coincidence, and you could not be disproved, for there are things that happen in life that are not God's intention, and they are beyond man to foresee. A flip of the coin could be predicted if all the factors were known before hand, but since they are not, and since they vary with every flip, it is considered a matter of chance. God does not determine which it will be, and man cannot determine which it will be, and so we call it chance. Jesus did not hesitate to use the word. He said in Luke 10:31, "And by chance there came down a certain priest..." He means that it just happened that he came by just as the man who was beaten was laying there. The providence of God was to be seen in the Good Samaritan who showed compassion, but not in the priest who just happened by.

This brings us to our text. Paul is praying for divine direction. He is asking God to providentially work in his life so as to bring him back to the Thessalonians. This clearly implies that not all that happens is God's providence, for what is the need for praying for specific divine direction if all that life brings us is his pre-determined direction anyway. It puts prayer on a very high level to see that it can actually help determine the future course of life and history. To believe this, however, is to come into apparent conflict with the scientific world view. For the scientist all effects have a cause, and these causes can be verified, and so there is no room for God to break into the chain of cause and effect to alter what is to be. In other words, the scientific world view is determinism.

Many theologians have this same pattern of thinking. They have such a rigid concept of predestination that God's hands are tied. A more adequate concept is brought out in Karl Heim's book Transformation Of The Scientific World View. He pictures God's relationship to history like newspaper press. Once the type is set in presses all that comes out on the printed copies is completely predetermined. But anytime he wishes the editor can stop the presses and insert new type, and this changes the material on subsequent copies. Christians agree with the scientific world view that every effect has a cause, but they just recognize that the greatest of those causes is the will of God. When He acts providentially in history, He does not intervene in the sense that He makes shambles of the law of cause and effect. He simply becomes a stronger cause to alter what natural causes would have produced had He not intervened. Providence breaks no laws any more than an airplane does when it overcomes the law of gravity by a greater cause.

Paul is simply praying that God will providentially work in the future so as to assure His seeing them again face to face. We want to examine the basis on which Paul makes this request for divine direction.

I. PAUL'S PETITION.

The word here is stronger than just prayer. It is supplication. There is a fervency in his petition that matches the great gratitude which he had. The significant factor, however, is the qualitative nature of Paul's request. He did not seek divine direction for any self-centered purpose. It was totally for the sake of service, and in order that he might perfect their faith. We cannot pray too earnestly, but we can pray too selfishly. A. W. Tozer felt that too much prayer is "A heavenly method of achieving earthly success." He felt there were many so-called Christian projects afloat in the world calling on the saints to pray and give that were nothing more than schemes to relieve men of earning an honest living. He said, "Selfishness is never so exquisitely selfish as when it is on its knees."

We find none of this in Paul. His prayer was always, "Lord give me that I may give." Prayer to him was a power for service and not a power to gain service. Paul was never satisfied short of perfection. He never reached it, but he kept pressing on. He couldn't thank God enough for the faith of the Thessalonians that caused them to stand fast in tribulation and temptation. Standing fast did not mean standing still for Paul. It was marvelous what they did, but Paul did not see life through rose colored glasses. Just because they made a great showing did not mean they were mature in the faith yet. He recognized they had much to learn, and it was his goal to see that they learned it.

Calvin saw in Paul's attitude the importance of Christian teaching. He wrote, "From this it is clear how much we must devote ourselves to teaching. For teachers were not ordained only that in one day or in one month they should bring men to the faith of Christ, but that they should bring to completion the faith that has just begun." This does not mean that we cannot be fully committed until we know all things. Someone said that when Columbus started

out he did not know where he was going. When he arrived he did not know where he was. When he returned he did not know where he had been, but all the same he discovered America. We can know and experience fellowship with God in spite of a lack of knowledge, but as we gain more and more of that knowledge, we increase our capacity for service to others.

God is an unlimited source of power, but we can only draw on that source in accord with our capacity. The fact that a 40 watt bulb does not give adequate light to read by is not due to lack in the source of the power, but in the instrument that puts that power into service. A 100 watt bulb does not add to the source, but merely increases the capacity to draw on the source for greater power of service. This is why Christians should have a hunger to know the Word so as to perfect their faith, and that they might thereby increase their capacity to be used of God in service to others. If this is not our desire, as it was Paul's, on what basis can we ask God for His providential guidance?

In verse 12 we see Paul's prayer for them, and this should be the prayer of every believer for himself. To increase and abound in love toward fellow believers, and toward all men, is one of our highest goals. Here we find an application of our little chorus deep and wide. Love in the Christian is to be both intensive and extensive. It is to grow more and more and over flow until it is the basic factor in our relationships to believers. It is not to end there, for the church is not to become a mutual admiration society which gets wrapped up in itself and forgets the reason for its existence, which is to reach a lost world with the love of God.

II. THE MEANS OF DIVINE DIRECTION.

In verse 11 Paul is not asking for a miracle, but for God's guidance in a providential way. When a miracle takes place no one

can say, “What luck.” It is so definitely an act of God that no mistake can be made. No cause but a supernatural cause could possibly produce a miracle. Providence, on the other hand, is very much within the possibility of being caused by natural law. There is nothing impossible about the story of the teacher being saved by the student that we wrote of at the beginning. There is nothing impossible at all about the multitude of events that so coincide as to produce amazing benefits for God’s children. To show the distinction consider the story of Exodus. If God had foreseen that natural causes would at a specific time result in a dry path across the Red Sea, and therefore worked in the life of Moses and the people to get them there at just the time that such would happen, that would be providence and not miracle. If, however, there were no natural causes to produce such an effect, then it is a miracle.

There is nothing necessarily spectacular about providence. One man was telling of the remarkable providence that preserved him when his horse stumbled. Another man said, “I have a more remarkable providence than that. My horse never stumbled at all.” There is a tendency to only think of God’s guidance and providence when there is a close call, but it is far more abundant in preserving us from having any close calls in the first place. Paul is not asking for anything spectacular to happen. He just wants God to work things out so Satan does not hinder him from getting to them. It took 5 years before did get back, but he was patient with the providence of God. He didn’t expect God to pick him up and carry him there. He was content to leave it in the hands of God to work out the time schedule.

III. THE GOAL OF DIVINE DIRECTION.

What ultimate purpose was behind Paul’s desire for divine guidance? It was that when Christ comes again that they might be mature in Christ with hearts established in holiness. The whole

attitude of the New Testament is that we are to be aiming toward perfection in the light of Christ coming. This is the purpose behind all of the exhortation to watch. We are to be watching and keeping awake, and preparing for that day by growth in holiness. This is the end of all providence. God's whole purpose in acting in our lives is that we might be conformed to the image of His Son.

When Christ comes again with all His holy ones, we want to be prepared to join that holy company. The saints here are not angels, as some would say, for this word is never used by itself anywhere in the New Testament to refer to angels. This is a reference to the redeemed that will return with Christ. The significance of this is that it makes perfectly clear that the coming for and with the saints is all one event. This has been the historic pre-millennial view throughout history. The significance of it for our lives is that it ought to compel us to pray with Paul in all earnestness that we might be used for service, and prepared for the second coming by the providential guidance of God. Such a goal is not within our capacity to reach apart from divine direction.

13. SANCTIFICATION AND SEX Based on I Thess. 4:1-8

The father of Matthew Henry, the great Bible commentator, was courting a girl who was heiress to a fortune while he was a Presbyterian minister. Her father said to her, "He may be a perfect gentleman, a brilliant scholar, and an excellent preacher, but he is a stranger, and we don't know where he came from." "True," she replied, "But we know where he is going, and I should like to go with him." She did go with him, and it is no wonder that such a marriage should produce great fruit for the kingdom of God. It was founded on God designed goals. This girl wanted a man whose goals were God's goals, and he wanted a girl that shared those goals.

I have read that one of the biggest gripes of an architect is people who want him to design a home, but really only want him to put down on paper what is in their own heads whether it is sensible to him or not. Such is often the case with Christians who pray for God to direct their lives. They really mean, approve of what we have already decided to do. This is so often true in the whole matter of choosing a life mate. Marriages are only made in heaven for those who seek heaven's guidance. The issue of marriage and sex has always been a major concern for Christians. Here in Paul's first letter we get a glimpse of what was a universal problem. First consider-

I. HIS EXHORTATION v. 1.

Paul had just built up in 3:13 to the ultimate goal of the Christian life to be holy and unblameable at the coming of Christ. Now he goes on to urge them to strive for that goal. Paul is saying that sanctification is not automatic. You don't just everyday in every way get better and better. It is a matter of constant conscious obedience to the commands of Christ.

Paul beseeches them and exhorts them to go on walking so as to please God more and more. In verse 2 he says you have the knowledge, and you know what Christ expects, but now you must put it into practice, for this is God's will and purpose for your life. In Eph. 1:4 Paul said, "According as He has chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love." I read of a farmer who said when he was offered a book on how to improve his farming, "I already know more now about farming than I am practicing." That is the case with us as Christians. We already know more of what God wills than we are practicing, but we must be ever pressing on to His goal for us, which is to be fully sanctified. Second we see-

II. HIS EXPLANATION. v. 3.

Paul was diplomatically laying the background for dealing with a very sensitive and serious situation. These Thessalonians had been raised in paganism all their lives where sexual ethics was totally perverted. Paul was writing from Corinth where there were 1000 prostitutes in the temple of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love. It seems strange to us that Paul would have to tell Christian people that it was God's will that they abstain from sexual immorality, but when you consider the background of these people, it is not so strange at all. None of them were raised in Christian homes, but all were raised in pagan homes. Their concept of sex was totally pagan.

Timothy had apparently come back with some news that was not good. These Christians were still practicing the sexual ethics of their pagan society. This is happening in our day as well, for studies show that Christian youth have sex outside of marriage almost to the same degree as non-Christian youth. These Thessalonians were selecting their mates by immoral methods. We need to remember that when we talk about the power and purity of the early church we are referring to the Jewish Christians at Pentecost. They were already well trained in the Word of God, and biblical sexual ethics. The Gentile churches did not have this background.

Lesser men than Paul would not have had the wisdom and tack to handle this as Paul did. Many would blast such corruption with scorching condemnation, and try to shame and scare them into purity. Paul, like his Lord, took an altogether approach. He praises them for their growth. He recognizes their faith and love, and urges them on to greater commitment. He points out the great goal of the Christian to be holy and blameless, and then moves in to show how different this is from the heathen goals, and how they must leave those behind, and press on to godly goals.

The psychology of Paul is obvious. If I want to see a person arrive at a higher goal, the surest method of failure is that of discouragement and condemnation. If a child is learning to play the piano, the quickest way to kill their enthusiasm is to point out how insignificant his pounding is compared to the beautiful music of some great pianist. You can try and shame them into working harder by telling them they will never get anyone to listen to them if that is all they can do. What you need to do is tell them that what they are doing is wonderful, and you can see they are making progress. You encourage them to think that they are learning, and that someday they will be able to play beautiful music. This was Paul's method in this letter.

Paul recognized that sanctification is a process which is advanced by teaching, and not by threatening. He does add a threat sometimes, but that is not his primary method. In verse 4 he says that everyone should know how to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable. In verse 5 he adds, "Not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God.." Paul is saying that a Christian can and must control the sex drive.

In Rom. 1 Paul points out that all sorts of sexual perversions arose among heathen peoples because they did not know God. In other words, for the world sex is determined by the appetite, and doing what comes naturally. In the Christian life sexual expressions are to be determined by one's commitment to God's will for a sanctified and honorable life. It is important to see that Paul is saying that sanctification and sex are to be in harmony. Sex is to be a part of life which is beautiful and precious as God meant it to be.

C. S. Lewis in his book Christian Behavior says, "Modern people are always saying sex is nothing to be ashamed of. If they mean, he says, 'there is nothing to be ashamed of in the fact that the human race reproduces itself in a certain way, nor in the fact that it gives

pleasure,' they are right." Christianity says the same thing. It is not the thing, nor the pleasure that is the problem. The old Christian teachers said that if man had never fallen, sexual pleasure, instead of being less than it is now, would actually have been greater. I know some muddle-headed Christians have talked as if Christianity thought that sex, the body, and pleasure, were bad in themselves. But they were wrong.

Christianity is almost the only one of the great religions which thoroughly approves of the body, and which believes that matter is good, and that God Himself once took on a physical body, and that some kind of body is going to be given to believers in heaven. Christianity has glorified marriage more than any other religion, and nearly all the greatest love poetry in the world has been produced by Christians. If anybody says that sex is bad in itself, that person does not understand Christianity.

It is just because of the Christians high view of the body and sex that the Christians sexual ethics is so far above that of the world. Recognizing it as a God given gift, we also recognize that, like all the rest of life, it must be used in conformity with His will that we be sanctified and holy. This simply means it is an appetite that needs to be satisfied within the framework of love and marriage. To satisfy any appetite by illegitimate means is a departure from the will of God. It is perfectly natural to walk by a pop corn stand, or a hot dog counter, and have you appetite stimulated. No one will question the normalcy of your desire to have some of that product to satisfy your wetted appetite, but if it is not within your means to lawfully satisfy it by buying some, no one would consider you justified in stealing it.

The sexual appetite is also perfectly normal, but there is also legitimate and illegitimate ways to satisfy it. The Bible says that the legitimate way is in a life commitment to another whom you love. If

you don't have the money for the popcorn, you have to wait until you do. If you don't have someone you can love for the rest of your life, you also need to wait until you do. Some false prophets with a bit of psychology suggest that it is repression to deny one's sex drive satisfaction, and it is bad for one's health.

This has led to all kinds of justified immorality. Resisting a conscious desire is a normal part of the whole battle with temptation. It is not only not harmful, but it is helpful and strengthens the character to resist. The repression that is dangerous is that of being so frightened of some impulse that you do not let it become conscious at all. Then it enters the sub-conscious and causes trouble. This is the danger of those who look upon sex as an evil in itself. It ought never be a problem to a Christian who recognizes sex as normal.

Many years ago Dr. F. C. Wood Jr. preached a sermon on sex at an all girls school. The sermon stirred up a great deal of response, and it is no wonder, for though he started with a biblical premise that sex is good, he ended with a conclusion as far from the biblical conclusion as East is from the West. He said, lets relax and not worry about our sex perversions. Don't take it so serious." This false thinking goes right back to the day of Paul, and it has plagued the church through the centuries. It is called anti-nomianism. It means anti-law. It is a perverted concept of grace that says if grace abounds where there is sin, then let us sin all the more that grace may more abound. All law and rules are thrown out the window, lest anyone think we are saved by being good. This leads to the thinking that we can do as we please, for God's grace will take care of us.

Paul says no such thing. He goes on to say that God will avenge all sex perversions. Paul makes it clear in verse 8 that those who reject his instructions do not reject man, but God. In other words,

Paul is saying that the arguments of those who say ethics are all relative to the culture, and are arbitrary and man made, are false. The Bible makes it clear, not just here, but everywhere that purity in sex is an absolute and universal standard in the sight of God. The one thing we always know in every situation is that it is God's will for our sanctification.

14. REVOLUTIONARY RESOLUTIONS Based on I Thess. 4:9-12

No one doubts that man has made a great deal of progress in the physical realm. In 1903 when the Wright Brothers flew their heavier than air machine, the whole distance of their first flight was less than the wing spread of a modern B 36. Progress has been obvious. The progress in medicine has been equally amazing. Someone has said that if they get wonder drugs any more powerful you won't be able to take them unless in you are in perfect health. William E. Hocking has said, however, "Progress does not carry with it religious progress. It means rather that men have found new ways of being lost." Physical and technological progress does not bring people closer to God. It often only makes them more efficient sinners.

Progress in the spiritual realm is the obligation of Christians in every age. They always have the great responsibility of providing the world with Christ-like lives. If the church is to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth it must maintain a constant growth in spiritual matters. Christians ought to resolve, not just every New Year, but every day of their lives to be a more Christ-like witness in our world that is still in the dark ages spiritually. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians and suggested some vital areas for spiritual progress that are as relevant today as they were then. In fact, if we resolved to carry them out, they would revolutionize our Christian witness in

the world. In these 4 verses Paul first deals with our relationship to believers, and then with our relationship to unbelievers.

I. OUR RELATION TO BELIEVERS.

Concerning brotherly love, says Paul, there is no need to write to you, for you are taught of God. Love of one another is inherent in the Christian experience. One cannot become a new creature in Christ and not recognize that love is the basic foundation for our fellowship. A non-loving Christian is a contradiction in terms. It is true that individual Christians can have antagonism for one another, and thereby place themselves outside of God's will, but even such Christians still love other Christian people. It is impossible to be a Christian and not love other Christian people. John said, "He that loves not his brother abides in death." It is possible to remain on a low level in this area, however. That is why Paul says that there is no need to write, but then goes on to write anyway. There is need to tell them about love, but there was a need to urge them on to greater love.

The Greek word here for brotherly love is philadelphia. The idea of brotherhood comes from this word. Few ideas have been more abused than the one of brotherhood. It has been made so superficial by a loose and broad use of it so that it has lost its biblical ring. The Bible uses it only to refer to relationships within the church. It is a relationship among believers in the Bible, but in liberal circles the concept of the brotherhood of man has been watered down so that it is made to refer to all people. We need to beware of throwing away biblical truths just because they are abused. Brotherhood is a perfectly good word that came into this world because of Christ. It is even true in some sense that we are brothers of all men, but the biblical use of brotherhood is limited to those within the family of God. This is important lest we loose sight of the distinction between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of

darkness.

Agape is the word used in the Bible for universal love. We are to agape even our enemies. God so agaped the world that He gave His only Son. Philadelphia is a more particular love for the brethren. It is where we start as Christians. We are to love the brethren, but then go on to broaden that particular philadelphia love into universal agape love. The New Testament makes a clear distinction between these two loves, and it shows that growth upward is from philadelphia to agape. In II Peter 1:5-7 we read, "Add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity." Charity, of course, is agape.

Paul says to them that they are doing fine, for they have given evidence of their love to all the brothers in Macedonia, but he urges them to go on and abound more so as to love universally as God loves. Don't keep your love just within the realm of Christian circles. Go beyond this to even love those who are no part of the church. What Scripture seems to teach here is that love for the brothers is a natural part of the Christian life. It comes with the new birth, but only in seed form. It must grow and abound more and more until we are mature enough to see that our love must include event he non-Christian world. This is a goal we are to strive for because it does not come automatically. It is a goal reached only by growth. This being the case, there can be few resolutions more revolutionary than to resolve to rebound in love, and seek to grow in conformity to the love which Christ has for all men.

II. OUR RELATION TO UNBELIEVERS.

Paul advises first that they major in silence. Most Christian schools have a major in speech, but I have never heard of one with

even a single course in quietness. Maybe it is because it would be too tough, for Paul implies that this is no snap course, but a real rugged one. The word for study is a strong word. It means to earnestly strive to be quiet. Paul uses the same word in Rom. 15:20: “Yea, so have I strived to preach the Gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man’s foundation.” In one other place he uses it in an even stronger sense. In II Cor. 5:9-10 he says, “Wherefore we labor, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ...” The word labor is the same word as study is here, and it shows how strong the word is, for it is the word Paul used to describe his activity to please Christ.

This seems paradoxical to make such a struggle to be quiet. As one translation has it, “Make a desperate effort on behalf of tranquility of mind.” It sounds like the man who said, “We will have peace even if we have to fight for it.” You wouldn’t think it would be such a battle just to be quiet, and to live a peaceful life, but it takes a great deal of effort, and each Christian should resolve anew every year to concentrate on being quiet. Pascal’s statement may seem a little strong when he said, “I have often said that all of the misfortunes of men spring from not knowing how to live quietly at home in their own rooms.” This was certainly true to a large extent in this church. Paul’s letter to them indicates that they were probably getting a reputation in the community as being fanatics. This is only a problem when Christians are truly fanatical. They were all excited about the second coming to the point that they became lazy busybodies, and they were indifferent to society. Every time this has happened in the history of the church it has left a dark blot of shame and failure.

Paul lays down some principles in this passage that would have prevented all of these if men would but guide their lives according to God’s Word. Paul makes it clear that any view of the second coming

which makes one less fit for a long life of usefulness on earth is a false view. It is a sin to be so heavenly minded you are no earthly good. Paul urges them to mind their own business. Nose trouble has always been a vice among Christians. Just because we have received Christ does not mean we have been given a divine search warrant that permits us to meddle in people's lives. Christians are to respect the rights and privacy of other people.

John Wesley said that the best evidence of a man's growth in grace is when he can say, "Every year I become more merciless in my judgments of myself, and more merciful in my judgments of others." In other words, the Christian who resolves to concentrate on his own conformity to Christ, and not try and change other people, will be the Christian whose life most does change other people. Someone has said, "A man who cannot mind his own business is not to be trusted with that of the king." If someone tells us to mind our own business, let us not be offended, for it is not only biblical advice, it is essential to our spiritual progress.

Paul then tells them to work with their own hands. The Christian who does a good days work in whatever he is doing is fulfilling the will of God in a far more realistic way than we recognize. Even if Christ is coming again this week, the Christian who is in the will of God will be doing a good job at his work. If he makes shoes, he will make them good enough to last for months, even though his conviction is that Christ may come in a week. A sloppy job is never a credit to a Christian, and it hinders his witness to the world. Apparently some of these Christians had quit working completely. There thinking was that if Christ is coming soon, what sense does it make to plow the fields and sow grain? There are two things wrong with this thinking. First, we do not know when Jesus is coming, and second, even if we knew it would be soon, we have an obligation to witness to the world. Who would be drawn to a faith that makes men less effective for life, and less responsible as

citizens?

William Barclay said, “When we Christians prove that our Christianity makes us better workmen, truer friends, kinder men and women, then and only then are we really preaching.” To either run around or lay around like fanatics or busybodies, as if the world is coming to an end, is neither good sense nor good Christianity. Paul says to calm down and establish yourselves in a pattern of life which challenges the world by showing the power and the love of Christ. The Christian is to be the best citizen, the superior worker, and the most conscientious servant. Why? It is because you have an obligation to the non-Christian world. I have heard people say that they don’t care what people think. This is a bad attitude, for God does care, and he expects us to care as well.

The church is to be conscious of its image before the unbelieving community. We are not a water-tight colony indifferent to public opinion. We have an obligation to live a life worthy of a people who claim to be children of God. We are epistles read of all men. We are living products of the grace of God. God forbid that this makes us less useful for practical living. Paul wanted these believers to recognize that one of the most revolutionary resolutions that can be made in life is the resolution to walk worthy of those called of God. We are to strive to live all of life on a level that benefits men and brings glory to God. May God help is to be committed to philadelphia the brothers and agape the world. This will always be our most revolutionary resolution.

15. NO REST FOR THE RIGHTEOUS Based on I Thess. 5:6-11

While I was visiting in the hospital one of the workers came in and a patient said, “Are you still working?” “Yes,” she said, “No

rest for the wicked, and I guess I am awfully wicked.” We have all heard this at some time or another, but the thought came to me that it is ridiculous to apply that to manual labor, when as a matter of fact the righteous have to and ought to work just as hard and harder. The biblical origin of that statement has an all together meaning that would not likely be bantered about as a bit of humor if those who use it knew.

The wicked, says Isa. 57:20-21, “are like the tossing sea; for it cannot rest, and its water toss up mire and dirt, there is no peace, says my God, for the wicked. In Rev. 11:14 we read, “And the smoke of their torment goes up for ever and ever; and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image...” The biblical context to that statement than is that the wicked person has a turbulent meaningless life now, because he is not at peace with God, and will have no rest for all eternity if he does not come to Christ.

On the other hand, those who do come to Christ enter into His rest as we read in Heb. 4:1-3, and which Jesus invites us to in Matt. 11:29, where he says, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you shall find rest unto your souls.” Rest means a great many things in the Bible. We use that one 4 letter word to translate over 16 different Hebrew words and 7 different Greek words. The term as we are using it simply refers to the fact that wicked are not right with God, and so they are restless. The righteous in Christ are right with God, and so they are restful. As Augustine put it, “Our souls are restless till the find rest in God.”

Now getting to our text, we see another aspect of this whole matter. We see that there is a very real sense in which the statement, which is wrongly applied to the wicked, can be rightly applied to the righteous. We can appropriate a misused saying and

fill it with biblical content by saying there is no rest for the righteous. Paul in verse 6 says therefore, that is, since we are children of the day and not of the night, let us not sleep as do others. The others being those of the night, or non-Christians. We see here that there is a sense in which we as Christians are not to rest or sleep.

No one takes this literally and tries to stay awake 24 hours a day. What Paul means he does means very literally, and that is that the Christian must be always wide awake in his relationship to Christ. We must at all times, and in all places, be conscious that we are Christians, and that we have been bought with a price, and there will be a day of judgment. Being wide awake to this means a life without rest in terms of our labor to win men to Christ, and in our striving to be more Christ-like ourselves in every aspect of life. There is to be no sleeping on the job, for we are to be always wide awake to our responsibility.

In New York there is a Church Of The Heavenly Rest. Seminary students jokingly refer to it as The Church Of The Celestial Snooze. There is a good deal of joking about sleeping in church, and its humor grows out of the fact that it is often so true. One sermon snoozer poet wrote, "I do not see my preacher's eyes, However bright they shine. For when he prays, he closes his, And when he preachers, closes mine." Paul is not writing here about sleeping in church, but about the sleeping of the church in the sense of ceasing to be the instrument of God for the advancement of His kingdom. Paul is concerned about the danger of lethargy and indifference as to God's plan in history. It is the danger of becoming a spiritual Rip Van Winkle. Jesus gave this same warning in His parable of the 10 virgins. Five of them slept unprepared for the bridegroom, and they were shut out of the wedding feast. Samson is also an illustration of the danger of sleeping and not watching.

Paul says it is perfectly consistent for non-Christians to sleep and be unconcerned about the things of God. They are children of the night, and that is when people do sleep, and that is when wickedness thrives. Spiritually speaking, we see there is rest for the wicked in the sense that they are not bothered about the will of God and the great task of service in accomplishing that will. Instead of there being no rest, the fact is, there is no work for the wicked. They have no task to perform, and they have no goal to seek in terms of the kingdom of God.

The Jehovah's Witnesses use to have a slogan that said, "Thousands now living will never die." Paul is saying here, "Thousands now living are already dead." They are in a stupor that leaves them oblivious to God. They are dead in sin, as Paul says elsewhere. This is not the case for us in Christ, for we have been raised from this death, and have been given life and light. Now we are to watch and walk in the light as He is in the light. Satan will seek to lull us into indifference and contentment, but we must constantly remember that there is no rest for the righteous. We must sound the alarm:

**Awake my soul, stretch every nerve,
And press with vigor on;
A heavenly race demands thy zeal,
And an immoral crown.**

Karl Marx said, "Religion is the opiate of the people." The Bible says just the opposite is the case. It is the stimulant of the people. It is sin that is the opiate that dulls men's minds and allows them to sleep with eternal judgment facing them. Consider for a moment the paradox of this biblical contrast of Christians to unbelievers. The more we look at paradoxes and see that they make sense, the less problem we have in understanding the conflicting ideas we often find in Scripture. The Bible makes it clear that those who never can

rest are those who are sound asleep, and that those who sleep is sweet are those who are always awake. The paradox is a result of using the same analogy or word in different ways. We need to understand the meaning in each context.

In this immediate context, for example, we have one word meaning 3 different things. In verse 6 it means spiritual sleep. In verse 7 it means literal physical sleep, in verse 10 it means the sleep of the body in death. Life is many sided, and so is language. You cannot limit yourself to only one aspect and expect to make sense of the Bible, or any other book. The context tells you what aspect is being considered. For example, when Christ is called the Lion of the Tribe of Judah the aspect of the lion which makes us think of kingship is what comes to our mind. When the same word is applied to Christ's arch-enemy, which is Satan going about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, we have the aspect of a lion's ferocious nature come into our mind. Two totally different concepts are using the same animal to illustrate. So also sleep can mean one thing when applied to the believer, and a completely different thing when applied to the unbeliever. It can be either a good or bad thing depending on the context.

Prov. 3:24 says, "If you sit down you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet." We recognize sleep as a precious promise to those who put their trust in God. Ridley faced death at the stake and his brother said he would stay with him and comfort him. He responded, "I mean to sleep as gently as ever I did. I will both lay me down in peace and sleep, for thou Lord only makest me dwell in safety." The next morning the jailor had to wake him in order to take him to the stake. Then when we turn the page we read in Prov. 6:9-11, "How long will you lie there, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a vagabond..." We see sleep referring to laziness

and indifference rather than trust. We need to learn this principle of interpretation: The context determines the meaning of words. A different context makes it clear that the Christian has the sweetest sleep and most perfect rest. In another context it is seen that he must never sleep and rest, but be ever awake and watchful.

For the Christian to be asleep and unconcerned about his service for God is to be a soldier on guard who is sleeping while the enemy advances. Such a guard is less than worthless. He is a positive aid to the enemy, and he is worthy of the firing squad. A sleeping Christian is Satan's greatest delight, and that is why Charles Spurgeon cried out to his congregation in England, "Sleepy Christian, let me shout in thine ears: Thou art sleeping while souls are being lost, sleeping while men are being damned, sleeping while hell is being peopled, sleeping while Christ is being dishonored, sleeping while the devil is grinning at thy sleepy face, sleeping while demons are dancing round thy slumbering carcass, and telling it in hell that a Christian is asleep. You will never catch the devil asleep; let not the devil catch you asleep."

Spurgeon sounded the alarm in his day because Christians had it so soft that they were in danger of being satisfied with their good life. They did not want to get involved in anything that might spoil it, such as being a constant witness for Christ. It cost to be a Christian who is awake and active in the service of Christ. It is so much easier just to sleep and not get involved. Involvement, however, is the only hope for our world. If Christians do not take a greater role in society, there is no hope that it will ever be a great society from God's point of view. Materialism may give us greater comfort in our present life, but it will only lull us to sleep if we do not see beyond it to the spiritual needs of people.

We ought to pray that poverty will be wiped out, and that diseases be destroyed, but even more ought we to pray that the

church will be awakened to the need to pursue the task of bringing people to a redemptive relationship with Jesus Christ. To do nothing in a world of such great need is to be asleep while the enemy overruns the fort. As Frank Lauback said to the church, “It is either wake up or blow up.” May God help us to be among those who are fully awake and who recognized that there is no rest for the righteous.

16. LEADERSHIP IN THE EARLY CHURCH I Thess. 5:12-13

By necessity, any group of people who hope to attain certain goals has to have leaders. Organization is an essential component in the body of Christ, just as it is in the existence of any living organism. If there is one thing that the universe compels us to believe about its Creator, it is that He is a superb organizer. The harmony of our universe is no accident, for it was planned by God. When God entered history in the person of His Son to build His new creation, He again revealed His desire for harmony by training 12 men to lead and guide His church. Jesus put His whole active ministry into the training of leadership, for it was of prime importance to Him.

As we follow the progress of the church we see that it grew in its organization to meet the needs as they arose. In Acts 6 we read that a need arose for someone to assure that Greek widows received their fair share of charity. So the first official officers of the church were appointed, and they were the deacons. Later deaconesses needed to be added because in oriental lands men did not have access to minister to women in many situations.

Whenever Paul established a new church he appointed elders, as we read in Acts 14:23. Paul later in his letters explains the duties

of the elders, and also the presbyters and bishops. We learn that basically they were rulers and teachers, for they guided the church in its business and they taught the people the Word of God. The strength or weakness of the church depended upon the leadership and upon the cooperation of the people with the leadership.

The Jews in their synagogues, and the Greeks in their religious clubs had a democratic form of government, and so it was natural that this form of government would be adopted by the church. We might see in this the providential guidance of God, and also see that this form of government is God's preference. Paul, however, makes it clear that no form of organization, or method of leadership will be successful unless there is cooperation between the leaders and the led. That is what brings us to our text. Paul is pointing out the duties of each to the other, and only as each fulfills its obligation can the whole church be what God intends it to be. Paul had just comforted them with the doctrine of the second coming. Now he challenges them with the duties that face them until He comes. We will look first at the duties of the leaders, and then the duties of the led.

I. THE DUTIES OF THE LEADERS. v. 12

The duties of the leaders is actually secondary here, for the thrust of Paul's exhortation is to the followers, and he beseeches them to know their leaders and to esteem them. By his description of the leaders, however, he tells us of their duties. He is not writing of ordained clergy here, for the labors he writes about are obviously those of layman. They have only recently been converted from paganism, and even if there had been Christian schools to go to for training, there was not enough time to have them trained and serving this church. Paul had likely appointed elders to organize the church. All of the early churches had to be led by layman. The early church depended completely upon dedicated layman for its

leadership.

These leaders, Paul says, are those who labor among you. Their primary duty is building up the faith of those in the church, for the church must become strong and mature before it can reach the world. These leaders were to labor, and the word for labor is kopiao, which means to toil, to be wearied, and to be worn out. It is the same word Jesus used in Matt. 11:28, “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Paul used this word of himself several times as he wrote in I Cor. 15:10, “I labored more abundantly than they all.” In Col. 1:29 he writes, “Whereunto I also labor, striving according to His working which worketh in me mightily.” In his conclusion to Romans in 16:12 he wrote, “Salute Tryphena and Tryphosa, who labor in the Lord. Salute the beloved Persis, which labored much in the Lord.”

These and other verses indicate that good hard work is the duty of a leader. Paul indicates that every leader is to take his task seriously, and to work at it until it becomes toil, and until he is tired. It is assumed that any leader will do his best out of gratitude for the grace of God that made him able to be a servant in the first place. This labor is in two primary areas, that of supervision and teaching. Both of them are brought out here. Paul has a high view of the importance of both, but gives added weight to the teacher. In I Tim. 5:17 he writes, “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine.” Paul was glad when church members were learning theology. One of the reasons for the weakness of the church today is because we have left theology to the professional, and we have forgotten that it was meant to be for the layman.

II. THE DUTIES OF THE FOLLOWERS.

The first obligation of a follower is to get to know the leaders.

They are to take an interest in their leadership, and by observation and fellowship come to know and understand them as persons. This implies a close fellowship in which love operates supremely. Why is Paul so concerned about people getting to know their leaders? All of history demonstrates that this is the wisdom of God. The vast majority of petty problems that have hindered the work of the church are due to the fact of people not knowing their leaders. The leader becomes a distant figure who is suppose to take care of things, and the people tend to ignore his role and authority.

If a person does not know his leaders, he does not appreciate them. He does not recognize and acknowledge that they are seeking to do their best under God. As a result they do not have confidence in their leaders. Someone has said, “He who has lost confidence can lose nothing more.” The church begins to fall apart when the group does not fulfill their duty of getting to know and appreciate their leaders as persons.

In verse 13 Paul says to esteem them very highly. This seems to make a double level of Christians which has leaders on a higher level. This is the very thing that led some Christian groups to develop a hierarchy. All of this comes from simply not reading the word of God with accuracy of understanding. Paul makes it clear that he is not advocating any hierarchy. He says the motivating factor for your esteem of leaders is for the work’s sake. In other words, you are not to respect and submit to your leaders because of any special personal qualities they might have. Your cooperation is for the purpose of harmony so that all may go well and the church make progress toward its goals. It is for the work’s sake that we cooperate.

In a church it is the work that means everything. All differences a personality that would slow down the work must be suppressed for this higher interest. We can easily see how problems

would arise. What if the leader proves to be incompetent? What if they put power and prestige above the work of attaining Christlikeness for all. It is possible for authority to become extremely dangerous. Butler wrote,

Authority intoxicates,
And makes mere sots of magistrates;
The fumes of it invade the brain,
And make men giddy, proud and vain.
By this the fool commands the wise;
The noble with the base complies,
The sot assumes the role of wit,
And cowards make the brave submit.

The danger here is that people will not respect their authority, and that appears to be the danger in this church. It is easy to see how they might say, “Why should we obey him or her? They were just saved along with us, and they are not anything so great.” This could well be true, but Paul urges them to have high esteem for the sake of the work, for if someone does not have the authority to lead, and if others do not submit and follow, there can be no growth and progress.

In Heb. 13:17 we read, “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves, for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account...” The great responsibility of a leader demands that he receive the authority that goes with it. He is responsible for the souls of those whom he leads, and it is the duty of all to know their leaders, and to be assured that they are persons committed to Christ and to His church. Paul concludes in verse 13 that they are to be at peace among themselves. Party spirit comes from failure to follow Paul’s advice. If everyone does what is right in his own eyes, the concept of leadership collapses and chaos is the result.

It is true that a tyrant could appeal to this passage, but when rightly understood it cannot apply to such a leader. Scripture can be perverted and misapplied, but all this should not hinder us from applying it in the way it was designed to be applied. The message of these verses to the church universal is simply that leaders should be totally committed to the welfare of the followers, and the followers should be totally cooperative with their leaders. The goal they are all to be working toward is that all might be presented mature in Christ Jesus.

17. THANKFUL NO MATTER WHAT! Based on I Thess. 5:18

Markus Bach tells of flying above the majestic Selkirk Range in British Columbia with a strange and intricate mechanism in the tail of the plane. It was called a magnetometer. This instrument was used in Ontario to detect 60 millions tons of silver, copper and zinc. It is an "electronic prospector in the sky." Unlike the old time prospector who had to climb the hills and with pick and shovel dig his way to uncertain riches, these modern prospectors sat in comfortable bucket seats soaring over the mountains like a seagull while the instruments were computing all the information needed to tell them where treasures were to be found. No one would ever suspect that by means of this instrument those men in the plane were seeing the unseen. They were seeing what men on the ground could not see. They were penetrating forests and rocks, and they were detecting that which was hidden to the natural eye.

Paul did not know anything about instruments for discovering riches in the rocks, but he had already discovered an instrument equivalent to the magnetometer which enabled one to find riches in all of life's experiences so that the possessor could be one who was

always thankful, no matter what. We could call Paul's discovery a thankometer if we keep in mind that it is an instrument which is itself unseen, and which is built into the very heart and mind of the obedient and perceptive believer. It gives the believer the amazing ability to pierce through the crust of reality into the core and discover riches which are unseen by the natural eye.

It was the possession of this advanced divine technology that enabled Paul to be a persistent optimist through all the trials he endured. Throw him into prison and he looks upon it as an opportunity to catch up on his choir practice. He and Silas sing praises to the Lord in the prison. Let the blind think they are defeating Paul by running him out of town, stoning him, and afflicting him by every means possible. Paul sees an altogether different picture, and he writes in II Cor. 2:14, "But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumph, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of Him everywhere."

Paul thankometer was water proof and shock proof. In spite of ship wreck and stoning it kept operating and caused Paul to see blessings everywhere. His optimism was comprehensive and covered every possible circumstance. He wrote in Phil. 4:4, "Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say rejoice." In verse 6 he wrote, "Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." Paul did not let his optimism become limited by circumstances. He wrote to the persecuted Thessalonians who were suffering for Christ, and he commanded them in the same comprehensive terms of our text and said in verse 16-18, "Rejoice evermore, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks."

Paul expected every Christian to be equipped with a thankometer which was to be kept in operation full time. Christians are not to be joyful and prayerful and thankful on a part time basis. If we are

joyful only when all is well, then we have not risen above the natural level, for this is only normal. Who would be impressed with a magnetometer if it was a device that let a man down by a rope with a pick and shovel and let him dig away at the mountain to see if there was any valuable metals? The fancy name would only add to our laughter at the commonness of it. Likewise, the name Christian does not impress anyone who sees that the label does not affect the actions and attitudes of the one who wears it. The non-Christian must certainly laugh at the professed believer who goes to all the trouble of prayer, worship, and Bible study just to be like everyone else who do none of these things.

Paul says in everything gives thanks. That is, under all circumstances. To be thankful just when circumstances are such as to call forth natural gratitude is to give no hint that Christians are on a unique level. If the Christian does not possess a thankometer, or whatever else you want to call that power which enables them to see treasures of beauty in the junk heaps of life, then he is living in voluntary blindness on the level of the natural and unredeemed man. Like all of God's gifts, this one is also free to those who ask and seek for it. Paul is urging Christians to hunger after this greater vision of reality that they might perceive that which will make them thankful, no matter what.

Paul says that it is God's will that we be thankful under all circumstances. This is one thing we need never doubt, for it is stated clearly. We know then that it is possible for everyone of us to acquire the vision of Paul and be incurable optimists. Knowing that perpetual thankfulness is God's will is the first step on the road to acquiring the ability to see the unseen. We tend to see what we are looking for. The focus of our mind determines what we perceive with our eyes. We are blind to all evidence but that which confirms what we have already predetermined is reality. This is why spiritual truth is foolish to the unbeliever. He has already determined before

considering the evidence that the spiritual is non-existent. He cannot allow himself to see its reality and so he is blind to it.

If you have determined in your mind that Friday the 13th is a day of bad luck, you will be blind to all the good and fortunate events of the day, and concentrate only on the bad things. The Christian is to be one who shatters superstitions and prejudices by concentrating on the positive and valuable. He finds the single star in the vast expanse of dark and cloudy sky. He sees the vein of gold in the mountain of common dirt. He sees the glory of the commonplace, and the cause for joy even in trial. He can even obey his Lord and rejoice and be exceeding glad when persecuted, for he knows the great reward that awaits him in Christ.

The Christian who is not being thankful under all circumstances has some faulty parts in his thankometer and needs to turn to God, the Master Technician, for repairs, for we can only be adequate Christians and effective witnesses when we can fulfill God's will in being thankful no matter what. Thanksgiving is a good time for a spiritual eye examination, or a thankometer tune up. It is a good time to look at yourself and your attitudes, and to evaluate how you see life. We need to determine if we are like those who, as Trench writes, "Murmur when in a blue sky one speck of cloud appears." We are to be like those whose hearts are filled with thankful love if, "but one streak of light, one ray of God's mercy, guilds the darkness of the night." What do we see in the-

I. TRIVIAL CIRCUMSTANCES OF LIFE.

In contrast to Paul's picture of the ideal Christian who is thankful no matter what, what are those people who are complaining no matter what? The sad fact is that all of us tend to conform, to some degree, to this pathetic image. The poet has given us a fairly good description of this far from extinct creature called

the chronic complainer.

**Once there was a man whose name was Horner,
Who use to live on Grumble Corner.
Grumble Corner in Cross Patch Town,
And he never was seen without a frown.
He grumbled at this, he grumbled at that.
He growled at the dog, he growled at the cat.
He grumbled at morning, he grumbled at night,
And to grumble and growl was his chief delight.**

This sounds like an eyewitness account of a man I once worked for. He was a man who, as my father would say, had an even disposition-he was mad all the time. No matter how happy the occasion, you could be sure he would not let any joy slip through and rob him of his reputation as the shipping room crab. Nothing was ever good enough or fast enough. He even shouted at the truck drivers when they came in. You would think that even in the darkest life a little sun must shine, and it did with him too. Things did go well sometimes and there was just nothing to gripe about. But he had a defense against just such occasions. The secret weapon all of use when we are determined to be pessimistic, and that is to complain about the trivial. When all else fails there is always the weather.

**As a rule a man's a fool; when its hot he wants it cool.
When its cool he wants it hot; always wanting what its not.**

It is such a habit to complain about the weather that it is practically a custom in our culture. It is only a trivial aspect in our lives, but we need to apply what we know is God's will and seek even here to be thankful in every circumstance. We need to have our thankometer working even on the most miserable days. We need to be like the country preacher who one winter battled through wind

and sleet to get to the village chapel. He began his prayer, "O Lord, this is a wretched day, and no mistake... but we thank thee Lord, that everyday isn't as bad."

If you look, you can find riches in the most dismal of days, for the clouds and rain cannot dim the light that comes from within. Saul Kane in John Masefield's *The Everlasting Mercy* was converted and saw then what he had never seen before. His eyes had been open to perceive a deeper reality and he said, "The running brook, to my new eyes, was babbling out of Paradise; the water rushing from the rain were singing, Christ has risen again." Even the commonplace and trivial is to lead the believer to praise God with thanksgiving.

II. TRYING CIRCUMSTANCES OF LIFE.

This is where the Christian really needs to shine, for if his light goes out in the winds of adversity the world will not be impressed with the sustaining power of the Gospel. We need to see Paul's meaning here accurately lest we think it is a mountain top ideal impossible for us to attain. Paul is not saying we are to be thankful for all things and all circumstances. He is saying we are to be thankful in them, and that is far different. The first is sheer nonsense, but the second is both possible and practical.

No one can be thankful for every circumstance. It is impossible to be thankful for what you despise and wish was not. I cannot be thankful for many circumstances, but I can be thankful in them. Paul was not thankful for the Judaisers who confused the church and caused Christians to fall back on trusting the law rather than the grace of Christ. Paul is not thankful for the conflict in the Corinthian church that led to a weakness of their witness and a failure of their fellowship. Paul was not thankful for the disobedience that led some of the Corinthian Christians into such

severe judgment that some even died. Paul was not thankful for any of these things, but he was thankful in them, for he was a channel of the grace of Christ to bring healing and solutions to all of these problems.

Don't ever give the impression that Christians are to be thankful for all things. This would mean that we are to be thankful for evil, sin, failure, blasphemy, folly, and every facet of the kingdom of darkness. This would mean that we would have to be thankful for the devil himself. Such an idea is absurd and is a denial of the reality of evil.

Abraham Lincoln was a grateful man, and he made a great Thanksgiving proclamation, but he bore a huge burden and was not thankful for the horrors of the Civil War. He wrote to a friend: "If what I feel were divided to the whole human race there would not be one happy face on earth." Many are the hidden heroes and heroines of history who bare heavy loads, but who do not break down in defeat, but go on serving others and bringing light into the darkness of those who are unaware of the burdens they carry.

**They call me strong because my tears I shed where none can see,
Because I smile, tell merry tales, and win the crowds to me.
They call me strong because I laugh to ease an aching heart,
Because I keep the sweet side out, and hide the bitter part.**

Author Unknown.

This is not hypocrisy, but thankometry, which is the art of obeying God and being thankful in every circumstance. It is being thankful, for example, that you can still help another when you feel helpless to help yourself. If we lack the ability to see any reason to be thankful in trying circumstances, then it is time for a spiritual overhaul. Christians have no business out on the highway of life with a defective thankometer, for this leaves them blind and limited

to their natural eyes, and they are liable to injure others as well as themselves. We need to ask God to open our eyes to see the unseen so that we can always be thankful, no matter what.

18. LET THE FIRE BURN Based on I Thess. 5:19

An embarrassing situation marked the passing of a well known fire chief. None of the family has spoken to any member of his engine company since the funeral. With the best of intentions these fire men sent what they felt was a high tribute. It was a floral arrangement with gold letters saying GONE TO HIS LAST FIRE.

Fire is a touchy word, and we need to be careful how we handle it verbally, as well as how we handle fire literally. We need to be aware that fire is both an instrument of hell and a tool of heaven. It is both a power for good and a power for evil. It is associated with both judgment and salvation. It can be destructive or constructive. God used fire for the building of most of the universe, for our Sun and all of the stars are great balls of flaming fire. Fire is also a tool by which God will destroy the world. Fire is a symbol of God in the Old Testament. He revealed Himself to Moses in the burning bush. He led Israel by a pillar of fire. In Heb. 1:7 His servants are called flames of fire, and the Holy Spirit is symbolized by fire.

On the other hand, fire is used in a negative way also. A sword of fire kept Adam and Eve from reentering Eden. Fire is a sign of judgment. God is called a consuming fire. The lake of fire is the fearful and of all who do not yield to the fire of the Holy Spirit. Fire plays a dual role all through Scripture. It can be a symbol of either heaven or hell. It can stand for fierce anger and hate, or it can stand for warm and gentle love. As the song of Solomon says in 8:7,

"Water can't quench the fire of love."

This dual nature of fire leads to the paradox that the Christian is to both seek fire and shun it. A Christian is to be fire proof, and also to be filled with fire and ablaze with the Holy Spirit. The church cannot survive without fire, and yet it must fight fire continuously. Fire is both friend and foe, and the battle of life is fire against fire. Thousands of churches have been destroyed by fire. This kind of loss by fire has plagued the people of God all through history.

When the Babylonians captured Jerusalem we read in I Chron. 36:19, "And they burned the house of God, and broke down the wall of Jerusalem, and burned all its palaces with fire." Solomon's magnificent temple was turned into a smoldering pile of ugly black ashes. King Herod rebuilt the temple, but it too became a victim of fire. When the Romans took Jerusalem in 70 A. D. a soldier threw a firebrand into the temple. Titus, the general, tried to distinguish the fire, but it was no use, and the temple was again lost to the flames.

The people of God in New Testament times have also been subject to great loss by fire. Nero blamed the Christians for the terrible fire of Rome. Christians taught that the world would be judged by fire, and so it was easy to cast suspicion on them as being fire bugs. They were punished by being burned as human torches. Fire became a common means by which heretics were eliminated. Whenever we speak of making a bonfire we do not realize that the word comes from the gruesome practice of burning people, which was known as a bone fire. This kind of experience with fire makes exciting movies, but it is not the kind of experience that appeals to us. Most Christians do not have a martyr complex. The poet gives us a realistic picture.

**Movies about a Christian hero
Getting burned by a Roman Nero,**

**Seem to attack wide spread attention,
Especially so in the third dimension,
But the appeal of the film does not inspire
Modern Christians to brave the fire.**

There is no good reason why any Christian should desire to burn, as many martyrs of the past have done. Too many temples of God have already gone down in the fires of persecution. Every Christian is a temple of the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is the fire of God. With the fire within the Christian is to burn and fight the fire without. It is divine fire against demonic fire. Every man is facing one fire or another. Either he is being a channel of the fire of hell, or he is being cleansed and motivated by the fire of heaven. T. S. Elliot has recognized this two fold fire and writes,

**The only hope or else despair
Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre-
To be redeemed from fire by fire.
We only live, only suspire
Consumed by either fire or fire.**

The destiny of every person is determined by which fire they allow to burn in their hearts. No one knew this better than Paul. He was a Pharisee who was being consumed with blazing bigotry, and the flame of rebellion against the church of Christ, when suddenly he met with a flame more fierce than the sun and he cleansed by the fire of Christ's love. From that time forth Paul was a flame-thrower for Christ. He was filled with the fire of Holy Spirit, and he became a crucial weapon against the fiery darts of Satan. Paul was used of God to keep Christian conscious of their needs to let the fire burn within. He wrote, "Quench not the Spirit." This is a warning Christians need to hear in every age, for Christian can throw a wet blanket on the fire of the Spirit, and the result will be that the fires of Satan will burn with greater intensity. If the fires of hell run

wild, it is because Christians are quenching the superior fires of heaven. Leighton Ford wrote, "The greatest need of the church of Jesus Christ today is to catch fire."

We need a Pentecost at any cost, for only the fire of the Spirit can empower us to be victorious over the raging flames of hell that threaten the world and the church. The Holy Spirit is symbolized by fire because fire is the source of the 3 things that are essential for abundant and victorious life. The Holy Spirit supplies these three essentials that we want to look at. If you quench the Spirit you will know it by weakness and defects in these three areas. First of all, fire is essential for-

I. HEAT.

Take away the fire of the sun and earth becomes a giant iceberg. Life cannot survive without fire and the warmth it produces. This is true in the spiritual life also. Take away the fire of the Spirit and God's people will become God's frozen people. Instead of being a volcanic mountain the church becomes a snowcapped mountain. It may be appealing to the eye, but with no power to melt the cold hearts of men. It takes the hot lava of love to soften people's hearts and melt them so they can be impressed with the Gospel. Jesus was filled with the Spirit and had a heart of such warmth that people loved to gather around Him. Billy Graham put it beautifully when he said, "The multitude, starved for compassion, love, and companionship, were attracted to Him as chilled men are drawn to glowing embers." His very words produced the heat of emotion. The two on the road to Emmaus said, "Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked to us by the way....?"

Only as we have fire within will we have the warmth and emotion to kindle others and cause them to be ablaze with the love of Christ. This is the key to evangelism. Centuries ago Augustine said,

"One loving spirit sets another on fire." Fire is contagious and it spreads. Drop a match in a forest and thousands of acres can go up in flames. Drop an ice cube and only one square inch gets chilled. That is the difference between a fire filled Christian and one who has quenched the Spirit. A Christian who is not enthused about Christ and the Gospel will never warm anyone else and draw them to Christ.

Elton Trueblood in his book *The Incendiary Fellowship* says, "Evangelism occurs when people are so enkindled by contact with the central fire of Christ that they, in turn, set others on fire. The cold Christian can never be a soul winner. If the non-Christian sees you as dull and unenthused about your faith, he will write you off as having nothing to offer. A British lawyer said, "The world does not believe, because it does not believe that the believer's believe." Our words and actions must come hissing hot from a heart filled with the fire of the Spirit, or we leave the world cold. Examine your life and ask yourself, do I impress anyone as being enthused about my Lord? Do people know I have an enter glow when I consider my Savior? Do they know I am thrilled and excited about God' love and His purpose for my life? Have I allowed the pressure of the world to smother the flame of enthusiasm for Christ? Sad is the poem of Lord Byron who wrote in anguish of his spiritual decay:

**I am ashes where once I was fire,
And the soul of my bosom is dead;
What I loved I now merely admire,
And my heart is as gray as my head.**

This can happen to anyone, and that is why Paul warns us not to quench the Spirit. Let the fire burn and feed it, for a fire not fed will go out. Christians need to add fuel to the fire day by day that they might be consistently warm of heart and emotionally enthused. An unknown poet wrote,

**Give us a militant spirit, Lord,
Come, set our spirit on fire.
Give us a passion to share thy Word;
Give us consuming desire.**

**Give us a flaming and burning zeal,
Moving us forward and on.
Help us the urgency, Lord, to feel,
Till greater victory is won.**

Dr. Kirsopp Lake has written, "Early Christianity succeeded by the contagion of an enthusiasm." This is just another way of saying that they let the fire burn. They did not quench the Spirit, but let the heat of love warm their own hearts so that others could not help but be warmed. If this heat is no present in our lives then we are quenching the Spirit. The second value for which fire is essential is-

II. LIGHT.

Take away the light and man is blind to all beauty and truth. Take away the fire and spirit and man is left in the darkness of ignorance and shut off from the truth of God. As he refers to the emotional nature, so light refers to the intellectual nature of man. The fire of the Holy Spirit is essential for the head as well as the heart. Theophylact wrote, "In the night of this life God gave us the Spirit for a light." The Spirit bears witness to the truth, and he illuminates the Word of God for the mind. Without the light of His fire the mind cannot discern the will of God. Billy Graham wrote, "When the disciples were baptized with fire on the day of Pentecost, their intellects were sharpened, their understanding was quickened, and their powers of comprehension were transformed."

The disciples had a balance of heat and light. Emotion ran high, but it was always under the control of reason. Peter preached a

sermon of such powerful logic, and with such persuasive facts of history that 3000 were compelled by the evidence to bow to Christ as Lord. A sharp critical and alert mind is not inconsistent with burning enthusiasm. Many tend to set up the heart and head as opponents, and create a battle between emotions and the intellect, but the Bible unites them. They are allies, and are meant to work together. When one seeks to go it alone the balanced life is lost, and there is trouble.

In verse 21 Paul says to test everything. He means that we are to use our heads and not get so enthused about everything spiritual that we forget to use sound judgment. All emotion and enthusiasm that is truly of the Spirit will conform to the truth of God's revelation. Charles Finney saw the Holy Spirit work in revivals as much as any man in history, but he also saw the danger of too much heat and not enough light. He wrote, "Sometimes I have seen a burst-a real tornado of feeling in a revival; but in such cases, truth loses its hold on the minds of the people; they are too much excited to take sober views of the truth and of the moral duties it inculcates.It is always well to avoid that measure of excitement which throws the mind from its balance and renders its perceptions of truth obscure or fitful."

People must see that we are enthused to be attracted to Christ, but they must also see that our enthusiasm is based on solid ground. We must have a reason to give for the hope within us, and the reason must be sound and appealing to the mind. Truth is the means by which the Holy Spirit moves us and uses us. He is the Spirit of truth. Close your mind to truth and you quench the Spirit, and you lose the light of His fire. Whenever a Christian has the pride to say he knows enough of the Bible to get by he quenches the Spirit. Whenever a Christian pretends to know the last word on a difficult biblical subject and closes his mind to new perspectives, he quenches the Spirit. When we judge a person, group, book or theological

system as having no light when we have not studied it, then we are quenching the Spirit.

Charles Finny warns, "The Spirit is quenched by indulging prejudice. Whenever the mind is made up on any subject before it is thoroughly canvassed, that mind is shut against the truth and the Spirit is quenced." A Christian whose mind is not open to conviction and new ideas and truth has thrown a wet blanket on the fire of the Spirit. He is saying that he needs no further light. Show me a Christian who is satisfied with what he knows, and I'll show you an iceberg devoid of both heat and light. God forbid that any of us should be content to be cold and indifferent while the fires of hell are busy burning. Only the fire of the Spirit can defeat those demonic flames. Let our prayer be that of Ralph Cushman.

**Set us afire, Lord, stir us, we pray!
While the world perishes, we go our way.
Purposeless, passionless, day after day.
Set us afire, Lord, stir us, we pray.**

We need fire for heat, and we need fire for light, but thirdly we also need the fire of the Spirit for-

III. POWER.

Fire the source of most of the power that is made man what he is. Man is the animal that has made friends with fire said Henry Van Dyke. Atomic power is fire power. The power that takes astronauts into space is fire power. The source of power for most industry is fire power. Fire is power and that is why the Holy Spirit, who is referred to nearly 300 times in the New Testament alone, is constantly associated with power. The fire power of the Christian is dependent upon his being filled with the Spirit. Heat and light are forms of power, but they are ineffective if there is not enough power

to move the will. Cannon Fremantle said, "It is not enough that religion should be merely capable of defense. It must lead and inspire or else it dies."

We need fire of sufficient power to do more than warm our own hearts and open our own eyes to truth. We need fire that is contagious, and fire that will move us to labors of love, and which will cause others to be kindled and become torches of testimony for the glory of God. Shakespeare recognized this when he said, "Heaven does with us as we with lighted torches do, not light them for themselves." "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." If the fire of the Spirit is burning in us we will be empowered to do work that captures attention and admiration. If we tend to be lazy and uninvolved in labors for the church and the cause of Christ it is obvious we are quenching the Spirit. The Spirit is power, and so if we say that we are too tired to labor for Christ then we are quenching the Spirit.

Paul says in Rom. 12:11, "Never flag in zeal, be aglow with the Spirit, serve the Lord," If you are letting up in zeal, and if you are becoming dull and less radiant, and if you cutting back on your service for the Lord, it is clear that you are throwing a wet blanket on the fire of the Spirit. As fantastic as it sounds, we who can do nothing to quench the fire of the sun can quench the fire of Him who made the sun, and all the blazing stars of heaven. We have in the power of our wills the greatest fire fighting power in the universe, for we can refuse to be fuel for the fire of the almighty Spirit. But we can also obey the first commandment and love God with all of our heart, which gives heat. We can love Him with all of our mind, which gives light. And we can love Him with all of our strength, which gives power.

His fire will consume the world, but we can refuse to let Him

burn in us. Paul recognizes that God has given man this power, and that is why he urges them not to use it, but says quench not the Spirit. Let the fire burn he pleads. We need the heat, the light, and the power that only can be ours as we yield to the fire of the Spirit. Let our prayer be that of the hymn writer who wrote,

**Thou, whose purpose is to kindle;
Now ignite us with thy fire;
While the earth awaits thy burning,
With thy passion us inspire.
Overcome our sinful calmness,
Rouse us with redemptive shame;
Baptize with thy fiery Spirit,
Crown our lives with tongues of flame.**

What will you do? Will you quench the Spirit, or will you let the fire burn?

MESSAGES ON II THESSALONIANS

1. THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST Based on II Thess. 1:1f

The doctrine of the second coming of Christ is one on which all true Christians agree as to its reality, but one on which they disagree on many other points. One of the causes for much confusion is the fact that we are seldom content with reading the Bible from the historical point of view. That is, we so seldom make a conscious effort to see the letters of Paul as written to specific people under specific circumstances, and for the purpose of conveying specific

information. It is my conviction that we can never rightly understand the Bible until we study it historically, and that means that we determine just what the author was conveying to the original readers.

Any conclusions drawn apart from this consideration are usually pre-conceived ideas read into the text. I have read dozens of books on the second coming which prove all kinds of things by simply ignoring the text and bringing in all kinds of passages from the prophets to the book of Revelation to support their views. The result is that each position links together a series of unrelated texts arranged just to prove their point. Because there are so many varied passages all through Scripture each view can compile a list that, when woven together cleverly, will prove there's to be the most biblical. The cults, of course, do the same thing. The end result is that a person is convinced of any position he happens to read because each of them is very convincing, and each has biblical basis when the text are arranged to fit a system.

We all have preconceived ideas about certain systems of interpretation, but none of these will be of much hindrance if we study just the Bible text in front of us as of independent value. That is we must first of all determine just what an author is saying in his letter, and only then refer to other Scripture to support it. If we treat Paul's letter just as a letter should be treated, and take it without commentary and cross references, and seek to understand it as he meant it for the persons to whom he wrote it, then we can go to other texts for commentary. It must be considered as a distinct message in itself, and not as a jumping off place to go roaming all over Scripture for proof texts. By this method of roaming all over the Bible can be made to teach anything, but when you stick strictly to the text at hand, you are compelled to face its message, and any false interpretation can be easily spotted.

We want to begin a study of II Thessalonians in a verse by verse method, for not only will this help us to stay on the subject of the text, but it will enable us to keep a closer check on our reasoning and conclusions. Since I also have a bias, it is your obligation to follow closely and correct that which you can see does not fit the text. The first two verses are introduction, and they are the same as in the first Epistle, and so we will skip them and go right to verse 3.

In verse 3 Paul expresses how grateful he is to God for their spiritual growth. Their faith is growing, and that indicates they are becoming stronger as individuals, and their love for one another is growing and so they are becoming stronger as a body. In verse 4 he says that because of this he boasts of them in other churches. They are used by Paul as examples of how believers ought to grow, even in the midst of trial. This was good psychology on the part of Paul, because if they know he is boasting of them, they will be more determined to go on enduring and not give up, which they might do if they thought no one cared anyway.

Paul makes it clear that these Christians were going through persecution and tribulation, but he also makes it clear that they were standing fast, and were not wavering in faith. This is important background to know about these Christians. He is not writing to those at ease in Zion, or to those who live as we do with little to fear by standing for Christ. They were suffering for Christ. There was no promise to them of escape from trials, for they were already in them, and they were to go through the persecution of Nero. If Paul knew anything about the supposed rapture of the church out of the world before tribulation, he kept it to himself, and for good reason, for it would be of small comfort to the early Christians who had to go through 10 waves of horrible persecution by the Romans. If it is true that the church will escape some great tribulation at the end of history, it would have been of no value to the early church, or to the suffering church through the centuries. It

is not even of much comfort to us today since we can never be sure we are the last generation of Christians.

This text does not say anything to prove or disprove the idea of a rapture of the church to escape a tribulation. It does indicate that if such a teaching is true it has been of little value in the history of the church, and specifically in the lives of the Thessalonians. Paul does not mention it, but speaks to meet their need rather than deal with speculation about some future escape. In verse 5 he says that the fact that they are standing fast in the persecution is a manifest token, or is clear evidence, that God has judged them worthy of His kingdom. He will right all the wrongs against them, but meanwhile He will use the wrongs they suffer to make them worthy. Paul is assuring them that they are God's own, and that they suffer because they are, and are not of the world. Jesus said that just as the world hated Him it will hate His followers. He promised that in the world you shall have tribulation, but if we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him. Paul wants them to see that their suffering is evidence that they are on the right track to the eternal kingdom.

The Scripture places a high value on suffering for Christ, and those who suffer for His sake are promised great reward in heaven. "The path of suffering and that path alone leads to the land where sorrow is unknown." The poet has probably overstated the case, for certainly there will be some non-sufferers who will be saved, but the Bible does lay great stress on suffering and being worthy of the kingdom. We can pursue this, but it is enough to see that these Christians are encouraged and comforted by being assured that God will use what they suffer for their eternal good. They suffered by giving their allegiance to a rejected king, but what is that when they are assured that He will yet reign, and they will be His loyal subjects forever. Paul goes on then to describe the judgment ahead. He first assures them of their reward, and then of the judgment of their enemies.

In verse 6 he tells them that God, being a righteous and just God, will write all wrongs, and those who are now making tribulation for them will suffer His tribulation. This is important psychologically for the suffering believers. Injustice arouses the emotions more than most anything, and even a Christian cannot easily submit to it. Our very nature cries out for revenge when evil men hurt and kill the righteous. Paul says not to let it get you down. Justice will prevail, and evil men will not get by with it. They may triumph for the day, but they will certainly lose the war, and all their evil will be repaid with interest.

Here is the great tribulation that I see the Scripture teaching. It is God's tribulation upon evil men. It is the greatest possible tribulation, for it is God's wrath, and it leads to eternal damnation. That Christians will escape this, no one has ever doubted. This tribulation, however, comes after the second coming and not before. The so called 7 year tribulation before the second coming is nowhere to be found in this passage. He does not deal with how long it lasts, but he does make it clear that it is after the second coming. He makes it clear in the next two verses that the second coming is both a day of joy and a day of judgment. There is joy for believers and judgment for unbelievers. Believers will suffer tribulation before the rapture, but unbelievers will suffer God's tribulation after the rapture.

In verse 7 Paul says that on that day they will, with him and his companions who have also suffered tribulation, experience rest. He does not write of escape from tribulation, but of rest when it is all over. That is the promise, and the second coming will end the battle of good and evil forever. The believers will enter their eternal rest, but until this they will suffer at the hands of evil forces. Not until the second coming will all be changed and the final victory be won. It is at the revelation of Christ, and this word means at His uncovering or unveiling. The hidden Christ will be made manifest in all His

glory and power.

Some divide the second coming into two parts with the rapture first and then 7 years later this revelation, with a great tribulation in between. If Paul knew of this, he was again silent about it, for he says here that it is at this revelation of Christ that their rest will begin. This would be a strange thing to say if the church is to be raptured 7 years earlier than this revelation he speaks of. It is my conviction that the rapture and the revelation are the same event, and that the New Testament clearly indicates this. To separate them demands that you ignore the Greek, which makes it clear that this revelation of Christ was the blessed hope. It is the day of reward, and Peter says it is the day we receive the crown. This day of the reveling of Christ is the day the believer is to wait for. The rapture is going to happen on that day that Jesus is reveled.

We are going beyond the text, however, for Paul is silent about the rapture here, and only indicates that the day of Christ's reveling will be a day of rest for believers. It does not prove there could not be rapture 7 years earlier, but it does show that those who separate the rapture and revelation have a problem to explain, and that is, what have the Christians been doing during that 7 years that makes it needful that their rest does not begin until the 7 years have passed? However this be answered, the fact is that the revelation of Christ is the day of joy for believers.

Paul goes on in verse 8 to show that it is a day of judgment for the unbeliever. The second coming will be dooms day for those who know not God, and who have not obeyed the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Some feel since both Jews and Gentiles were persecuting the early Christians, it could be those who know not God, which would be the Gentiles, and those who knew Him but did not obey the Gospel, which would be the Jews. This may be, but it is not certain. What is certain is that it is the end of hope for all unbelievers. This being the

case has always puzzled me as to how there can be any evil people left after this, for they are all judged and condemned. Verse 9 says they will be punished with everlasting destruction, and verse 10 says this will be on the day He comes to be glorified in His holy people, and that this included the Thessalonians. It is difficult to see where so many unbelievers come from at the end of the thousand year reign, if all have been judged at the second coming.

There are many questions about end times that are not easily answered, and I am not convinced that any system of theology has been developed that answers them all clearly. The problems arise because we do not stick to expounding the text at hand, but bring in information from many other sources. If we just stick to the verses that Paul is writing to this church we will see that the second coming is the beginning of heaven for believers and hell for unbelievers.

2. UNFULFILLED PROPHECIES II THESS. 1:9 TO 2:2

The New Testament makes it clear that Jesus came into the world the first time, not to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. It is equally clear that when He comes the second time, He will come to end the day of grace and judge all men who have not taken advantage of the good news. This day of judgment is necessary because God is just, and He cannot allow those who have rejected and cruelly treated His Son to go unpunished. The exception, of course, is if they too receive Him before He comes again. Paul was a persecutor of believers, but he received Christ, and so he will not experience God's tribulation. This final judgment when Christ returns is not only necessary from God's point of view, but from the point of view of Christians who suffer for Christ. They can only endure to the end if they know it

will be worth it, and if they know that the opposition will be dwelt with justly.

If the universalists idea of all being saved in the end were true, the suffering Christian would soon be asking himself what am I doing suffering for Christ, and paying such a cost, when it does not make any difference in the long run anyway? If all are going to eventually redeemed, one just as well be on the most favorable side meanwhile, and for Christians like the Thessalonians that would mean siding with the opposition. In other words, if you can't beat them, join them. This would be the logical conclusion for them to reach. If they are going to persecute us, we just as well give in, for all will be the same in the end.

Paul makes sure no such thoughts go through the minds of these people. He praises them for enduring persecution. He assures them that it makes an eternity of difference. Those who are putting them through tribulation will experience the tribulation of God and eternal destruction. In verse 9 Paul just states the fact that punishment will be dealt out to the unbeliever when Christ returns. The fact that it is called punishment reveals that eternal damnation is not for innocent people. There will be no one punished by God who does not deserve it. Paul does not elaborate, or paint any pictures of horror. This is the only place in all of Paul's writings where he mentions everlasting destruction, and here he just states the fact of it. He was not a hell-fire and brimstone preacher if we can judge him by his letters. He believed in eternal punishment, however, and he makes it clear.

Neil writes, "The most notable feature is the reticence of the description. What in normal apocalyptic literature would have included a lurid picture of the torture of the damned and the bliss of the righteous, in Paul's hands becomes a restrained background of judgment with a light focused on the Person of Christ as Judge." It is

horrible enough without detail for Paul says it is eternal destruction. A piece of paper could not be destroyed forever, but persons are made in the image of God, which is eternal. The context only tells us one thing about this punishment, and that is that it is to be an exclusion from the presence of God. It will be eternal life without that which gives life meaning, and so could be better called eternal death. The first death separates us from physical life, but the second death separates us from spiritual life.

As history began with the exclusion of Adam and Eve from God's presence, so it will end with the exclusion of all from His presence who have not taken advantage of God's plan of reconciliation. Just as the believer will be caught up to be ever with the Lord, the unbeliever will be cast out to be never with the Lord. When Christ comes again the line is drawn once and for all. As in the days of Noah you are either in the ark or out of it, and where you are determines your eternal destiny.

In verse 10 Paul says that this awful day of judgment and exclusion from the glory of Christ is the very same day of great joy for the believer. Not only is the battle done and the victory won, but he has rest, for the glory of Christ will be manifested in all its fullness in them. Once we get it into our heads that the Day of the Lord is both a day of judgment and joy we will be able to fit all Scripture into a simple pattern. Sometimes an author will write of the Day from the point of view of judgment, and then another will write from the view of it being a day of joy. Here we see them both together. Some who do not take heed to such passages as this, where both are together, divide the two and complicate the simplicity of Scripture. It is my conviction that all we need to do is accept Paul's understanding of the second coming, and then the rest of Scripture falls into place. It is a great day of many amazing events, but it is still a once for all program. The day is stretched by some to include over a thousand years, and it could well be, but all I read is that

however long the Day is, when it comes it is the last Day, and all of the passages dealing with final judgment and salvation will be fulfilled.

If you enjoy speculating about the order of events of that day, it is your privilege, but please do not label such speculations as the Word of God, for it is such practices that has made the glorious doctrine of the second coming a stumbling block to many. Each one who speculates is more concerned about proving his own guesses than proclaiming what is clearly revealed. Paul said it will be a day of final judgment for the unsaved, and a day of ultimate joy for the saved, when they shall see Jesus and be like Him. Paul says all this will be yours simply because you received the good news when it was preached. In the last two verses of this chapter Paul prays for them. We are going to skip to the second chapter.

Chapter 2 gets us into one of the most difficult passages in the Bible. Many feel it is impossible for us to ever know the right interpretation for sure. If we were to try and go over all the different ways men have interpreted this chapter, we would do little else for the rest of the year. Most of them are not even reasonable, and so we can narrow it down considerably. We need to remember that difficult passages on which Christians have a variety of views are not essential for salvation. They are not a part of the good news to the lost world. They are passages of value only to the believer, and in some cases, only to those who originally received the message.

The background here is simple enough. Paul wants to get some things straight about the parousia and rapture that he wrote so much about in his first letter. All agree that the gathering together is the rapture. Paul received the word that they were apparently confused and shook up about this matter. The second coming can be a very emotional doctrine, and when it is not properly understood

people can be led into some very unbalanced thinking, which does more harm than good.

The words Paul uses in verse 2 describe a state of jumpiness and worry. They were on edge and perplexed about it, and this was not good. The second coming is to be a doctrine of stabilizing influence, and is to be anticipated with joy and not anxiety. Some false teachers had apparently gotten some ideas into their heads to the effect that the Day of the Lord was already at hand, and that it had actually arrived. Paul urges them not to accept any such idea, and not to believe it even if it is in a letter reported to be from him. Paul rejects any part of the idea no matter what its source. They are to stick to what he told them, and not take any other ideas as authorities.

This is advice that has been ignored time and time again, and it has led to all kinds of fanaticism. We are not immune from it today. Harold Ockenga tells of the son of the president of an evangelical college who was so persuaded of the soon coming of the Lord that he wanted to quit his studies and make money so as to enjoy life before the end came. Some of the Thessalonians had the same idea, and they quit working thinking that it was senseless to plant a crop when they would not be here to harvest it. This has been the response of many in different ages. This makes the glorious doctrine of the second coming a stumbling block. Paul wants these Christians to ignore the idea that the Day of the Lord is here, and he wants them to get back to work into a normal pattern of life.

We need to stick to what we know from Scripture, and not take seriously all the fantastic ideas of men that are always floating around. Leon Morris wrote, “Men taken up with advent speculations may easily take an unbalanced interest in the latest idea.” If we wish, we can find all kinds of information from self-appointed experts in the field of prophetic speculation. Some

can give you a day by day account of how world events are fulfilling Scripture passages. They can name names and countries that the Bible has revealed will be doing such and such things. If I seem skeptical of this kind of thing, it is because of the history of it. Paul was skeptical in his day, and every generation has needed the warning that Paul gives here.

The Bible makes it clear that every age until the end will have anti-Christ, and evil movements and wars of all kinds that fit the prophecies of Scripture. Someone can be found in every period of history to fit, but they are all only apart of the process, and they are not the fulfillment of the prophecies. So we need to be cautious lest we think that we are facing the ultimate anti-Christ. One of the main tasks we have in our study is not just to try and figure out who the anti-Christ is, but to seek to eliminate some ideas by showing how he cannot be who many think he is. Paul gives us more detail here than anywhere in Scripture, and if we apply them we can be quite sure of who cannot be the anti-Christ.

If Paul could urge them not to get shaken, and not to believe the Day of the Lord had come because anti-Christ had not yet been revealed, how can we believe Christ could come any minute? I think that the falling away and the man of sin must come first before Christ comes in judgment. If that was true then, it is still true today, and so I look for these signs to be fulfilled before Christ returns. If it couldn't be when Paul wrote because these signs were not yet fulfilled, then it still holds true that it is error to say that the Day of the Lord has arrived, for these prophecies are not yet fulfilled.

3. THE MAN OF SIN AND THE SECOND COMING. 2:3f

Christians have not been the least among the gullible who have fallen for all kinds of gimmicks. One could write a lengthy history on the nonsense of the way Christians have been duped. A man in Fort Worth, Texas is giving away flat gold plated two inch nails. All you have to do is pound it in the wall of your home and leave it there, and your prayers will be answered. For five dollars more he will send you one of his “miracle billfolds” which he claims has been a financial blessing to thousands. Sincere believers are constantly being exploited, and deceivers actually make a fortune. Getting a believers money by deception is bad enough, but when the deceiver begins to peddle false doctrine, then it is very serious, for then he is in danger of perverting God’s revelation.

The fact that Christians fall for so much makes it clear why all the warnings are in the Bible to be cautious in following any other authority than the Word of God. There is no other foundation which is safe, for even the most godly and intelligent have demonstrated their ability to be deceived. The Christian must recognize this, or he will be a victim who ends up believing many things that are only the conjectures of men. Conjectures about the unknown may or may not be true, and there is way to prove or disprove them, and so in the realm of speculation one is free to think as he pleases as long as it is consistent with what is known. It is wisest, however, to be silent where God is silent. If God has not spoken, it borders on presumption for men to speculate. What God has revealed is enough, and so let us be content with clear revelation and listen to Paul’s exhortation to the Thessalonians, who were all to ready to listen to men.

In verse 3 Paul warns them not to be deceived by the self-appointed prophecy experts of his day. It is well to note that Jesus gave His disciples the same warning in Matt. 24:23, “Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there, believe it not.

For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; in so much that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.” Paul is only following the advice of Christ, for Jesus made it clear that there would be a long period of history before He came again. They were to go into all the world and preach the Gospel. Meanwhile there will be false prophets who will seek to deceive you and proclaim that His coming has already taken place. Paul is now dealing with Christians who have been shaken up by just such false prophets as Jesus said would come. Paul says do not believe them. There are definite signs to guide the believer so that he is not at the mercy of every prophetic fanatic that appears on the stage of history. Paul says not to be deceived by any who say the Day of the Lord has come or can come before these signs are evident.

Unfortunately, Christians have not listened to Jesus and Paul, but they have followed fanatics that have brought disgrace on the church of Christ. Many Christians are eager to swallow anything that tickles their ears or pleases their prejudices. They are almost superstitious in their craving for information on what has not been revealed. The wise test everything by the Word of God, and if it is not in harmony with God’s Word they reject it. It is important then that we listen to Paul and avoid being deceived. He is making it clear that the Day of the Lord will not and cannot come until there is a falling away and the man of sin is revealed.

Unless it can be shown that these two things have already been fulfilled, and that the man of sin is already here, then I must reject all ideas that indicate Christ could come at any moment. If He could not come to the Thessalonians without these clear signs in that day, it is inconceivable to me that these things could be fulfilled in the modern world without us knowing it. The result is, I do not believe Jesus will come again until I see these two things fulfilled. If an any moment coming was rejected by Paul, and if he could urge these

Christians not to believe it, then it can hardly be a sign of superior piety to believe it today. In fact, it is the Christian's obligation to recognize Paul's point here, and not be deceived. Until these two things he mentions are fulfilled, that day will just not come. They could, of course, be fulfilled in a matter of weeks, and so every believer is always potentially less than a year away from eternity. This is sufficient to account for the constant admonition to be ready for the second coming. We don't know when it will come, but we do know what must precede it as signs for the believers.

The first sign is a falling away. The Greek is apostasia from which we get the word apostasy, which means abandonment or desertion of what one has professed to have believe. It is used in Greek to refer to revolts and rebellion in a religious sense. This has happened many times in history. In the Roman persecutions many professing Christians escape death and torture by apostasy. They left the church and renounced Christ. One of the big problems of the early church was deciding if a person who had apostatized during persecution should be allowed back into membership when the pressure was off. There have been many other periods where apostasy was common. This means that the apostasy that Paul refers to must be one so universal that it could not be missed. Keith L. Brooks wrote, "The great period of wrath is not due until we witness the universal revolts from the true faith on the part of those professing to represent Jesus Christ in the world. The unbelief of infidels is not apostasy." Like Calvin and many others he looks for a great world wide rebellion from within the church.

If this sign was all alone it would be inadequate. It would mean that Christians in times of great revival could be sure that the Day of the Lord was not near, but Christians in times of apostasy would always be thinking that it was near. How could one ever be sure which apostasy was the last? Paul solves this by giving another sign that cannot be missed. The man of sin will be revealed. We will

know when the last rebellion against the church is taking place because on the wave of that rebellion the man of sin will ride to power. This is the idea the early Christians had about this matter. In the Didache (teaching of the 12 Apostles) from the second century we read this: “..as lawlessness increases they shall hate each other and shall persecute and betray, and then shall appear the deceiver of the world as a Son of God, and shall do signs and wonders...And then shall appear the sign..first, the sign spread out in heaven, then the sign of the sound of the trumpet, and thirdly the resurrection of the dead.”

They felt then that lawlessness would become so great that the deceiver could rise to power, and then after that there would be signs for the believer to indicate the coming of Christ. Justin Martyr, back in that early period, in his dialogue with Trypho wrote, “What brainless men! For they have failed to understand what has been proved by all these passages, namely, that two advents of Christ have been announced, the first in which he is shown as suffering, without glory, without honor, subject to crucifixion, and second, in which he shall come from the heavens in glory, when the man of apostasy who utters arrogant things against the Most High, will boldly attempt to perpetrate unlawful deeds against us Christians.” The early believers understood this man of sin to be one who would enter history at a time of great lawlessness, and he would and he would seek to oppose the church, but would be unsuccessful because Christ would come in power to destroy him.

This appears to be the clear and obvious point which Paul is making, and it means that believers will know the man of sin, and possibly face his pressure before the second coming. We do not know any such person fitting this description, and so it seems clear that the second coming is at least weeks or months away. However, since it would not take long in an international crisis for all law and order to vanish, and the man of sin to rise to power, we must all

recognize that we are always potentially near the end of history. We can say on the basis of verse 4 that no man alive today is fulfilling this, for he opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God, or is worshiped. He will be a person that opposes all religions, and all objects of worship. He is lawless, and so he wants no rules from any religion to be binding. He wants to be absolute in his power.

It would seem likely that such a person of power would arise from the secular world. The Roman Emperors came the closest to fulfilling this picture, and they were certainly types of the anti-Christ, for some of them actually proclaimed themselves to be God, and they persecuted those who worshiped other gods. Many feel that the Roman Emperor is what Paul had in mind, and it can be argued with much support. The problem is that the Day of the Lord did not come then, and so we must see them as types of what will finally be. Some great leader will gain world power and proclaim himself God. When this happens it will be no secret. He takes his seat in the temple of God, and some feel this will be the temple to be rebuilt in Jerusalem. If that be the case, it will take some time to accomplish. When the man of sin that Paul describes does come there will be no debate, for all will know. Meanwhile, we are not to get shook up, but be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding the work of the Lord, and not be any anxiety concerning the second coming.

4. THE MAN OF SIN Based on II THESS. 2:5f

A six year old boy and his father once traveled down the Danube River, and at the close of one day they stopped at a cloister. The father took the boy into the chapel to see the organ. It was the first large organ he had ever seen. His face lit up with delight. He asked

his father if he could play it. The father complied and went to fill the great bellows. The boy was too small to use the stool, and so he pushed it back and stood on the pedals. Suddenly the silent chapel was filled with deep tones, and the monks who were just then eating their supper dropped their knives and forks in astonishment. Their organist was right there with them, and so they ran to the chapel, but when they looked up into the organ loft they saw no one at the organ, and yet its harmonious tones continued to flow forth in thrilling power.

“It is the evil one!” cried one monk. “No, it is a miracle,” said another. A third monk boldly climbed the stairs and found the small boy treading from pedal to pedal while playing on the keys above with his little hands. The boy was John Wolfgang Mozart, one of the greatest musicians that would ever live. This story is of interest because it illustrates the difficulty that men have in interpreting the unusual and mysterious. Seeing no evidence of a person at the organ, the monks came to the conclusion it was either the devil or God. Only the man who could see the situation up close could come to a conclusion that was certain and not just a matter of conjecture.

So it is with the passage we are studying in II Thessalonias. Only those who were addressed by Paul could see the situation from the vantage point that would give them perfect understanding, for, after all, it was written to clarify their minds. They were like the monk who climbed the stairs. They had heard Paul explain these matters in detail in person. We are like the two monks below trying to guess which is the most likely explanation for what we hear and see. The result is, just as the monks came to opposite conclusions, so men have come to opposite conclusions in interpreting what Paul has written here. This means humility must characterize any interpretation of this passage. We must be ever open to new light, but meanwhile, with what we have, we must seek to understand Paul’s message.

In verse 5 Paul reminds them that he told them these things when he was with them. They were Gentiles with no knowledge about God's plan for the world. Paul had apparently gone over these matters of the end times in detail with them. They had the key to what he writes here in their memories, and so in verse 6 he simply says, "And now you know what restrains." Unfortunately, Paul's confidence was only in them, and not the rest of the Christians in history. For we were not there to hear him, and so we are not certain at all. What we do know for sure is that they knew what it was that was restraining the lawless one in their day. This tells us a great deal. It tells us that the man of sin is no mere historical person or power, but is definitely supernatural, for he existed in the first century. He is Satan incarnate in man like Jesus was God incarnate in man. Satan's last attempt to conquer will be by counterfeiting God's method.

He is under God's control all along. He cannot even come unto the stage of history until God says the time is ready. God has a power in the world that is restraining Him from coming. The big question is, what is that restrainer? There are those who say it is the church and the Holy Spirit. Both are needed to account for the restrainer being called by a neuter in verse 6, and a masculine in verse 7. The church is the instrument, and the Holy Spirit is the person in control holding back the man of sin. It makes sense, for Paul says that we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers. The church is restraining the power of Satan by the power of the Holy Spirit. This is why the church is the light and salt of the world. As long as the church does its task, the man of sin cannot take over. This is the battle of the ages, and Jesus said that the gates of hell would not prevail against His church. The Gospel would be preached to every nation, and then would come the end.

The Amillennial idea is that this restraint of the man of sin is

the same as the binding of Satan for the 1000 years, or the total period of the age of grace. The church and Christ reign in history until God's plan is completed. Then comes the final test with the great falling away, and then Satan is let loose to deceive the nations. He does so with his man of sin and lawlessness who gains world power and deceives all who love not the truth. Christ then comes and this great imposter is destroyed. This interpretation appeals to me because it accounts for so many things in the Bible, and it is so simple. I cannot assure you it is a certainty, but as I compare it with other views it seems far superior. But let's look at some other views.

B. B. Warfield, the great Presbyterian scholar, feels that the restrainer is the Jewish state, and it was restraining the power of Rome against the Christians. This view does have some support, but Rome's power was restrained by the existence of Judaism. Judaism was a legal religion in the Roman Empire, and the Romans thought of Christians as a movement within Judaism, and so they were not persecuted as they would have been had they not had this shelter. When Judaism fell in 70 A.D. The Christians were then on their own, and they met real trouble. The Emperors called themselves God, and they demanded worship just as the lawless one is to do. There was also a falling away. This would be a sound interpretation except for the fact that Jesus never came to destroy the Emperor. There is no room for a spiritual interpretation of the second coming here, for the whole context clearly reveals the literal coming and judgment.

What about the opposite view that Rome is the restrainer, and that Judaism is the one restrained. This view also has support, for Paul was saved several times by the power of Rome from being killed by the Jews. Christians had protection from the Jews just because the Romans would not tolerate lawlessness. The Roman power of law and justice kept the hatred of the Jews from destroying the church as it did her Lord. The day will come, however, when

the reign of law in the world will be taken away, and lawlessness will reign. A Jewish ruler will be revived by Satan and gain world power. The temple will be rebuilt, and he will proclaim himself God and deceive the world. This view reads a Jew into the place of being anti-Christ, but there is no basis for this.

A third view which is the most widely held from the earliest days of the church is like the second, but does not make the Jews the source of the anti-Christ. They say that the restrainer is the Roman Empire. The early Christian writers almost all agree on this. The early Christians prayed for the Empire to last, for they feared that when it collapsed the man of sin would come. The New Testament abounds with exhortations to pray for leaders and to live a life of peace. The breakdown of the law and order of the Empire would be the beginning of the end was the Christian conviction. It was Roman power that seized and executed the false Christs that appeared on the scene.

If it was Rome, it would explain why Paul does not mention it in a letter to be read in public. These believers were already in tribulation. If they started reading in public ideas about the fall of Rome they could easily be charged with treason or rebellion. Paul does say that the restrainer would be taken out of the way, and the Romans would not have cared to hear this idea being expressed. The Reformers say it was the Roman Empire, and when it was taken away the Papacy began, which they say represents the man of sin. The Pope is the anti-Christ in this view, and it has been a popular view of Protestants. This was part of the warfare between Protestants and Catholics, but no where in history has a Pope proclaimed himself God, as did the Roman Emperors.

I accept the Roman Empire as the restrainer, but in the sense that it was the maintainer of law and order. When it fell the principles of law lived on, and even today much of the law of our

land goes back to Rome. The spirit of law has gone hand in hand with the church in building Western civilization. The church has preserved the law and justice of the Empire, and where the church goes, there goes law and order. This is then the restraining power that keeps Satan's hands tied so that he cannot get his man of lawlessness on the stage of history. When the church has done its task and God's time comes, law and order will collapse, and in the anarchy that follows Satan will be allowed to guide his man of sin into power. It is not important that we know for sure all the details, but it is important that we be busy fulfilling the Great Commission.

5. THE LAST DAYS Based on II Thess. 2:7-10

In the magazine called the New Yorker there was a cartoon of two ministers conversing in a luxurious library. The older man says to the younger: "Drawing upon my not inconsiderable experience, Andrews, my advice to a young man ambitious of preferment in our calling is to steer clear of two subjects-politics and religion." There is no doubt about it that these are the two most controversial subjects. They are so just because they are important and vital to both time and eternity. There is much needless controversy, however, that can be eliminated if men will limit their debate to what is known, and not argue over the unknown.

There are at least 3 or 4 probable ways to interpret Paul's remarks about the man of sin and the restraining power that was holding him back. One is free to believe any of them if he can maintain a consistency with the rest of Scripture. It would be easier to shut out eyes to the matter and just steer clear of controversial subjects, but this is foolish since we have everything to gain and nothing to lose by struggling with the hardest passages of the Bible. However difficult it might be to know the exact interpretation of

every detail, it is easy to get the basic ideas, and these are the values that we really need anyway. We do not need to know who and when, but it is important that we know what. If we admit we do not know who the anti-Christ and the restrainer are for sure, and that we do not know for sure when he will be revealed, we can still know and declare what he will do when he does come, and what the consequences will be. We want to study Paul's difficult words so as to know what history will be like the last days.

In verse 7 Paul says the mystery of iniquity is already at work in the world. Being that the man of sin is a product of Satan's power, it is obvious why he is already at work, for Satan does not cease to do all he can to promote evil. But notice that Paul says he is limited and works in mystery, which means he works in the dark and in secret. Lawlessness has no right or power to operate openly in the light, for the restrainer is holding him back. When the restrainer is out of the way, then Satan will be permitted by God to again operate in full power out in the open. The man of sin will come to the light. No longer will he be limited to underground operations.

Paul is simply telling them that if they think evil is powerful now, just wait. It will be a great deal worse before history is ended. The last days have already begun, and the lawless one does have some power, but in the latter days of the last days he shall be revealed in great power. The Apostle John said the same thing-anti-Christ is coming, but already there are many anti-Christes in the world. Anti-Christianity is as old as Christianity, for both began at the same time. Herod sought to slay the Christ-child, and from that day to this there has been a division-the followers of Christ and opponents of Christ.

Only the presence of the restrainer prevents the final revelation of the man of lawlessness. The restrainer I believe is the principle of law and order that is embodied in the church by the power of the

Holy Spirit and manifested in a just government. If you believe the restrainer to be something else or someone else, as some believe it to be Michael the archangel, or if you say with Augustine and many others, “I frankly confess I do not know what he means,” still we can all agree that the restraining is still going on, and as of now Satan does not yet have the power to freely establish his man of lawlessness.

If we agree at this point, the rest does not really matter, for then we are in the same position as the Thessalonians. We are waiting and looking for the signs to be fulfilled, for the day is yet ahead when as Paul says in verse 8, the wicked one shall be revealed. Paul implies by his following words that his rise to power is almost immediately followed by his being destroyed in the coming of Christ. Sometime, of course, is needed for him to deceive the people, but centuries can hardly be read into this place between the coming of anti-Christ and the coming of Christ. Whoever he is, Paul says Jesus will consume him, or slay him, with the spirit of His mouth. This is Old Testament imagery. In Isa. 11 we read of the Messiah coming in judgment: “...he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked.”

When Jesus comes again it will not be in patient long suffering, nor with a message of love to woo the wicked from their sin. He comes in glory and power to judge and destroy. He comes to wrap up history by bringing justice upon all believers. All he has to do is speak and it is done. When he says, “Depart from me ye accursed,” it will be accomplished. What the Jews looked for in Messiah in the first century is what He will be when He comes again. He will be absolute sovereign, and He will triumph over all His enemies.

Paul indicates that He will come with such brightness that the light itself will destroy the power of darkness. Notice that it is the brightness of His coming, that is His parousia, which will destroy the

lawless one. Parousia is the word used by Paul in his teaching concerning the rapture of the church. Those who put 7 years between the parousia, which includes the rapture, and this parousia which ends the rule of the man of sin, do so on the arbitrary ground that their system demands it. There is no support for such a view in the Greek. If such an arbitrary use of Scripture can be allowed for one system, then it can be allowed for all, and the cults have as much right to twist the Bible to fit their schemes as anyone else. Just because a person is an evangelical Christian does not mean he has a license to do what he condemns in others.

If you cannot prove what you believe by Scripture alone, then you are as accountable as those who do the same to prove what you do not believe. The point is, the New Testament uses parousia as a term to describe all of the events of the second coming. It is without foundation to say it has two meanings. When Jesus comes with His saints and for His saints it will be to destroy the man of sin, which also makes the theory of the secret rapture improbable if not impossible.

After Paul has given a brief order of events: the falling away, the man of sin revealed, and the second coming of Christ, he goes on to give the reasons for this in God's plan, and he describes briefly what the plan of the man of sin will be. In verse 9 he gives us the source of our power, and the signs of that power. All of the terms here to describe the signs are terms used of the miracles of Christ. In other words, they are going to be real supernatural acts to gain the allegiance of the people. Anti-Christ will be a real counterfeit of Christ. The motive and goal, however, are all based on evil and falsehood. They are designed to deceive rather than enlighten like the miracles of Christ.

Notice that the word coming is used again, but here it is the parousia of the anti-Christ. In verse 6 the word for his being

revealed is also the same word used of the revelation of Christ, which is apokalypsis. The appearance of the anti-Christ on the stage of history is described in the same terms as the appearance of the true Christ. Since it is obvious that the parousia and the apokalypsis of the man of sin are the same event, why should it not be equally as obvious that the parousia and apokalypsis of Christ are the same event? They are not two different events separated by 7 years, as some believe. There is no more basis for that than there is in putting 7 years between the revealing and the coming of the anti-Christ.

The fact that the anti-Christ has a revelation and a coming confirms my conviction that he is a supernatural being, and that he is now in existence, as he was in the first century, he will appear just as soon as Satan is unbound and allowed to pursue his plan of deception through signs and wonders. At this point I would caution against what I feel is another misuse of Scripture. Every time someone appears who can do great wonders, someone is quick to point out that even Satan will do miracles to deceive the people. Paul did not go into detail and tell us what the signs would be, but it is certainly unjust to impose this passage on all those with whom we disagree. Much healing may be evil in its source and result, but I would hesitate to link any of it with the miracles of the anti-Christ, for they just do not fit the picture. None of those who can be criticized are anywhere near fulfilling Paul's description of the anti-Christ. Be careful how you apply this passage to wonder workers. Unless you are prepared to deny that God is doing anymore wonders in the world, you are in danger of using the Word of God to impose the work of God.

In verse 10 Paul says it will be the lost who are going to perish, and who will fall for him when he comes. They will fall for his deceiving lies just because they loved not the truth. In other words, God is going to use Satan's evil scheme as a means of accomplishing his own judgment upon the foolish and hardhearted who reject the

Gospel. Only the lost will be deceived, for the saved are in no danger. The implication is that the whole world will have been evangelized, for they have all had a chance to receive the truth, but many have not received it. In other words, after the world has had a chance the day of grace will end, and the day of judgment will begin. God let Satan back on the battlefield and laughs at his futile efforts, for when he is at his best he fails utterly, and Christ destroys his whole plan by His coming. However we interpret details, the message is clear that Satan is going to have one more chance to deceive the world, and then he will be destroyed, or judged forever. History as we know it will close, and this is what we call the last days.

6. THE DAY OF JUDGMENT Based on II Thess. 2:18

The optimist says the world is everyday in every way getting better and better. The pessimist says the world isn't what it used to be, but is going to the dogs. The Christian realist says they are both right, because there are two kingdoms of reality. There is the world order, or that realm in which sin and rebellion reign. There is the kingdom of God, or the realm in which Christ reigns. Both will exist side by side in conflict until the end. The Christian, as a realist, must be both an optimist and a pessimist if he accepts the whole picture of reality painted for us by Scripture. If the Christian refers to the world as it is outside of Christ, then he has no choice but to be pessimistic. The Bible clearly says that it will pass away and end in destruction. There is no basis for optimism about the world. But we must not have our vision so limited by the world order that we cannot see the hand of God working in history.

We must open our spiritual eyes and recognize that there are

thousands of victories being won everyday around the world. We are referring to the victories of light over darkness. The Christian must balance his pessimism concerning the world with his optimism concerning the kingdom of God. If he does not, he will not be an effective servant of Christ. Paul shows us the balance between the two in this passage. He paints a picture of the end time, and the final revelation of the man of sin. The whole thing will end in every rejecter of truth being condemned. Paul was certainly no universalist. He knew that many would be finally lost. On the other hand, as soon as he finished this awful picture he begins to sing a song of thanksgiving in verse 13, because he is aware of another whole realm of reality. He is aware that God has a plan of salvation, and that there will be many elect, and this includes the Thessalonians, who will not be a part of that awful picture he has just painted.

We need to keep this dual vision before us-a lost and damned world, and yet a glorious saved kingdom of God. Optimism is essential to motivate us to win as many out of the world into the kingdom before the day of judgment comes. Pessimism alone is a pagan characteristic, for even they can see the signs of doom. The following inscription was found on a Chaldean tablet in the Mosque of St. Sophia in Constantinople. It was written 200 years before Abraham, but it sounds like a modern prophet on the signs of the times. It reads, "The times in which we live are decadent. It is evident we are approaching the end of the age. Everyone has disregarded the law. Children no longer obey their parents. Everyone is eager to write a book." Such statements can be found in almost every age because every age is peopled by the sinful. The world has also always had its men of sin, which means men of power and leadership who are opposed to the will of God. They make life on earth more miserable than it would naturally be. None has fulfilled the picture that Paul paints for us in this passage, and so we still await the coming of the anti-Christ.

In verse 11 Paul says the strong delusion that God sends upon the world in that day will be for a very definite purpose with a definite cause. The cause is in verse 10. It is because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved. The day of judgment is a day to be feared by all who have not responded to the truth, for before that day they will be led into a delusion that will seal their doom. God permits Satan freedom to work in order to accomplish His own purpose in causing evil men to condemn themselves. Put a piece of cheese in a dangerous spot such as a trap, and let the mouse's nature do the rest. So God sends His bait into the world, which is the deluding power of Satan, and lets the rebel sinners follow their hero into judgment. They refused God's truth, and would not bow to Him, and so He makes sure they bow to the one they adore that they might join him in his destruction.

History will end with a final demonstration of the folly of sin and rebellion against God. It is of interest to note that God fully cooperates with Satan in his plan, or, rather, God makes Satan cooperate with Him. God permits Satan to do his best, but then He also helps out by sending a spirit of delusion into the world. This may be the same thing as permitting Satan free reign, but it could indicate also that even Satan could not dupe all sinners without help from God. Some of them would not swallow his line, or be dazzled by his show of miracles, and so God makes sure all will be involved by sending strong delusion. The sovereignty of God runs through this passage, for without God even Satan could not be total success in deceiving the whole world of the unregenerate.

In verse 12 the reason for God's making sure of Satan's success is stated: That all might be damned who believe not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness. We speak much of God's plan of salvation, but here we see God's plan of damnation. This is conclusive evidence to support my conviction that Paul is describing the final days before the day of judgment. If it was any other period

of history, it would contradict all that Scripture says about God not willing that any should perish. But if we see it as the very end of history when the day of grace is over, then it is no problem at all to think of God as directly involved in a plan of damnation. It would be inconsistent to conceive of God planning and working out the damnation of sinners at the same time as he has the church trying to fulfill the Great Commission of taking the Gospel to all the world. It is only when this is accomplished that it can be reasonable to conceive of God working on a plan of destruction. Just before the end it makes sense to let Satan loose to deceive the world of rebels, and lead them into the ultimate of folly and damnation, but at any other time it makes no sense at all.

To me it is necessary to see ourselves standing in the same relationship to this passage as the Thessalonians. It applies to all Christians throughout history. For it is ahead for all of them, which includes the last Christians on earth. Paul says that they all might be damned who believe not the truth. The all must be taken literally or it is meaningless. All does not always mean all in the Bible, but here it is obvious that it must mean all. All unbelievers will be deceived by the man of sin. Such a universal deception has never taken place. There have been many anti-Christ persons, but never have they succeeded in deceiving all believers. No infidel ruler has ever had the loyalty of all non-Christians. That is why I say that Christians will know when the man of lawlessness is revealed, for the whole non-Christian world will be deceived by him. Such a universal deception can hardly take place unnoticed.

Paul thought of the world as one. Rome was an universal power, and Paul thought of all people's of the world of his day. We must think of the whole world as we know it in applying Paul's words. When anti-Christ comes he will not deceive just the people in the area of the Roman Empire, but of the whole world as we know it. God's judgment will not be local, but universal. Therefore, it is

inconceivable to me that any Christian could live at this period of history and not recognize the man of sin. He will deceive every person who is not of the elect. That means that the elect alone will not give allegiance to the man of sin. All who believe will not be deceived. The implication of these verses leaves no doubt in my mind that every believer alive in the last days will know who the man of sin is. It is easier to believe that they will be gone at this time than to believe that they could be here and not know. Since all the evidence is opposed to their being gone, it follows that Christians will be here and will know.

In verse 13 Paul, having finished his picture of the judgment ahead for the lost, goes on to express his optimism concerning the Thessalonians. They were not going to be a part of that tragic deception, for they had received the love of the truth, and Paul is grateful. Paul is so thankful for them because they are beloved of the Lord and will escape the judgment. The Father planned their salvation, the Son purchased it and the Holy Spirit will bring it to perfection. Our hope is always in the sovereign God and His plan, and not in any man-made plan of escape. If the Lord wills that we escape we will, but Paul does not mention any plan. His focus is on the election of God and the present work of the Holy Spirit in them to bring them to sanctification. Those who are sanctified and believed the truth have all that is necessary to be free from the strong delusion of the days of the man of sin.

For me this means that all I have to do is be assured of my salvation in Christ, and that the Spirit is working in me to sanctify me. I then need not fear Satan's worst, for I can be secure no matter what he does. In verse 14 Paul states God's work of calling, and then in verse 15 challenges them to stand fast to the truth they were taught. This is typical of Paul's attitude. There is nothing to fear, for God is in control, and He will keep you, but hold on and never let go as if everything depended on your own faithfulness. Paul ends the

chapter with prayer that they be comforted and established in word and work. All of this chapter was for the purpose of calming and comforting them in order to make them stable, and ready for whatever comes in the day of judgment.

7. WHEN WITHDRAWAL IS WISE Based on II Thess. 3:1f

The Thessalonian Christian had been foolish enough to give heed to false teaching concerning the second coming. As a result some of them were acting in a way contrary to the will of God. Their basic problem was a lack of certain authority. They had been pagans all their lives, and they had probably believed all kinds of superstition, and so now as Christians they had to learn to accept the authority of the Apostles, and this was not easy. Paul's first letter apparently failed to solve the problem, and some of them had refused to get back to work, even after they had heard his advice and commands. In this second letter he has to use stronger language, and speak with as great an authority as anywhere in the New Testament.

Paul knows that if Christians are not submissive to the Word of God they will be at the mercy of every source of advice. These people were basing their attitudes and actions on mere rumor that was baseless, and not on the wisdom of God as revealed through the Apostle Paul. Their concepts of the end were about as well founded as those of the poet who confessed: "Absolute knowledge I have none, but my aunt's washer woman's sister's son heard a policeman on his beat, say to a laborer on the street, that he had a letter just last week, written in the finest Greek, from a Chinese coolie in Timbuctoo, who got it straight from a circus clown, that a man in the Klondyke heard the news, from a gang of South American Jews, about somebody in Borneo, who heard a man who claimed to know of a swell society female fake, whose mother-in-law will undertake to prove that her

7th husband's sister's niece, had stated in a printed piece, that she has a son who has a friend, who knows when the world will end."

It was on the basis of authority as remote as this that some of them began to be idle and to wait for the Lord without working. This disturbed Paul greatly, and he was determined that Satan would not bring shame upon the name of Christ and His church by this subtle means. His first strategy we have already considered. He has destroyed the false theological foundation of those who are idle. He has made it clear that the Day of the Lord is yet future, and that Christians will know when it is near, and so until then they are to work and carry on a normal and honorable pattern of life. They are to live just as if they were sure the Lord would not come in their lifetime. In other words, Paul has said they were not to use the second coming as any excuse for laziness or idleness, for until we see the signs we have no idea when the end will be. Now he goes on to some specific and practical methods to be used by the faithful in bringing those who are out of step back into harmony with what is good Christian living.

It is a sensitive situation, and Paul approaches it diplomatically and with all the kindness of his Christ-like heart. In the first verses of this third chapter he strengthens their relationship and makes it clear that they are one in Christ. They are seeking the same end, which is the glory of Christ and the extension of His kingdom. In verse 1 he calls them brethren, and he asks for their prayers. Paul reveals his confidence in them and covets their prayers. He acknowledges that they are God's children, and so their prayers will be a benefit to his ministry. Paul's greatness was in his dependance upon God, and in his recognition that the prayers of the common Christian were of value and power in getting the Gospel to speed on its way to success. R. A. Torrey sent out 5 thousand letters in 1901 asking for prayer as he took his world tour of evangelism. When he reached Australia there were ten thousand praying, and 40 thousand

were praying in England everyday. He said, “Who could not preach under such conditions, and is it any wonder that the marvelous results followed that did follow.” I cannot doubt that the success of Billy Graham is also due to the thousands who pray for him constantly.

Paul knew this was the source of much of his success, and he wanted these Christians to share in it. Paul was wise as a serpent and harmless as a dove. He was going to lay down some rigid commands, but he made it clear that it was in love. So often Christians do the right thing in the wrong way. They let evil increase and stir up friction and hard feelings. The difference is that of being Spirit-led or self-motivated. The Spirit-led man has a person centered approach to problems. His concern is for persons and what is best for them. The law centered approach says to get the problem solved, and let the devil take those who will not cooperate. Paul’s method wins the sinner back into fellowship.

In verse 2 Paul points out that he and his companions are also suffering persecution, and they are seeking for deliverance. We are all in the same boat going up stream against the current, and so let’s stick together. In verse 3 he goes from his problems to theirs, and he assures them that the Lord is faithful in spite of the opposition of faithless men, and he will strengthen and guard them. Here again we see the pessimism-optimism combination: Look at the world and you see faithless men and opposition, but look to God and see a faithful guide who will bring us through.

In verse 4 Paul stresses his confidence that they will not listen to every voice, but will accept his authority and abide by his commands, as being from the Lord. He is going to give them a command that may not be easy to follow, and so he prepares them to say yes to it by expressing his confidence in their loyalty to his authority. No where do we see more clearly how apostolic authority was in the early

church. If Paul could not get the loyalty to his commands, there would be no way for the truth to triumph over the heresies of that day. Apostolic authority was the foundation of the early church. We can see why it was necessary for Christ to appoint men as authoritative voices through which he could speak.

In verse 5, just before he gets to the basic problem, he prays that the Lord will direct their hearts into the love of God and the patience of Christ. Paul is praying that these two virtues would characterize them, for these are essential to facing and conquering their problems. Verse 6 brings us to the place where we see Paul taking the role of standing in Christ's stead and commanding the body of Christ with absolute authority. Paul was not even a member of this church, and so we wonder how he can command and not just suggest. He could do so because an Apostle stands in the same relationship to the church as does the Word of God. Paul is still commanding every local church, for obedience to him is obedience to the Word of God. No church is independent of the authority of the Apostles. Though dead they still speak through the Word, and that is why we have the Bible, so that they might continue to speak, for their voice is the voice of Christ to His body.

Paul's command is in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. There is no question as to the source of Paul's authority. Paul commands them to withdraw from fellowship those believers who live disorderly, and not in harmony with the Christian values that he taught when he was with them. Here is a biblical form of segregation based on conduct. A Christian who is living disorderly, or in idleness, is not to be encouraged by being allowed to remain in good standing in the church fellowship. If a Christian will not conform to the authority of the apostolic teaching, he must lose the benefits that go with obedience to it, which is Christian fellowship. Paul does not just suggest this as one possible way of dealing with a lazy Christian. He commands it in the name of Christ. He says to withdraw and not

associate with such a person, or show any approval.

Such discipline is not as effective today because a person can now go to another church and not even suffer for his folly. In Paul's day if you were out of the church, you were out, for there was only one church. Nevertheless, the local church still must heed the command of Paul and withdraw fellowship from the disorderly and idle Christian.

In verse 7 Paul calls their attention to the fact that Christians are to be as he and his companions were when they were with them. You are to imitate us, said Paul, for we were exemplifying the Christ-like life. We were not disorderly or idle in trying to shirk our duty. Paul learned to work hard, for laziness was a Gentile vice. The Jews glorified work, and Paul, even as a man of high position in Judaism, had his own trade. The Jews said, "He who does not teach his son a trade, teaches him to steal." Paul sensed that this view was lacking in these Christians when he was with them, and so he went out of his way to be an example.

In verse 8 he says they didn't even eat anywhere without paying for it, but they worked night and day to earn their own living so as not to burden the people, and to be a good example. In verse 9 he says it was not because they did not have the power and right to expect to be supported, but because they wanted to set this good example. Paul did not hesitate to wave his rights if he could be more useful for the advancement of Christian learning. In verse 10 he reminds them that even when he was with them he had laid down the command that if any would not work, they should not eat.

It is good to remember this passage when you hear Billy Graham, or some other creature, preaching on safe driving, housing or labor. Some are critical and say the church is to stick to the Gospel, but here we have the very highest authority for preaching

and teaching on any area of life. Paul had plenty to say about a Christian's responsibility to work. No Christian can say it is my own business how I make a living, and so it is no concern of the church. If it is not in harmony with Christian teaching, it is the concern of the church. If a Christian takes advantage of the state poverty program and refuses to work when he could, just because he can get something for nothing, he is out of God's will, and he should be out of fellowship with the rest of the body.

Work is part of the Christian life, and to shirk it is a sin. When people are incapable of working, no one was more for charity than Paul. He traveled all over the known world to get a collection for the needy saints of Judea. But when a person does not work because they will not, then Paul says they are to be disciplined. It is as serious as any other sin, and Christians are not to be charitable to the idle and lazy. Today, of course, the church does not have the control as it did then. A lazy Christian can get food from the government, and so the church cannot prevent them from eating. The ideal would be for the government also to require some work for their free handouts. If a person is not willing, but chooses to be idle, he is undeserving of support. If he is willing, then even if there is no work, he is worthy of support. Hesiod the Greek wrote, "Both gods and men are angry with a man who lives in idleness, for in nature he is like the stingless drones who waste the labor of the bees, eating without working."

In verse 11 Paul says that he has heard of Christians who are doing nothing but are mere busybodies. Their only business being to pry into what is none of their business. They were probably trying to persuade others to stop working too, and just wait for the second coming. They were becoming a stumbling block to others. In verse 12 Paul commands the guilty ones to cease this folly and get back to work. The Lord will not come until you see the signs fulfilled, and so meanwhile you must live an honorable life by making it count as a

witness for Christ. In verse 13 he encourages the faithful not to give up, but to persist in doing right and living well regardless of the foolishness of some. In verse 14 he says that if any still persist in folly after reading his letter, then they are to have nothing to do with them that they might be ashamed and repent. In verse 15 he makes it clear that the bottom line is love, for we are to always treat a fellow Christian as a brother and not as an enemy.

