

BOOK OF FIRST THESSALONIANS

Introduction

Thessalonica was a wealthy trade center, a port city that supplied Rome with many of their goods. It was a heathen cosmopolitan city, a melting pot of many people from all over the world. As a result of this influx of different people, there were many cultural groups and many different religions.

The Thessalonian church was founded when Paul and Silvanus went there to preach. (Timothy came later.) This church was a great testimony of faith and love, and they embraced and fully believed all God's Word. Although Paul only preached to them about three weeks, they joyfully accepted everything he told them concerning God's full counsel.

The word 'Thessalonians' means victory over tossing of the law, or victory over falsity. Many people don't realize how the law holds them back. Examples of this are found in the churches at Corinth and Galatia, as well as in many churches today. The law is a huge detriment to people, but many think keeping the law can add something to them, or make them more holy in God's eyes. This is simply not so. God only sees us in Christ, and we can't do anything or add anything to what Christ accomplished for us on the cross. It is all in Christ; nothing of us. The law was not made for the righteous, but for the disobedient. When Christians put themselves under the law, in spite of the fact that Jesus freed us from the law by His death on the cross, they are being disobedient. Any Christian that is under the law will have his/her growth in Christ stunted. These Thessalonian saints had victory over the law and falsity.

The first letter Paul wrote to the Thessalonians church was the first letter he wrote to any of the churches. He wrote it 13-15 years after he was born again on the road to Damascus. Paul studied God's word for at least 10 years before he started his missionary journeys.

In this Thessalonian church we find another group of saints who are referred to as overcoming saints. There is not one word of correction in Paul's letter to them. The Corinthian church had correction after correction, and the church at Galatia had to be admonished for turning from the faith.

Not only did Paul write to the saints at Thessalonica, they wrote to him asking questions and seeking to know God's full counsel in the high calling bridal message given to Paul. They were followers of Paul as he followed Christ. They didn't stop at being saved by our precious Lord Jesus. They drank deeper and deeper from the cup of salvation.

CHAPTER 1

VERSE 1

Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

In God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

The Thessalonian church was not just a church, it was a church that was IN God the Father and Christ Jesus. The only churches that truly live up to the name 'church' are those founded IN God and Christ Jesus. There is one way to God; one truth and one Savior, Jesus Christ. This oneness shows power and unity with no divisions. A house divided against itself cannot stand.

Paul didn't refer to them as the church of God, although he would have been scripturally correct in doing so. He said the church was in God the Father, and this indicates a new relationship. The Thessalonians were not just part of the church; they were the church in God. They had taken their place in Christ, and they were abiding securely in the vine. They had found their place of rest and fellowship in God the Father and Christ Jesus.

Grace and peace

This is the same pattern we see in Paul's epistles: first grace, then peace. A person must receive grace to have peace. That is God's way, and how it will always be. Peace comes from grace, and peace is dependent on God's grace. Grace is given freely by His faithfulness, and His grace and faithfulness are forever.

VERSE 2

We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers;

We give thanks to God always

Paul was very thankful for this group of believers. The Lord delights in the steps of a good man, and everything is by faith. We need to walk with God, be willing to totally embrace His high calling message, and be willing to suffer to win Christ as bridegroom.

In our prayers

'We give thanks' shows that brother Paul is including two brethren, Silvanus and Timothy, with him. The two of them were with Paul when he was praying those prayers for the Thessalonian saints. The prayers of the apostle Paul went beyond the physical. He gave sweet thanksgiving to God in his prayers for the dear Thessalonian saints. They were on the right path to win the crown by growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

VERSE 3

Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father;

Remembering without ceasing

This shows that remembrance doesn't stop, it's always there. There were three things Paul commended these saints for:

1) Their works of faith.

Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. The works of faith are the result of believing God and putting absolute confidence in Him, and not in people. This is about God's fore-ordained good works for us. These are works of love and not works of the law. The Thessalonian saints were manifesting faith in God's love. They were building gold, silver, and precious stone lives. Despite the sufferings, these saints stood and withstood for the gospel of Christ. God worked in them complete confidence. He will work that confidence in us as well.

2) Their labor of love.

This is labor, not work. A labor of love is a desire to please God. This comes from knowing that He loved us first, and knowing that fills our hearts with gratitude. When our hearts are filled with gratitude the love of God just oozes out. This love comes out to us, and we give it back to Him as well as to others. A labor of love is the only lasting labor there is ever going to be. Christians must be motivated by divine love, and not by greed, prestige, or to honor or seek glory for themselves. Divine love will prompt and promote us.

John 15:13

Greater love hath no man than this, than a man lay down his life for his friends.

There are hearts that labor to love, but these hearts are ones that love to labor. These are joyful and willing hearts that are full of the love of God.

3) Their patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

The patience of hope is abiding in the Lord, but even more abiding in all the promises of God. Patience of hope means we have to persist in hope, and continue to believe God regardless of what circumstances we are in. We patiently wait for, long for, and love His appearing. When we do get to our home in heaven, it will be a time when our heavenly Father will rejoice like no other time. God will greatly rejoice when the goodly pearl will be given to His most precious Son. He will forever rejoice in the Lamb's wife because He knows she will complete His Son, and love Him forever.

Paul rejoices in these things for these saints because they are the result of believing God.

In the sight of God our Father

All three things listed above are qualified by this phrase. This tells us we must be more interested in living our lives before God than before men. God's opinion and how He sees us is much more important than how we are perceived by men.

VERSE 4

Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.

Brethren beloved

Paul calls them beloved brethren, which signals they are saints running the race to win Christ. These Thessalonians turned from the things of the world as a result of their faith and truly repented from their wickedness.

Election of God

These brethren were some of God's elect. The word election means 'selection.' This selection doesn't mean salvation, because God is not willing that any should perish, but come to repentance. Paul's letters to the Philippians and Colossians make it clear that not everyone qualifies, or endures, the selection to run the race to win Christ.

Philippians 3:12

Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.

Throughout scripture we read of people overcoming. They get the call, so to speak. This is true of the bridal message. We don't hear it when we first get saved, and we don't get it the moment we are filled with the Holy Spirit. This is because it is an overcoming affair like it was with Rahab. God asks us if we are willing to run the race to win His precious Son Jesus as Bridegroom. This is when we select to run the race to win the prize of God's high calling in Christ Jesus. God's elect are the ones who were predestined to receive His high calling message. God saw the hearts that would accept this before the foundation of the world, and they are predestined to become conformed to the very image of His Son.

Romans 8:30

Moreover, whom He did predestinate, them He also called: and whom He called, them He also justified; and whom He justified, them He also glorified.

The election is in the blood and its power to cleanse us. That cleansing shows our election is sure and can never be taken away.

VERSE 5

For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.

Our Gospel

This is the gospel given to Paul by Christ Jesus himself.

Romans 2:16

In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.

We need to come to a knowledge of the truth and to live the joy of the Lord. This is our strength, and this is the joy unspeakable and full of glory.

The gospel came:

1) In Word.

This speaks of the revealed Word, the truth given forth in word as being fact.

2) In Power.

God demonstrated the power of the gospel in Mark 16:17-20 with the signs that shall follow those who believe.

3) In the Holy Spirit.

This is the power of God making the Word real in the lives of God's people.

4) Much assurance.

The faithfulness of God can give us the power of the Holy Spirit in much assurance, and this is why the Thessalonian's election was sure, and it reached their hearts. The power of the Holy Spirit will always ignite the heart. This is the transforming power in our lives. Assurance shows it wasn't allowed to be just a theory, a fable, or a fantasy. This was in assurance and they were absolutely convinced that the gospel preached to them was true and holy. This is how the Holy Spirit works in our lives. When God comes to us in full assurance of His high calling message, we then know it works in us, it is for us, and it belongs to us. The assurance in the gospel displayed by Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy was their testimony, because these brothers lived it. They talked the talk and walked the walk. They had joy in their suffering and trials because they possessed the joy unspeakable and full of glory.

VERSE 6

And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the Word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost.

Followers of us

Paul says that when they saw what manner of men he and Silvanus and Timothy were, they became followers of them. They followed Paul as he followed Christ. Those three men set forth a glowing example of what it was about to yield to the Lord. They saw the message operating in Paul and the others because they were totally dependent on the Lord, and as a result the Thessalonian saints became followers as well.

Having received the Word in much affliction

We can rest assured that when God's message begins to work in us, if we continue to take in the message and really embrace the truth, there is going to be much affliction. This is a pattern that follows the working of the gospel in our lives.

Joy of the Holy Ghost

Those people had the trials, afflictions, and difficulties but they were offset by the joy of the Holy Ghost. No one likes to suffer, but the joy is in what God is working through us and in us.

Jesus didn't delight in suffering on the cross or in the separation from God when all the sins of the world were put on His precious head, but the joy and rejoicing for Him was in what lay beyond the cross when He would have a bride, and that His death would bring many sons to glory. His great love made Him willing to endure all the horror of it, but He rejoiced in the outcome.

Hebrews 12: 1-2

- 1) Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.
- 2) Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

We can rejoice in what God is working in us. If we only concentrate on the affliction, we will miss the joy of the Holy Spirit that offsets those afflictions. We need to realize that it is in these trials and afflictions that we are being prepared for something wonderful and glorious, and the things we need to attain it are being worked into our lives through them.

VERSE 7

So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia.

Ye were ensamples

The Thessalonian church received the message first, and then they became an example. This is always God's pattern. The way we can be effective in ministering the Word of God is to first receive the message for ourselves in affliction and joy in the Holy Spirit. Then we become examples to all that believe. The lives of the faithful saints in Thessalonica became examples of the message they received, and Paul had a way of knowing that when he sent Timothy to check on them. Paul had been forbidden to preach the gospel there, and he had to leave so he couldn't check on them himself.

Macedonia and Achaia

The Thessalonian church was an example to even the Berean saints which included the saints at Philippi. They spoke of the Thessalonians' love because the testimony of their love was on display for all to see, and this excited the Philippian saints. They rejoiced for the faith in love they saw in the Thessalonian saints.

VERSE 8

For from you sounded out the Word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak anything.

The example of the Thessalonian saints was spread by:

- 1) Sounding out the Word of the Lord.

After they received and understood the Word and fully embraced Paul's bridal gospel, they

began to sound out the message to others. Not only were they sounding out the message in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. They weren't just a sounding board; this was a sound from within that came from all the abundance of the Lord that was in these sun-glory lives and hearts. Faith without works is dead, and this is working by grace and faith in our lives and producing much fruit. This is falling in love with Jesus and letting Him will and do of His good pleasure in us. This is what will produce fruit. The Thessalonian saints weren't just hearers of the Word only, they were doers of the Word as well. They shared the message of the gospel with others in the way they lived, and they became a sweet salve to many everywhere they went.

2) Their faith to God-ward.

Their faith was not in men, but rather in God. They did not focus on anything marvelous they had done. It was their faith in God that was manifested to other people.

We need not speak of anything

The Word that these Thessalonian saints spread was so effective that Paul said he couldn't add anything to their testimony. Their words and their faith had already spoken for them.

VERSE 9

For they themselves show us of what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God;

They themselves

Their words and their faith was the witness. A number of things shined forth in their testimony:

1) What manner of entering we had unto you.

These people were a precious testimony of the ministry of Paul. Paul wasn't looking for any glory for that because they were a testimony of the message Christ Jesus gave to him to faithfully proclaim. The entering in they had was definitely effectual.

2) How they turned to God.

Turning to God is the first step. Then keep turning to Him. Their words and their faith showed how they turned to God.

3) They turned from idols.

The Thessalonian saints turned from idols to serve the living God. The only way a person can turn to God from idols is to turn to God first. When we turn to God He takes our love for idols away. This goes against the law-keeping circles, but turning to God first is always His pattern. We need to attack anyone's religion or what they are doing. We should first show them a better way, and induce them to turn from their idols. This is exactly what Paul did, and what the Thessalonian saints followed through with.

Idols speak of the world, and they attack us in different ways. The enemy has an endless bag of tricks to come at us with, but God won't allow us to be tempted beyond what we can

bear without making a way of escape. The power of God rests in His children. Everything we do has to start with turning to God.

To serve the living and true God

This is why people should turn from their idols. First they need to hear of the better way, and then be enticed to worship and serve the living God. This is a continuation of yielding to the Lord.

VERSE 10

And to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.

4) To wait for His Son from heaven.

The Thessalonian saints were willing to wait and endure until His coming. These things are also shown forth by their word and their faith. Their lives testified of this, and our lives should testify of it as well. There are testimonies meant to win souls and do work for the Lord, but our greatest testimony should be that we are waiting for His coming. While we are waiting we shouldn't be idle. We are to continue in the Word and in faith as an example for others. To do this we need the power of the Holy Spirit.

Even Jesus which delivered us

The wrath written of in this passage is the great tribulation. Compare it with 5:9 of this book, as well as Revelation 3:11. The Thessalonian saints realized they would not have to go through the tribulation spoken of in Revelation, and they were waiting and longing for the return of Jesus.

CHAPTER 2

Chapter 2 is full of "patterned preachers." Some of the different preachers presented in this chapter include:

Verse 1 - successful preachers

Verse 2 - courageous preachers

Verse 4 - preachers approved of God

Verse 9 - unselfish preachers

Verse 11 - paternal preachers

Verse 13 - appreciative preachers

Verses 14-16 - persecuted preachers

Verses 17-18 - affectionate preachers

Verses 19-20 - hopeful preachers

VERSE 1

For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain:

The successful preachers are those who heard Paul's message and it worked effectually in them. In the book of Acts chapters 16 and 17, we find that Paul had some tremendous afflictions and suffering he had to overcome to get the Word to them. This is often the way of the Lord. Anything worth having is worth suffering for. None of what Paul suffered was in vain because the message he preached to them was effectual. The Word of God never returns void.

God gave Paul and his associates the entrance to come to the Thessalonians; they didn't have to force their way in. God gave them the entrance and the Holy Spirit gave them the utterance. These brothers always went where God sent them, and they always spoke the truth in love in the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Today's mainstream Christianity is moving without God, and has moved to man's instructions instead. They have moved away from doctrine for money, crowds, popularity, or for whatever they feel gives them the most glory. Glory belongs to Christ, not to men. There is a departure from truth when men turn to their own ways and not God's. We need to follow Paul as he followed Christ.

VERSE 2

But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention.

These are the courageous preachers. Paul and Silvanus were shamefully treated at Philippi. They were insulted, beaten and imprisoned. But God had a plan. By Paul and Silas being in prison in Acts 16:25, they were able to bring the gospel to the jailer, and as a result he and all his family were saved. Paul and Silvanus were also courageous in all of this, and they didn't let anything stand in the way of preaching the gospel. They were bold in the Lord to speak His gospel with much contention. They preached boldly despite heated arguments. There were certain Jews who followed Paul just to make trouble for him. To become bold in God is to become weak in ourselves. As we decrease, God increases the resting power of His might upon us.

Verses 3-6 show us seven traits of the flesh that Paul refused to allow in his ministry.

VERSE 3

For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile:

1) Exhortation not of deceit.

Deceit is 'to be lead away from the right way; a fishing lure to trick fish.' There are preachers who use all sorts of bait to lure people in to win Christ. However Christ is preached we therein do rejoice, but we are to follow Paul and his ministry in Christ. If it isn't according to the Word of God it will never be right. It must be by faith and not by feelings.

2) Not in uncleanness.

This is speaking of impure motives. Paul wasn't just going through the motions and treating his preaching as a job. Paul was convicted to preach the gospel of Christ without charge so as not to abuse his power in it. This was Paul's heart because he loved the Word of God.

3) Nor in guile.

Guile means 'craftiness.' Paul had no other motive but that the people he preached to would grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Paul offered only the gospel to them, and he refused to allow any fleshly 'tricks' to interfere with the gospel message.

VERSE 4

But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which tries our hearts.

Allowed of God

Paul took his opportunities from the Lord, not men. Because Paul waited for God's opportunities, they were allowed by God to be put in trust with the gospel. They were allowed of God by grace, and this is a privilege and nothing of ourselves. It was by God's faithfulness after He proved their hearts and their efforts, that He put them in trust of the gospel. The word trust shows that God had confidence in them. God had this trust in us as well when He gave us this gospel.

4) Not as pleasing men.

Paul refused to be a man pleaser, and he refused to give out a message to tickle people's ears. Some preachers today preach what people want to hear, and it isn't the gospel. Man-pleasers preach a "good God, good devil, good everybody" message. They don't want to offend anyone. The whole counsel of God doesn't allow any leaven to leaven God's truth in love message. In this church age God is seeking out the goodly pearl. Only His full-counsel message can create that in us.

Which trieth our hearts

Trieth means 'to examine to deem worthy.' God doesn't try us just for fun. There is a purpose in the trials He brings into our lives. Through the trials God is showing forth the worthiness in our lives, and the Holy Spirit makes us those goodly pearls for His Son Jesus. The entire trinity is involved in this process.

James 1: 3-4

3) Knowing this, that the trying of your faith works patience.

4) But let patience have her perfect work, that you may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

Paul knew he was being tried by the Lord, and he knew his life and ministry was on display before the Lord, not before men for approval or disapproval. God tries our hearts as well, and we stand before Him, not men. He is trying us because He wants to mold us and make us to fit that bridal gown meant for the bride of Christ, and for us to become those sun glory saints who will share in all of Christ's glory for eternity. What a glorious opportunity He is offering us!

VERSE 5

For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloak of covetousness, God is witness:

5) Neither at any time used we flattering words.

Flattering words only glorify the flesh, and Paul refused to glorify anyone but Christ.

Flattering words are no more than honey coated nothings. Paul knew such things would rob him and all the saints as well. He brought the true message, and it was the message that burned in his heart. Paul's message is the one that will build us up and give us an inheritance amongst them that are sanctified.

6) Cloak of covetousness.

A cloak of covetousness simply means, 'eager for gain; greediness.' Paul wasn't wanting what they had, he wanted them. He never hid behind greed, and he wouldn't even take money for his preaching. Paul worked a job to keep from charging for his preaching the gospel to people, and his only motivation was the love of God.

God is witness

This shows that God knew Paul's heart, and He understood his real motivation, and his reason for being there. God is witness of what is in our hearts, and in our intentions, and He is the one who validates us, not men.

VERSE 6

Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ.

7) Not of men sought we glory.

Paul didn't try to seek glory and the applause of men. To do that he would have had to water down or compromise the message. God gave Paul this office and He was the one who appointed them to spread the truth of the gospel, and they gave God the glory for it. We should do the same, because it is all in Him. We should want to be in the will of God, so that we don't miss His best. We need to decrease so that people can see Jesus in us. May our pride never stumble our brother or take away from the gospel. Humility and thanksgiving are the key to what God wants in our lives.

Might have been burdensome

Paul was not going to be a burden to them on money matters. That would have been covetousness. Paul never sought glory or money for his preaching. He always and only preached out of his deep love for Christ and the gospel.

Verses 7-11 highlight eight positive points of Paul's ministry. Verses 7 and 8 show the fervent love in a ministry that transforms a minister into a pastor with divine love in his heart.

VERSE 7

But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherishes her children:

1) We were gentle among you.

Gentle speaks of being mild or kind. Paul describes gentleness like a nurse who loves her children. Cherish means 'to warm; to brood; to foster; to walk close; affectionate in spirit.'
This is how Paul was with these saints - very gentle as he gave them the message.

VERSE 8

So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us.

2) Being affectionately desirous of you.

Paul always gave of himself. He gave them the gospel and all he had because they were so dear to him and to those who were with him. Paul didn't demand anything of them or take anything from them. He always gave something to them.

VERSE 9

For ye remember, brethren, our labor and travail: for laboring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God.

Our labor and travail

Paul and his associates labored and had stress. They were even made to despair of their lives. But nothing could be held against them because they preached the gospel despite the circumstances they faced. Paul wrote here about giving of himself by not demanding anything from them. He was willing to labor with his own hands in order to support the ministry. Paul was a tent maker by trade, and he was willing to follow that trade in order to meet his own expenses, and the expenses of those who traveled with him. His goal was to preach the gospel to them and not be chargeable to them.

VERSE 10

Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe:

3) Ye are witnesses, and God also.

God knew how holy and just and unblameable Paul's gospel was, and also how he presented it. Paul ministered the gospel in a holy way.

4) Justly.

5) Unblameable.

Unblameable describes the positive manner of life Paul had in the presence of the Thessalonian saints and all saints he preached to.

VERSE 11

As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father does his children,

6) We exhorted.

Exhortation doesn't always mean laying down the law or telling people what to do. Exhortation can also mean 'to encourage.' This is encouragement to walk the right path and embrace the things of God.

7) Comforted.

Paul knew how to comfort these saints, and he was able to comfort them. The gospel message is often used to comfort others who may be in trouble.

8) We charged you as a father does his children.

Paul's ministry to them was not just in a collective manner, it was also individual as Paul gave individual attention to the saints when they needed or wanted it.

VERSE 12

That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto His kingdom of glory.

Walk worthy of God

This is the purpose of verses 7-11. This is why Paul ministered the way He did and why he poured out everything he had. Paul wanted these saints to reflect the message they took in. Paul lived this message, and he allowed it to live in him. The life we now live we live is by the faith of the Son of God. We need the grace of God to walk worthy of God. In His grace we will see every circumstance as an opportunity to grow in faith. The specific walk we are to walk worthy of is the crown-glory walk.

Ephesians 4:1

I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that you walk worthy of the vocation wherein ye are called.

A vocation is not just a calling; it is the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. This is the race-winner's walk.

God who hath called you

This high calling is twofold:

1) Into His kingdom

Any person who is saved is automatically part of God's kingdom. Every believer has a one-way ticket to heaven that can never be revoked.

2) Glory

Glory reflects much more than being called to God's kingdom. The Thessalonian saints had been called to God's kingdom, but they were also called unto His glory. There are different glories in heaven in 1 Corinthians 15:41-42.

VERSE 13

For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the Word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God, which effectually worked also in you that believe.

Word of God

Paul was thankful for these precious saints because they were receiving the Word of God as truth. We give God all the glory by magnifying His Son. Paul was often in sorrow, but he was always thankful. The evidence of great faith is thankfulness in everything despite the state we are in. When we believe God and know His plan it makes us thankful.

Every Christian must come to the realization that the Word of God is not given out as the words of men. There are many words of men today, and the gospel must be separated from them. Paul's gospel was never the words, thoughts, or philosophies of man. Paul only preached the full gospel of truth and the full counsel of God.

Effectual work

When people who believe receive the Word of God it begins to work effectually in them. It is so important for our lives to believe God, and not be trying to 'do.' Believing God's Word is the only way the Word will work effectually in us. The more of God's Word we take in the more our faith grows. As God's Word works effectually in us we will begin to live that abundant life in Christ. It is in faith that we possess the things of God.

VERSE 14

For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews:

The churches

The churches Paul referred to in Judea were the churches Peter planted in Christ Jesus. Churches are organisms, not organizations. There is a distinction of the churches of God, and a further distinction shown in Christ Jesus. This indicates a place of intimacy, that place of blessing and appropriation that people have taken as being a part of the life-giving vine, Christ Jesus.

Suffered like things

Paul knew they were in Jesus because Peter's Christian converts suffered at the hands of the Jews just as the Gentiles suffered at the hands of their countrymen. The Jews persecuted the Christians just as the Romans did. This is a proof that they were followers of Christ Jesus.

Suffering doesn't always mean physical harm, or being humiliated for what we believe. There are also all the difficulties that God allows Satan to bring against us. Satan was operating against these Thessalonians, and he is still allowed to operate against us today. His main goal is to dissuade us from yielding to the Lord. As we choose to yield to God and to follow Paul as he followed Christ, our suffering is proof of following the Lord.

VERSE 15

Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men:

Who killed Christ Jesus and the prophets

The same spirit of the devil that has prevailed through the years is the same spirit that prevailed at the time these Thessalonian saints were living. This is the same spirit that killed Christ and the prophets before Him. Despite their wicked hearts, God's mercy and love are still toward them today. Persecuted means 'chased out.' Paul was driven from their midst a few times, but never in defeat.

Contrary to all men

There was nothing good about them, and God wasn't pleased with them. This is still true today. They are a people who are at odds with all men.

VERSE 16

Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins always: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.

Forbidding to speak to Gentiles

God gets upset when some try to hinder the truth to His Children. They hindered Paul and there was a consequence for their rebellion in Acts 17: 10-14.

To fill up their sins

Genesis 15:16

But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again, for that the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.

The Amorites spoken of are the godless nations that rebel against Him. God wouldn't allow Abraham to go into the land of Canaan because the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet full. This is speaking of the Amorites not having filled up the cup of wrath - and even today it is still not full. God will put an end to the wrath of the rebellious nations eventually. He does have His limits, and their rebellion will not go unchecked forever. These rebellious nations and people are consumed with sin and are totally given over to it.

That they might be saved

The ones spoken of in this verse completely forbid the message of salvation to be given out to the Gentiles, and even the Jews. Paul was so filled with the love of God he couldn't help but preach the truth in love. Paul was completely given over to the love of God, as much as the Amorites were completely given over to sin. Paul wanted to preach to the Gentiles so that the cup of their sins would be filled up with love and forgiven.

VERSE 17

But we, brethren, being taken from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavored the more abundantly to see your face with great desire.

Paul says he was driven out from their presence for awhile, but his heart was still with them. He desired to see the Thessalonian saints, and they greatly desired to see him.

VERSE 18

Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us.

God allowed Satan to hinder Paul from seeing the faithful saints at Thessalonica. We must understand that God has total control of Satan at all times. He can't do or say anything God doesn't allow him to say or do, because there is no power but of God. Everything in our lives has been allowed of God, and that includes Satan's buffeting. God knows exactly what is good for our lives and what we need to grow up in Christ.

Paul was in Corinth when he wrote this letter to the saints at Thessalonica. God sent Paul to the saints at Corinth because they needed him most. Sometimes there are parts of Christ's body (the church) that need to be tended to more than others.

VERSE 19

For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?

Paul used this language with one other group, the saints at Philippi.

Philippians 4:1

Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved.

Paul says this is because this group is running for the prize of God's high calling in Christ Jesus. Paul wasn't judging anyone. He knew who had a heart for God.

VERSE 20

For ye are our glory and joy.

Paul ministered to these saints in the will of God. He had a tremendous interest in the saints themselves. He saw them as his joy and glory. Paul wasn't interested in the substance they had, he was interested in them. These saints in joy and glory meant everything to Paul. Their joy and glory were also his.

CHAPTER 3

Five things concerning faith are covered in chapter 3:

- 1) Verse 2 - Comfort you concerning your faith.
- 2) Verse 5 - I sent to know your faith.
- 3) Verse 6 - Good tidings were brought of your faith.
- 4) Verse 7 - Comforted in all our afflictions and distress by your faith.
- 5) Verse 10 - That we might perfect that which is lacking in your faith.

This chapter notes seven factors about Paul's gospel:

- 1) Verse 2 - Paul's message will establish.
- 2) Verse 2 - Paul's message will comfort.
- 3) Verse 7 - We were comforted. This shows that those who publish the message are comforted by the same message they gave to others.
- 4) Verse 9 - Paul's message brings joy to us in seeing it operate in the lives of others.
- 5) Verse 10 - Paul's message will perfect that which is lacking in our faith.
- 6) Verse 12 - The Lord make you increase and abound in love.
- 7) Verse 13 - To the end He may establish your heart unblemished and holy in the Lord.

VERSE 1

Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone;

Paul was abused in Thessalonica and went to Athens. He had been driven out, but he didn't forget about the saints there. Paul wanted to find a way to minister to them and find out about them.

VERSE 2

And sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith:

Timothy

Timothy was sent to find out their state of faith. He was a precious vessel who went to Corinth and later to Philippi. Paul has quite a commendation for him:

- 1) He is our brother.
- 2) He was a minister of God.
- 3) He was a fellow-laborer in the gospel of Christ.

Paul put a lot of confidence in Timothy. Later he became Paul's successor. Timothy was a high caliber man that Paul sent back to some of the churches. It was very important to Paul that someone of high caliber go back to the saints he so longed to see again.

To establish you

Paul first sent Timothy to establish those saints. Establish means 'to set; to fix; to turn in a right direction.' This is what Paul wanted Timothy to do. The number one priority of a good shepherd is to establish the people, and then go beyond salvation. Getting people saved is the first step on the path to God's best.

To comfort you

Verses 3 and 4 will make us understand why we need comfort in our faith today. This can be compared with

1 Peter 4: 12 -13

- 12) Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you:
- 13) But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.

VERSE 3

That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto.

No man should be moved

It is the gospel that holds us sure, and in it we are not moved. By the grace of God we are not tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine.

Afflictions for yourself

The scripture tells us we are appointed unto suffering. There is no way to get out of it, because God has ordained this. Anyone who yields to the Lord will face resistance from Satan. We should thank God that He counts us worthy to suffer. God so loved us He gave each one of us our own package of fore-ordained good works. He knew in ages past what package each one of us would need. If we yield to Him, we will not be late for any of the appointments.

2 Timothy 3:12

Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

VERSE 4

For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know.

This should be no surprise to Christians who are going through tribulation, because scripture tells us we will have them. This was the reason for Paul comforting them in their faith. He wanted them to understand the sufferings and the purposes of them. He didn't want them defeated because of those things. We will suffer with Christ if we want to win Him. He wants us to grow up in Him in all things, and be full overcoming and mature saints to win the crown.

VERSE 5

For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labor be in vain.

When I could no longer forbear

When Paul could no longer stand wondering about their faith, he sent to find out if they were still standing for the truth, and if they still believed God. Paul was like a mother hen wanting to know how they were doing, but even more he wanted to know the state their faith was in. He wanted to know if the Word was working effectually in them.

For this cause

Paul was driven out from among them, and he knew of the persecution they were still up against. He wanted to know if they were on the right path, and that Satan hadn't dissuaded them from it.

Luke 22:31

And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat.

This is the same thing the devil wants to do to us today.

Our labor in vain

Paul didn't want all his labor, and the labor of his associates in ministering the gospel of truth to them, to be all in vain. He wanted to be sure all the labor they put into ministering was not wasted.

VERSE 6

But now when Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings of your faith and charity, and that ye have good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us, and we also to see you.

The good report Timothy brought back with him concerning their state:

- 1) Their faith.
- 2) Their love.
- 3) Their remembrance of Paul and his fellow-laborers.
- 4) Their desire to see Paul and all the others.

They had not forgotten the gospel or the apostle Paul, and they longed to see him. The fire of love in their hearts was still burning. These faithful brothers and sisters brought pure abounding joy and comfort to Paul. He had a joy in knowing they were still keeping the faith, and that their labor had not been in vain.

VERSE 7

Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith:

Despite all the afflictions Paul was suffering, he was comforted by the faith the Thessalonian saints displayed. When we abound in faith and hope we bring abounding joy to God our Father and His Son. The evidence of true faith is love, and great faith emits great love.

VERSE 8

For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord.

Paul knew that life was worth living, and that his salvation didn't depend on their conduct. He is speaking of having abundant life and joy because of their stand in the faith. Paul's interest was in their growth and development, not just in their salvation.

VERSE 9

For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God.

It was tremendous joy to Paul knowing those saints had the Word of God working effectually in them.

VERSE 10

Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith?

Praying night and day

Paul prayed night and day. He greatly desired to see the saints of like precious faith, to fellowship with them, and rejoice in the Lord with them. They were constantly on his mind, as well as all the other saints he ministered to.

Perfect that which is lacking

The only way to perfection is in the Word of God. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. Our faith needs to be tried in every way, and God will try our weakest points. We need to be tried in every dimension of our faith, so we can learn every dimension of God's love; the breadth, the height, the length, and the depths. Paul was used to perfect that which was lacking in the faith of the Thessalonian saints. We need the full counsel of God preached to us. All we need is found in it.

James 2: 22

Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?

VERSE 11

Now God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you.

Paul wanted to go back to them and he prayed God would direct him that way.

VERSE 12

And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you:

It is the Lord that makes us to increase and abound in love one toward another. Paul's message did this for them, and it will do it for us also.

Ephesians 3: 18-19

18) May be able to comprehend with all saint what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height:

19) And know the love of Christ, which passes knowledge, that you might be filled with all the fullness of God.

If we are not full and overflowing with love we are stagnant. When we don't love, or we think we can't love anymore, we are not believing God. When we believe God, embrace the scriptures, and let Him give us the grace to believe, He will make love happen in us.

VERSE 13

To the end He may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.

Establish your hearts

This is the result of abounding in love. The establishment of our hearts being unblameable in holiness is always a result of abounding in love, which is abounding in Christ. When we abound in Christ's love we become steadfast in the gospel.

1 John 2:5

But whoso keeps His Word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in Him.

In holiness before God

Men have their own ideas of holiness, and generally it involves what is worn or not worn, or what is eaten or not eaten, etc. This has nothing to do with God's definition of holiness. Holiness, according to God, is of the heart.

At the coming of Christ Jesus

The holiness of the coming of Christ is in us. We live anticipating the coming of the Lord, and we want to be ready when He comes.

CHAPTER 4

VERSE 1

Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as you have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more.

Furthermore

This means in view of the exhortations that Paul had already given them.

We beseech you

Paul is pleading with them and exhorting them to receive what he delivered to them, which is God's full gospel and the vocation they were called to. This of course is the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

How ye ought to walk

A four-fold manner of walk is found in the first 12 verses of this chapter:

- 1) Verses 3 - 7 are a sanctified walk.
- 2) Verses 9 and 10 are the walk of love.
- 3) Verse 11 is a busy walk.
- 4) Verse 12 is an honest walk.

This 'walk' is about surrendering to grace and becoming completely dependent on God. We not only lean on Him, but we fall into those wondrous and loving arms every day. God wants us to be completely dependent on Him. If we are running for the prize He will try us and weaken us in our bodies, in our nature, and in circumstances. However He does it, He will do whatever He has to do to decrease us and increase Christ Jesus in our lives. We need to put all our

confidence in Christ's ability and not our own. We need to abound in Him more and more from glory to glory.

VERSE 2

For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus.

The commandments Paul talks about are not a list of do's and don't's. He is speaking of the message he preached to them, and that message covers every part of our life experience. In verse 1, Paul writes that we ought to walk to please God so that we could abound more and more. We abound as we walk in the message Paul preached. Walking shows the gospel has shoes, so to speak.

Ephesians 6:15

And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.

We know we have been instructed to operate and function in Christ's love. This is a life that is truly walking in the spirit, and not in flesh. This is the will of God and His will is sanctification in our lives. How much are we going to allow God to set us apart? Being set apart is really the call for us to run for the prize of being readied to be Christ's bride. Let us set our hearts on things above, and not on things of this earth. Our hearts should be tender, convicted, and willing to receive all the Word of God and His grace in our walk.

VERSE 3

For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication:

Sanctification is the will of God

The word sanctification means 'set apart to God.' Sanctification isn't only a separation from something, but also a separation to something. Paul lists some things to be separated from:

1) Abstain from fornication

Every believer is still possessed of the old creation after being born again. When we are born again we receive a new nature, or a new man which is Christ Jesus. Both the old and the new natures are in us. Our bodies will respond as quickly to the old nature as they will the new nature. This is why the new nature must be built up to take complete dominion over our bodies.

Colossians 3:5

Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

Fornication in the natural is horrible, but there is also a spiritual fornication which God hates. Spiritual fornication is when someone takes a headship that belongs only to Christ, or yields to someone who usurped that headship.

VERSE 4

That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor;

Every one of you

This message was to everyone. When the Lord said He wanted all men to be saved and come to a full knowledge of the truth, there was no respecting of persons.

2) Possess his vessel

Everyone should know how to possess their vessel in honor and sanctification. This means bringing honor and glory to the Lord through our bodies. As we yield to the Holy Spirit we are, by His power, able more and more to hold the tendencies of our old creation in check. Our old creation is capable of anything, but as we yield more and more to Christ's keeping power we mortify (i.e. see as dead) our old man nature.

VERSE 5

Not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God:

3) Not in the lust of concupiscence

Concupiscence is strong desire, especially sexual desire. Christians, unlike the unsaved, should be very thankful for the life of Christ that was planted in us when we were saved. We are forgiven and free from the law in Christ. When God our Father looks at us He sees His precious Son in us. We are forgiven and Christ is our accountability. His blood did it all. As we go with Him, more and more of the world's attractions become useless to us.

VERSE 6

That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified.

4) Let no man defraud his brother

Defraud means 'to overreach; take advantage of.' Much of this is going on today as one takes advantage of another. Paul warns not to do this, especially not to our Christian brethren - as well as in any matter big or small. It would be better for us to take a loss than to defraud our brother. We shouldn't take advantage of anyone ever.

The Lord is the avenger

God will not put up with, or allow, the defrauding of one another. God will be the avenger against anyone who defrauds his brother.

VERSE 7

For God hath not called us into uncleanness, but unto holiness.

God has called us unto holiness both in our hearts and in our walk. He has called us to live a testimony, to be lights in this world. We can't be lights unless we let God make us to be lights. This shows we are yielding, because it is Christ in us doing the work to perfect us.

VERSE 8

He therefore that despises, despises not man, but God, who has also given unto us His Holy Spirit.

If Christians despise or disregard these things they are not despising man, they are despising God. When Christians do these things it is God they are despising, hurting, offending, and rejecting. There is no excuse for Christians to be rejecting men, because we have the very power and might of God. God has given us the very power of the Holy Spirit to overcome the oppositions of the flesh. The Holy Spirit will teach us how to serve God acceptably, and how to please Him.

Romans 8:13

For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.

Mortify means 'to make die,' and it is only through the Holy Spirit that we can accomplish that. We can do nothing apart from Christ and the Godhead. Our walk should be placed completely in the hands of all the members of the holy Trinity. All three of these divine and loving members are necessary to our lives if we are to reach the ultimate crown.

Verses 3 - 6 tell us what to abstain from, and what to stay away from. Verses 9 and 10 speak of a walk of love which is a sanctified walk.

VERSE 9

But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.

Evidently these Thessalonians already had quite a testimony of their brotherly love, because Paul said he need not write to them about it. God's love is the essence of the new nature and they were taught of God to love everyone. When we walk in love we will walk a sanctified life, and love the fulfillment of the law. Love is also involved in the process of sanctification. John's epistles go into great detail about love, and he insists that men must love one another.

1 John 4:20

If a man say, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar: for he that loves not his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?

Brotherly love is a proof of loving God. By God's grace we can increase in love more and more.

John 15: 12-13

12) This is my commandment, That ye love one another as I have loved you.

13) Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

VERSE 10

And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more;

Paul was encouraged by the Thessalonian saints because they had divine love, and expressed it toward all in Macedonia. Paul tells them to increase more and more in their love, because divine love is the expression of the life in Christ Jesus that yields more and more to the new man. The greatest testimony we have in our lives is the love of God. We need to grow in, live in, and possess this wonderful love.

VERSE 11

And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you;

Study

This shows the busy walk. Study means 'to be ambitious; eager; strive for.' This should be our aim and purpose in life.

To be quiet

Quiet means 'keep your seats; keep still; be not meddlesome.'

1 Peter 3:4

Let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.

We need to study to be quiet and leave things to the Lord. We should rest in what God has done and not try to accomplish things on our own. It is hard for many people to not be seen, or heard, or noticed. Our Lord Jesus doesn't possess any of these qualities. There is a glory in being still and quiet. This is the spirit God wants us to have, and it is essential for running the race for God's best. God wants to give us peace and quiet, but He can't if we don't stop talking, be still and know that He is God.

Do your own business

We should tend only to what we have need of. This is basically what Jesus told Peter when He called him to feed His lambs. We are to tend to what God has given us to do, and not try to straighten everyone else out or get them to do something. We should keep quiet and hold our peace. We should look upon the needs of our brothers and sisters in Christ, but when it comes to their affairs, let them take care of themselves. Before we can take the splinter out of our brother's eye, we need to remove the tree from our own eye. We are to mind our own

business and pray for our brother. We can be like a soothing salve to them. A busy-body can turn into a discord-sower.

Work with your own hands

Paul encouraged the saints not to be lazy. We should work for what we need and not expect handouts. God wants us to work because being idle is not good for us. Working leads to the result of verse 12.

VERSE 12

That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing.

This is an honest walk and it is composed of two things:

1) Walk honestly toward them that are without

This means we should set a good example and be a testimony to those who are not believers. The walk of honesty is the evidence of believing and yielding to God. The more we yield to God the more He gives us the power to overcome all wrongdoing in our lives, and frees us from that control. We don't need to give sinners a reason to mock our God by our actions, but rather we need to give them an opportunity to see our upright lives.

2) Have lack of nothing

This means to meet the needs we have personally. This was true in Paul's life because he worked a job to meet his needs and the needs of those who traveled with him. Paul never demanded payment for preaching the gospel.

Verses 13 - 18 deal with translation to heaven.

VERSE 13

But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as other which have no hope.

Them which are asleep

This is the Holy Spirit addressing death through the apostle Paul. Christ wants us to know about our home-going, and the abounding hope in it. Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints. When we are absent from the body we are present with the Lord. We'll be with Him forever. Christ calls the death of a Christian 'sleep' because we are alive in Him forever.

Sorrow not as those with no hope

This doesn't mean that when a loved one dies that we shouldn't sorrow. We do sorrow, but we know their departing to heaven is not goodbye, it is only a separation for a short time before we see them again in heaven. When a loved one dies we should sorrow for their absence.

Those who don't know Christ should sorrow because they don't have that marvelous hope of heaven that believers have. Those who die as unbelievers face a Christless eternity known as hell - an eternal separation from the light and protection of Christ's love.

VERSE 14

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him.

If we believe

If we believe Jesus died and rose again it is guaranteed that we are going to be raised up also. If we really believe this it is reflected in our own attitude. We can know when we die it is not the end of life, but rather the beginning of life eternal. Jesus did die on the cross, and He did rise again. He did it for all men, but not all men will become believers. All believers can say, "He died for me."

1 Corinthians 15: 22-23, 40-42

22) For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

23) But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at His coming.

40) There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another.

41) There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differs from another star in glory.

42) So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption.

Those who sleep in Jesus

When Christ comes, He will bring all of those saints who went to heaven by way of the grave with Him. Christ is truly the hope of glory. When we finally get to see and be with Christ Jesus, we will know that every trial we ever faced will have certainly been worth it. The trials will fade away in all the joy that will be ours. We need to be ready to meet Him at the first trumpet rapture when He comes to claim His bride. God forbid we should miss it.

VERSE 15

For this we say unto you by the Word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

By the word of the Lord

These are the things the Lord tells us through His Word. They are perfect with no gaps. It is true, and pure, and holy, and it is impossible for God to lie. We need to understand that all of this is by the Word of God. This shouldn't be looked at as something far-fetched or foolish, because it is the true Word of God. Therefore it will most definitely come to pass.

We which are alive and remain

There will be full overcomers still alive when Christ comes back. This shows how saved men can go to heaven without dying. There are two that have already proved this; Enoch and Elijah. Paul is speaking about those who will be alive when Christ comes the first time for His bride,

and Paul puts himself in this company. These are the saints who will be seen in the midst of the throne ruling and reigning with Christ, sharing in all His glory.

Revelation 4:6

And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind.

This company that is alive at Christ's coming will be the ones loving His appearing, and watching and longing to hear the first trumpet blast. There are different words used for the coming of Christ Jesus. The one being spoken of here is 'parousia.' Parousia in the Greek means 'in the presence of the Lord.' This refers to when He makes His appearances, or His comings. It is used in reference to the seven-year tribulation, in which Christ will make different appearances.

Shall not prevent

The word prevent means 'to precede.' This means that those who are alive and remain when He returns will be translated after those saints who have gone to heaven by way of the grave. Those who went to heaven by way of the grave are part of the Smyrna church. They are full overcoming bridal saints who did not leave their first love.

VERSE 16

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

The Lord shall descend from heaven

When God the Father turns to Jesus and says, "It's time to claim your bride, My Son!" Jesus won't send His angels to get us, He will come personally. He has been waiting and longing to hear those words even more than those of us who are watching for His return. His joy will know no bounds.

With a shout

Christ's beautiful voice will ring out with a loud shout of pure joy, and those full overcoming bridal saints in the first rapture will hear it. There will be joy and excitement like has never been seen. This joy and excitement will never end.

Only the bride will hear Christ's jubilant shout, but the whole world will be aware that something very important has taken place. Most people won't know exactly what it is at that time. Christ's first coming will be the most precious to Him, because at this coming He will take His bride to heaven with Him, and then take the throne as Almighty God.

A shout, the voice of the Archangel, the trump of God

All three of these are the voice of Christ Jesus. He is the great Archangel. Revelation 10 notes His voice was like a trumpet talking to John. Everything is in Jesus, and God will never do anything without His Word which is in Christ Jesus. Christ will come back through His Word, that Word of command, and by His voice of absolute authority.

VERSE 17

Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

We which are alive and remain

These are those who have not died. The phrase 'caught up' means, 'seized,' and this will be by the power of God. Both those alive who are full overcoming saints and those who died in Christ as full overcoming saints, represent the bride Christ who He will be coming for the first time.

In the clouds

We will be caught up together with Him in the clouds. This is no doubt referring to a cloud of witnessing believers.

Hebrews 12:1

Wherefore seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.

These were all the witnesses of faith found in Hebrews chapter 11. These are the ones who died a natural death, and were being held in upper Sheol in Abraham's bosom until Christ resurrected. They were the cloud of witnesses that raised Him out of the sight of those who watched Him ascend back into heaven. These same witnesses, who represent the 24 elders, will come back with Jesus to welcome His long awaited bride into heaven. According to Jewish marriage customs, when it was time for the husband to go to claim his bride, he always took his friends with him.

Meet the Lord in the air

Christ will not set foot on the earth when He comes to claim His bride. We will meet Him in the air. Christ will come at different times to get his entire church. He will claim His bride first. The second time He will come for the innumerable multitude, and then the 144,000 will be taken up to heaven. All of these will be meetings in the air. His taking of the bride, the innumerable multitude, and the 144,000 will remove Christ's church off the earth. After that, all that are saved in the tribulation will be earth dwellers.

VERSE 18

Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

Wherefore

All of this is because of this truth, and because of this knowledge of the Word of the Lord.

Comfort one another

We can comfort one another with this knowledge of the Word of the Lord. This becomes a very comforting thing when we begin to read of all these wonderful truths concerning us and Christ's

imminent return. Jesus is coming, and what a comfort it is to know it! This comfort is the end all of comfort. It can relieve and cure any circumstance we go through in life.

CHAPTER 5

In this chapter Paul calls for the sleepy Christian to wake up. Christians in slumber or in a drunken stupor will miss the chance for God's best. If they miss it, they will be part of the innumerable multitude and will have to endure a portion of the tribulation.

VERSE 1

But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you.

The times

Paul is giving us a look into the future. The word times refers to years in scripture. We see this in the books of Daniel and Revelation. God operates on a 360 day year with 12 months of 30 days each. The word 'time' represents one year, 'times' represents two years, and 'times and a half' represent three and a half years.

The seasons

This refers to a period of certain characteristics. Each of our four seasons have certain distinct and different (but easily identifiable) characteristics that set them apart from one another. Paul didn't know the day or the hour, but he did know the times and the seasons, just as we do. It is not farfetched to say that Jesus could come at any time, even today. We know this because the certain characteristics that mark the end time are already being displayed in the world. However, only God knows the exact time of Christ's coming when the bridal company is complete.

VERSE 2

For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.

Yourselves know perfectly

Paul notes that they have no need for him to write to them concerning what will take place because they are already aware of what will come to pass. They knew Jesus was coming and He was on the way at any time. Paul wanted them to live expecting Jesus to come that very day. The same goes for us today.

The day of the Lord

The day of the Lord begins the moment He catches His bride away. This is a long day that will start when He claims His bride, and will continue until the end of the thousand year millennial reign. When Christ finally takes the throne reigning as almighty God, His bride will be at His side. Our desire should be to be the bride at the wedding feast, not a guest. Attending as a

guest will be glorious, but not as glorious as being the bride who will share in all of Christ's glory.

A thief in the night

This is one of the seasons Paul wrote about. We haven't yet entered the night season, but this world is getting mighty dark as far as dispensational teaching is concerned. Paul says 'a thief in the night' because a thief comes when darkness is upon us. Many people aren't looking for Jesus to come, so He will be as a thief who catches them unaware.

It is night when there is the absence of light - meaning the light of God's Word is being taken away little by little. More light is extinguished the darker it gets. More people are falling away from the light of God's Word. They are falling asleep, and sleeping speaks of a nighttime condition.

In Mark 13:35 we find that the night season has four watches. In Luke 12:38 these watches correspond with different appearances of Christ to certain groups of people. Before the first watch takes place the bride will be taken off the earth to be with Christ Jesus her Bridegroom. She will be spared the tribulation that is coming on the whole world.

Revelation 3:10

Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.

When the bride is taken, the night (people's spiritual light) will grow dimmer and dimmer as the tribulation progresses, and the intensity heats up more and more.

Different groups of people will be taken to heaven according to the different watches:

1) The first watch

This watch is at evening, at dusk when the darkness is coming. It is when the innumerable multitude will be taken away to heaven. The time of this rapture should be before the middle of the tribulation which is when the tribulation gets going and grows in intensity. That phase of the tribulation is called the Great Tribulation (also Jacob's trouble.)

2) The second watch

This watch is at midnight which falls around the 3 ½ year mark, or the middle of the seven-year tribulation period. The tribulation will have gotten very intense at this time. This group will be the 144,000 known in Matthew 25 as the five wise virgins. At the time when this group goes up to Christ His entire heavenly church will be in heaven with Him.

3) The third watch

This watch will take place at the dawning of a new day, at dawn when the cock crows.

This group will be the remnant of God, and will include the five foolish virgins, the woman in the wilderness who was protected but not translated, and the saints under the altar who were saved after the church was removed from the earth, who were murdered for believing in Christ. All of these will make up the 4th rank of Christ's body. They are part of the family of God still on earth.

4) The fourth watch

This will take place after Christ has come to put up the Jews as head of the nations.

This group will be made up of Jewish evangelists who will preach the gospel to all the nations that still exist after Armageddon. Those who refused to recognize Christ as King of Kings and Lord of Lords will not continue beyond Armageddon.

VERSE 3

For when they shall say, Peace and safety: then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.

This peace and safety corresponds to the first seal in Revelation 6:1-2:

- 1) And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder; one of the 4 beasts saying, Come and see.
- 2) And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer.

When John sees this man on a white horse with a bow but no arrows, this shows the antichrist comes in on diplomatic means. Peace and safety is the first of the seven seals of Revelation to be broken. The second seal is found in Revelation 6:4, and shows a red horse coming out. This is a bloody war horse that signifies the seal of death. Peace and safety will quickly dissipate into sudden destruction. The full overcoming bridal saints will be taken from the earth before this seal is broken and the night time sets in.

There is much talk today of peace and safety. When they say peace, then sudden destruction comes, they will not escape. There will be wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes in many places. Men will love themselves more than they love God. They will have a form of godliness but deny the power thereof. All of these speak of our world today, so Christ could come at any moment. Are we loving His appearing and ready for His coming? The clock is ticking.

VERSE 4

But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.

Ye are not in darkness

Paul told them they didn't need to be around for any of this. He spoke to them as children of light, the full overcoming saints running for the prize of God's high calling, and told them that they are not in darkness. We are without excuse because we are children of light. We know the message and we need to live it.

Overtake you as a thief

We know the Lord is coming so we shouldn't be overtaken as by a thief in the night. Paul told the saints at Thessalonica that it should not be a surprise if they are looking and longing for His return. The same is true for us. Every provision has been made so that our Bridegroom's coming will not be unexpected.

VERSE 5

Ye are children of the light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.

Children of the light

We are children of the light because we were born of light, and we take in the light of God's Word which is the light of Christ Jesus. The word 'children' translates to 'mature sons.' We are sons of the light, and sons of the day.

Children of the day

Every one of God's children has it in them not only to be saved, but to walk with Him and learn of Him. Jesus died for every man. God is not a respecter of persons. Not only does God want us to be saved in Christ, but also to come to a full knowledge of Him, and to grow up in Him in all things so that we might attain the right to rule and reign with Him. How amazing to realize God planned this for us from the beginning and that the Gentile were always included in His beautiful plan. How loving is our God! The knowledge of this should humble the heart and fill it with much thanksgiving toward Him. We praise His name now and we will praise Him in the ages to come because He is worthy of all praise.

Not of the night nor of darkness

Paul encouraged these saints that once they were born again to embrace the things of God and mature in them. They were of the day, and not the night with all of its darkness. They shone brightly in all the darkness even though evil surrounded them.

VERSE 6

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

Let us not sleep

We need to understand it is our choice whether to sleep or stay awake and look for our Lord's return. Unlike in chapter 4 where 'sleep' speaks of death, sleep in this verse is referring to

natural sleep, i.e. being spiritually dead. This does not mean these saints are going to hell, it means they are oblivious to the deeper things of God.

As do others

Paul is not writing about sinners, but rather about other Christians. Sinners are never said to be asleep, but are noted as being dead in trespasses and sins. Paul warned these Thessalonian saints not to sleep as other Christians.

Watch and be sober

Paul gave us a warning to not fall asleep spiritually, but to stay awake spiritually and watch for the coming of the Lord, lest we miss out. Sober means 'to be temperate; calm; mature; free of intoxicants.'

Jesus spoke of his own disciples sleeping and not watching and praying in His hour of agony. Luke tells us they were sleeping for sorrow.

Luke 22: 45-46

45) And when He rose up from prayer, and was come to His disciples, He found them sleeping for sorrow.

46) And said unto them, Why sleep ye? rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.

There is much sorrow today. This may be why so many are prone to sleep when they should be awake, sober, and watching.

Ephesians 5:18

And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit.

Drunkenness is not just the state of being intoxicated with the world, but also of being drunk on the wine of religion. We need to be filled with the new wine of the Holy Spirit to stay awake and alert and looking for Christ's return.

VERSE 7

For they that sleep, sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night.

Sleep in the night

The Christians who are asleep in the night are the ones whose fire has all but gone out. These Christians are not living in the light God gave them. They are choosing not to yield to the calling. We have all been there at some time. We can sense darkness when we don't yield to God as a Christian should. The conviction comes on us quickly. God help us just to walk continually in the light.

Drunken in the night

Being drunk and being asleep are very close. Both tell us that people who are drunk and/or asleep have been dulled to reality. They are not alert or aware of what is going on around them. This is not speaking of ungodly sinners - this is speaking of Christians who have turned from the light of Paul's true gospel, if they ever heard it in the first place. Sinners are dead in trespasses and sins, and this is not true of any Christian. Christians are saved forever, but many fall asleep and become numb to the truth of God's Word. Christians who are asleep and drunken chose to go the way of darkness. Spiritually-dead Christians just live as small flickers of light. They will miss God's best. Christians belong in the light, not in the darkness.

VERSE 8

But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.

Those of the day

We are of the day, and God prepared us to be vessels to receive His glory. He wants to display us as His masterpiece. His magnificent bride will emit light just as He does, and together their glory will shine throughout all the ages to come. This is the manifestation of being filled with the Holy Spirit Paul wrote about in Ephesians 5:18-21.

Breastplate of faith and love

We need faith now more than ever to believe God. We must have faith right over our hearts to continue to believe regardless of the circumstances we are in. We also need the pre-eminent love for Christ. John wrote of the saints at Ephesus:

Revelation 2:4

Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou has left thy first love.

The saints at Ephesus left their pre-eminent first love for Christ. Their hearts were no longer as true to Him as in the beginning. They didn't burn with strong zeal for Him when their flame of love started to wane.

The breastplate covers the front and the back, and shows singleness of heart. We need to have both faith and love. If we just have all truth, we dry up. If we only have spirit, we blow up. If we put the two together, we grow up in Christ in all things.

Helmet

The helmet speaks of the singleness of the mind. It is a cap that protects the mind of Christ that is growing and maturing in those children of the light. The helmet also speaks of the knowledge of the mystery of Christ and His bride, and she will have that precise and exact knowledge. She will be aware of the high calling and rejoice in it. She is consumed with Him, as she lovingly longs for His return. All of this is tempered in faith and love.

Hope of salvation

Salvation is the only thing that can lift the mind out of the doldrums. If our minds are always thinking on a hopeless condition, we will be plunged into the throes of depression. The mind is what must indeed realize that we have hope in spite of the negative. We put on the hope of salvation as the hope of deliverance. This hope of salvation is speaking of the 'not being left behind' salvation. This is beyond being saved; this is the hope of being delivered as Christ's bride, and not being left behind to regret missing it. This is a complete salvation for those who take part in the first trump rapture, of being taken as His bride and escaping the coming tribulation.

VERSE 9

For God has not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ,

Not appointed us to wrath

This is the basis we have for putting on the helmet of salvation which is the Word of God. This gives us hope when everything seems to be falling apart. The wrath mentioned here is not hell, because these were all saved people. The wrath here is referring to the tribulation.

Revelation 6: 16-17

- 16) And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.
17) For the great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?

God's wrath will be poured out in the tribulation. God never intended for the church to go into the tribulation. God intended for the entire church be in the bridal company, but not all men will embrace that wonderful truth. Those who make up the Philadelphia church are bridal saints and will be spared the tribulation. The innumerable multitude will be in the tribulation until somewhere around the 2 ½ year mark. The 144,000 will endure 3 ½ years. These three groups comprise the 'church.'

'Appointed' means we are made for this high calling. It is God's purpose for us. God appointed us to be in the first company raptured to heaven and to escape the wrath that will come upon the world. He will take His bride to heaven so that she can escape the tribulation. This is the 'out-resurrection', deliverance from the wrath coming on the world.

VERSE 10

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

Those in Christ who have died and are not full overcoming Christians will not be raised up when the bride is taken. They will be raised in their own order. The bride will consist of those saints in the Philadelphia church who are alive when Christ comes, and the saints in the Smyrna church who have died and gone to heaven prior to the rapture translation. These two churches will be raptured first. The moment they are raptured the tribulation will begin on earth.

Verses 11-22 are exhortations for those of us who wait for Christ's coming.

VERSE 11

Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.

We are to comfort one another by telling of the hope that is ours in Christ, and of God's love for us. The real comfort we can give people is that Jesus is coming. In all the things we are going through, we are looking for and expecting Jesus. We can comfort one another with the understanding that Jesus is coming, and it could be at any moment.

When Christ comes for His bride will be one of many raptures. If there is only one rapture why are there so many warnings about not missing God's best? If everyone is raptured at once, these warnings are unnecessary. Three of the many raptures have already taken place: Enoch, Elijah, and when heaven's door opened to welcome Jesus back to heaven when He had all the Old Testament overcomers with Him. We who are alive today are getting ready for the first trump rapture.

VERSE 12

And we beseech you brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you;

Know them which labor among you

'Know' means to consider, to see. We need to see those over us and see if the message is working in their lives. They should be examples of overcoming. To know them is not to pass over them, but to be aware of those who labor among us, who are over us in the Lord, and who admonish us.

Over us and admonish us

'Over' means to protect; to guide; to care. 'Admonish' means to warn. This is to warn us to hold fast our crown lest it be taken away.

VERSE 13

And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves.

Esteem them very highly in love

Paul never wanted any gospel messenger put on a pedestal. If we do think more of a person than we should, i.e. put them on a pedestal or idolize them, God will allow them to fail, at least in the eyes of those who idolized them. No one should be looked up to like this except Christ Jesus. We give the messengers all due respect because of the worthy message they bring forth. We esteem them in love because they need love, too. Gospel ministers need to know they are being supported by faith, love, and prayers of those they minister to. To be esteemed and loved by those they minister to means a great deal to a pastor because it reflects the message being built in Christian lives, and the accomplishment of Christ in us toward that wonderful day of the

Lord. True ministers are the ones who are true and faithful to the calling. They are not true to the calling for financial gain; they are ministers appointed and anointed by the Word of God, and God himself. It should be a comfort to us that God has appointed someone to tend the flock.

There are seven instructions given in verses 13-15. This is no coincidence as seven is the number of spiritual perfection.

1) Be at peace among yourselves.

Receive the Word of God and grow up. This takes time because it is line upon line and precept upon precept. We will grow in grace and learn to love one another and be at peace with one another.

VERSE 14

Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble minded, support the weak, be patient toward all men.

2) Warn them that are unruly.

Ministers can only warn those who are unruly because they can't do the work that only the Lord can do. 'Unruly' means insubordinate. Paul is talking to first-rank believers, and warning them against losing out on winning the crown. If we are admonished to fall back in line and stay on the path, we should do as we are told and thank God for sending the warning.

3) Comfort the feeble minded.

The phrase 'feeble minded' is referring to those with small spirits. This is speaking of those who may be despondent or discouraged, and this means to calm and encourage the faint hearted. We have all been in that condition, and those who are in it just need to be comforted and lifted up in the Lord. This is a call for love and patience for us. How could we do less? Jesus in His great tender mercy called out to God to forgive those who were causing His precious body so much agony surrounding His crucifixion. Some saints have but a little faith, and it is up to us to lift up the arms of the weary and be mindful of our weaker brethren.

4) Support the weak.

'Support' means to adhere to and care for. People just need to know that someone cares. We are to love even those who would despise the calling. Never stop praying for them or give up on them because God never gave up on us. God gives us this kind of heart.

5) Patient toward all men.

This is the "70 x 70" forgiveness kind of patience that reaches those that are stubborn. When we abide in Him and trust Him, we'll see those baby steps of growth toward becoming like Him.

VERSE 15

See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and unto all men.

6) None render evil for evil.

This means we don't retaliate when wrong or evil is done to us. The saying 'Do unto others as they have done unto you' is not scriptural. We don't have a problem with this when we are in church among our brothers and sisters in Christ, but when we step back into the world and encounter the unsaved, we need help from Christ to learn to deal with them. Christ has a humble Spirit and turns the other cheek because He has compassion for all men. Christ had that same compassion for us even before we became His children. We need to let Him grow in us to seek peace with all men. We want to stir up the gift within us, not stir up the ungodliness in someone else. We are to do good to those who spitefully use us.

7) Follow that which is good among saints and all men.

We as Christians have to be consistent in doing this, and not just when we are in church. Godly living, as far as bridal living, always follows through and is consistent in every part of our lives. When we really love Jesus we will be like Him, because we begin to realize how much He loves us, and we start to live a life of praise and we become very thankful. 'Follow' means to catch that which is honorable and excellent.

These seven instructions show us what a difference we can make when we heed them. We can all represent all of the beautiful attributes of Christ in our own lives. Godliness is life changing, and living a testimony can bring others to Christ. The world is always watching.

2 Corinthians 6:3

Giving no offence in anything, that the ministry be not blamed.

VERSE 16

Rejoice evermore.

We should have a rejoicing spirit. Long-faced people are portraying the wrong attitude. They are not showcasing Christ and His sweet, tender, and rejoicing nature. 'Rejoice evermore' is an attitude of the bride's heart, the heart of a wife that is always grateful for her husband. We should rejoice in Christ's love for us, because His love is always with us, forever. His precious love covers a multitude of sorrow and distress. All the things in this world that are against us are just temporary, but His love is never ending. His soon coming should be the motivation for our lives, and should encourage us to be longing for and looking patiently for His return.

VERSE 17

Pray without ceasing.

This means to be in a constant attitude of prayer. Praying without ceasing is a natural by-product of our continual communion we have with Him. This doesn't always mean down on our

knees, talking to Him in spirit as we go through our day when our thoughts bring Him to mind. It's a beautiful relationship we have with Him.

VERSE 18

In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

Give thanks in everything. At times it is hard to give thanks for something that has happened, but we can surely give thanks for what it is working in us. We don't always give thanks for the trials, but we do know they are necessary to bring us to full maturity and growth in Christ. This is how we are taken from glory to glory unto perfection, and into the very likeness of Christ.

God will not withhold anything good from us. Everything He sends will be just what we need for growth at a given time in our lives. God always knows exactly what we need and when we need it. We are on a before-ordained-good-work path that God has for each of us. All of this is the will of God for our lives, and it is all in His Son, Christ Jesus. As we go with Him, fall deeper and deeper in love with Him and learn more and more of Him, by grace we will learn to rejoice in the trials. We will develop more and more of the beautiful bridal attitude of love. A bride is a vessel that rejoices always. We should be thankful to God in all things that concern us.

VERSE 19

Quench not the Spirit.

Quenching the Spirit is to quench all the operations of the Spirit. We should not stop any of the Holy Spirit's ministries, and there are many of them. We are not to stop Him if He is convicting us of something. He puts us through various trials to work something out in our lives. The trials are absolutely essential for our growth and development. He is just working in us to make us worthy to be in the bridal company.

This is for the individual. We need to be filled with the Holy Spirit and let Him lead us where we need to go, because He knows the exact path we need to walk to reach the crown. The Holy Spirit will take the things of Christ and make them ours, and He will shed the love of God abroad in our hearts. Quenching the Spirit will stop all the godly growth and development in us. The Holy Spirit is our comforter, our guide, and our teacher who will lead us into all the truth of God's Word. All members of the Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – are actively involved in preparing us for the bridal crown.

VERSE 20

Despise not prophesyings.

This is one of the ways to quench the Spirit. Prophesying is given unto edification. The bride wants to be edified, and to have spiritual growth. We should never stop learning while we are still on the earth. Those who prophesy speak unto men edification, spiritual growth, comfort, and exhortation.

VERSE 21

Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.

Prove all things

Paul says this especially in view of those prophecies that go forth, but are not necessarily a message from the Word of God. We should prove the messenger and hold fast to that which is good. We prove things by how they measure up to the Word of God.

The Berean saints searched the scriptures to see if what they were hearing was the truth. We are to study to show ourselves approved, and we are to rightly divide the Word of truth. We need to know for ourselves what the truth is. God wants us to know it even more than we want to know it. The knowledge will come to us line upon line and precept upon precept.

Hold fast that which is good

God withholds nothing good from us. We hold fast and embrace God's wondrous Word. We need to be dwelling on the good, the lovely, the things of good report. To do this is to dwell and abide in our lovely Lord Jesus. This is learning to go by faith and not by feelings. The good life comes when we settle in Jesus. We have everything in Him.

VERSE 22

Abstain from all appearances of evil.

This is so important because it deals with our testimony. To abstain from all appearances of evil means all appearances of evil. This is to protect the testimony God gave us. We need to be seeking goodly things, and not those things of the world. A little leaven leavens the whole lump.

VERSE 23

And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of the our Lord Jesus Christ.

The God of peace comes to us through the Holy Spirit. Sanctification belongs in the power of the Holy Spirit. This is where our desires are separated, our spirit is separated, and our knowledge is separated – all unto the Lord. We are sanctified in our souls – in our affections, our emotions, and our own will. God changes us and then sanctifies our affections. The Holy Spirit can actually change us and cause us to not want to do the things we used to do in the flesh. We are sanctified in the body and actually brought into subjection by the power of the Holy Spirit. This is how God preserves us blameless unto the coming of Christ.

The peace of God is complete in every way. We have the peace of God, we have peace with God, and we dwell in peace with God. To be wholly sanctified shows that all of us (not pieces of us) are set apart. It means Christ has all of us.

King David was wholly sanctified, but his son Solomon was not, and because of this Solomon's growth was stunted. He didn't finish with a full joy like his father David, but rather with despair

and sadness. Solomon loved the Lord and had great wisdom, but he didn't go after the Lord fully, and he wasn't fully sanctified unto the Lord. God wants us fully in every way:

1) In spirit

This is to desire the deepest fellowship with God, and to worship Him in spirit and in truth.

2) In soul

This is our sanctified soul that lives completely apart from fleshly living.

3) In body

This is a body ready to be changed into a new body that is ready to be given. These new bodies are made blameless, complete, and perfect.

VERSE 24

Faithful is He that calls you, who also will do it.

We are called to sanctification. God has called us into a complete separation of spirit, soul, and body. Not only does He call us, He will also perform His will in us so we can finish with a full joy.

Jude 24

Now unto Him that is able to keep you from failing, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.

VERSE 25

Brethren, pray for us.

Pray for all of us to yield to the workmanship of the Lord. He is the faithful one to do it if we let Him have His way in our lives.

VERSE 26

Greet all the brethren with an holy kiss.

Paul means this literally. A holy kiss is a real expression of love in Christ, and it should be shared. There is nothing fleshly or evil about it because it is very holy in Christ. We love one another with the consideration and the holiness the Lord gave us.

VERSE 27

I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren.

All brethren are holy, but some go deeper into God's full counsel. The Thessalonian saints had only three weeks of Paul's ministry, but God gripped and captured their hearts. They fully embraced God's Word, and it had an effectual work in them.

VERSE 28

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

Nothing of Paul's gospel will take effect in us except by grace. Grace saves us, but if we depart from that grace we won't grow. The key to all growth is in this marvelous grace. It will build up and sanctify all those who are saved. Everything God does is by His freely given grace, where we are to rejoice and dwell.