



THE FIRST EPISTLE TO THE
THESSALONIANS

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INSTRUCTOR BIOGRAPHY

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Biography:

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Russell and his wife Dee are blessed with three children - Ross, John and Kati. Ross and John are both graduates of the Southwest School of Bible Studies and currently serve as ministers in the Lord's church. Kati is married to Tony Lopez who is also currently serving as a minister in the Lord's church.

These Course Notes were developed from the original WVBS Course Notes.

BACKGROUND

I. THESSALONICA - THE CITY

- A. Thessalonica was a well-known city in the Grecian world.
- B. This coastal city is located at the head of the Thermaic Gulf of the Aegean Sea. It was once called "Therma" because of the hot salt springs in the area.
- C. Thessalonica was founded in 316 B.C. and named for a sister of Alexander the Great. In the year 146 B.C. it became the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia.
- D. As a military and economic center, it was very important in the Roman Empire. The city was located on the Via Egnatia. This legendary Roman road spanned from the Adriatic Sea to the city of Byzantium (later named Constantinople, now Istanbul). It was constructed in the 2nd century B.C. covering a total distance of approximately 1,120 kilometers (696 miles). Like other major Roman roads, it was about six meters (19.6 feet) wide, and was paved with large stones or covered with a hard layer of sand. Having this great resource, the city served as a center for trade and commerce.

II. PAUL'S VISIT

- A. When Paul visited the city, it was the largest in the region of Macedonia. Under Roman power Greece was divided into two main parts. Macedonia was the region to the north and Achaia was the region to the south.
- B. The city provided a great opportunity for evangelism. The city's commercial and seafaring population could quickly spread what they had been taught by Paul to other cities. This provided a way for great good to be done quickly for the cause of Christ.

III. THE CONGREGATION ESTABLISHED - ACTS 17

Acts 17:1-3, "Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.'"

- A. In Acts 17:2 we find that Paul entered the city of Thessalonica and went into the synagogue.
- B. For three Sabbaths Paul **"reasoned"** with them from the Scriptures, **explaining** and **demonstrating** that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ'" (Acts 17:2-3).
 - 1. "Reasoned" comes from the Greek word (DIALEGOMAI) meaning, "to think different things with oneself, to ponder, then to dispute with others" (Acts 17:17; 18:4, 19; 19:8-9; 24:25).
 - 2. "Explaining" is a translation of the Greek word (DIANOIGŌ) that means, "to open up completely" (Luke 24:32).
 - 3. "Demonstrating" comes from the Greek word (PARATITHĒMI) that literally means, "to place beside." The word is used to describe the process of setting information before someone in teaching or instructing.
 - 4. In a very practical sense, Paul was debating, using the Old Testament Scriptures to prove his point that Jesus is the Christ.

IV. THE RESULTS

Acts 17:4, "And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas."

- A. There were many conversions
 - 1. "Some of them" (Jews)
 - 2. "A great multitude of the devout Greeks"
 - 3. "A few of the leading women"
- B. There was a great uproar in the city (Acts 17:5-9).

Acts 17:5-9, "But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying

out, 'These who have turned the world upside down have come here too. Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king—Jesus.' And they troubled the crowd and the rulers of the city when they heard these things. So, when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go."

1. The Jews who were not persuaded caused problems.
2. They made a serious charge against the Christians. They claimed the Christians were teaching that, "there is another king—Jesus" (Acts 17:7).
3. An intense hatred of Christianity by the Jews soon developed.

V. GREAT AFFLICTION

- A. As the congregation was being established it faced opposition and persecution from two main groups.
- B. Mount Olympus was located approximately 100 kilometers (62 miles) southwest of Thessalonica. Mount Olympus was considered by the pagans to be the home of their gods. Therefore, the congregation was facing opposition from the Jews and persecution from the pagans.

1 Thessalonians 1:6, "And you became followers of us and of the Lord, **having received the word in much affliction**, with joy of the Holy Spirit."

1 Thessalonians 2:2, "But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God **in much conflict**."

INTRODUCTION

WRITER

We should make it clear that God is the author of this book, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20-21). The writer whom God used to reveal this epistle was the apostle Paul (1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2:18).

LANGUAGE

This letter was originally written in Koiné Greek. The word "Koiné" means "common." This is a fitting name because it was the common language used by the people in that day. God's word is not reserved for the upper class.

DATE AND PLACE OF WRITING

The time of writing for this epistle was toward the close of A.D. 52 or the beginning of A.D. 53. This was during the early part of Paul's residence at Corinth, possibly six months after planting the church at Thessalonica.

KEY VERSES

1 Thessalonians 2:4
1 Thessalonians 2:13
1 Thessalonians 2:19
1 Thessalonians 3:12-13
1 Thessalonians 4:16-18
1 Thessalonians 5:16-22

KEY WORD

The key word is "faith" found 8 times in this epistle (1Thessalonians 1:3; 1:8; 3:2; 3:5; 3:6; 3:7; 3:10; 5:8). [For additional information please see the appendices - FAITH AND WORKS.]

KEY PASSAGE

1 Thessalonians 3:12-13, "And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you, so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints."

THE THREE MAIN THEMES OF THIS EPISTLE

1. To praise and encourage them in their steadfastness under persecution.
2. To instruct them concerning living holy lives.
3. To correct the misunderstandings, they had about the second coming of Christ.

FIRST THESSALONIANS OUTLINE

Salutation (Greeting)	1:1-4
I. Personal Reflections	1:5-3:13
A. Relating to their Condition	1:5-10
B. Relating to his Conduct	2:1-12
C. Relating to his Concern	2:13-3:13
II. Paul's Instructions	4:1-5:28
A. Walk in Holiness	4:1-8
B. Walk in Love	4:9-10
C. Walk in Diligence	4:11-12
D. Walk in Hope	4:13-18
E. Walk in Light	5:1-11
F. Walk in Obedience	5:12-22
Conclusion	5:23-28

FIRST THESSALONIANS EXPOSITION

Salutation (Greeting)..... 1:1-4

1:1 *Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

[Paul, Silas and Timothy were three great servants of the Lord, who worked together to spread the good news of salvation.]

Paul - Paul was an apostle of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:1; 2 Corinthians 1:1; Galatians 1:1). However, in the case of the Thessalonians, Paul does not emphasize this point. This may indicate the close relationship and respect these brethren had for Paul. Paul's main work sent him to the Gentiles, though not exclusively. He was chosen by the Lord to declare the name of Jesus to the "Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel" (Acts 9:15; cf. Acts 22:21; 1 Corinthians 15:8-10; 2 Corinthians 12:11-12).

Silvanus (Silas) - We read of Silas joining Paul in Acts 15:40, as Paul begins his second evangelistic journey.

- A. Silas was imprisoned with Paul in Philippi (Acts 16:19-40).
- B. Silas was with Paul when he preached in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-4).
- C. He was in Berea with Paul and remained there after Paul departed for Athens (Acts 17:10-14).
- D. He again joined Paul in Corinth (Acts 18:5; 1 Corinthians 1:19).
- E. Peter referred to Silas as "our faithful brother" (1 Peter 5:12).

Timothy (Timotheus) - After Paul and Silas had gone through Syria and Cilicia they came to Derbe and Lystra. Here they met Timothy. Timothy's mother (Eunice) was a Christian of Jewish background and his father was a Greek (Acts 16:2).

- A. Timothy was in Thessalonica and Berea with Paul, but remained in Berea with Silas as Paul went to Athens (Acts 17:14).
- B. Timothy's character.

1. Timothy was a "fellow worker" of Paul (Romans 16:21).
2. He was probably a convert of Paul (1 Corinthians 4:17).
3. Timothy was a man of "genuine faith" (2 Timothy 1:5). The Scriptures teach that his mother (Eunice) and grandmother (Lois) were instrumental in developing this characteristic in him.

2 Timothy 1:5, "When I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also."

2 Timothy 3:14-15, "But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."

To the church of the Thessalonians - In the beginning, this congregation was made up of some Jews, a great number of devout Greeks and many chief women (Acts 17:4). The congregation was established in the midst of great conflict (Acts 17:1-9).

in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ - Here we have an interesting twist placed on this relationship. Notice the distinction. Most of the other references simply state "in Christ" or in "Christ Jesus". However, this phrase seems to emphasize the oneness of the Father and the Son. There is also a Divine - Human relationship that is spoken of here with the connection to "the church of the Thessalonians."

John 17:20-21, "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; **that they also may be one in Us**, that the world may believe that You sent Me."

Grace to you and peace - This is a combination of the usual Greek and Hebrew greetings.

- A. "Grace" is translated from the Greek word (CHARIS) meaning, "that

which affords joy, pleasure, delight, sweetness, charm, loveliness" (Romans 6:23; 2 Corinthians 8:9). Grace is the unmerited favor we receive from God (Romans 5:8).

- B. "Peace" comes from the Greek word (EIRENE) meaning, "harmony, security, safety, prosperity."

This is the word that was used to translate the Hebrew word "SHALOM" when the Old Testament was translated into Greek. There is a greater significance to the meaning here of "peace" than just "the absence of war." SHALOM considered the "wholeness" or "soundness" of man. It is a term of prosperity, especially in the spiritual realm (Colossians 1:2). "Peace" with God, only comes when we are cleansed from our sins in the blood of Christ (Isaiah 59:1-2; 1 Peter 1:18-19; Romans 6:3-4).

from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ - The source of grace and peace is Deity.

- A. God the Father is described as, the "God of all grace" (1 Peter 5:10) and the "God of peace" (Hebrews 13:20).
- B. The Scriptures also teach that grace and truth come from Christ (John 1:17). He is our peace (Ephesians 2:13-14).

Ephesians 1:3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ."

1:2 *We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers,*

We give thanks to God always for you all - It was a common practice for Paul to express his thanks to the Father for those he had a part in converting. A simple look at Paul's writings will show this attitude of thanksgiving. Paul rejoiced in the faithfulness of others (2 John 1:4; 3 John 1:4).

making mention of you in our prayers - The Scriptures teach that a Christian's prayers should be directed to God the Father. Paul prayed to the Father (Ephesians 3:14; 5:20). A Christian must always recognize and respect the divine roles of the members of the Godhead. It is the Father's role and His alone to be addressed in prayer (Matthew 6:9). The Bible teaches that with the help of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:26) we pray "to" (or more accurately "through") Jesus and

then He delivers our prayers as our mediator (1 Timothy 2:5) to the Father. This is the only biblical process or pattern taught for our prayers. [For additional information please see the appendices - PATTERN OF PRAYER.]

A. Prayer is a Privilege - Prayer is a tool provided to us by God which we can benefit both ourselves and others.

1. Paul often prayed for his brethren (Romans 1:9; Ephesians 1:16; Colossians 1:3).

Philippians 1:3-4, "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy."

2. The Bible provides us with many instructions concerning prayer (Matthew 6:5-15; Mark 1:35; Luke 18:1-8; Acts 2:42; 16:25; 1 Timothy 2:1; Philippians 4:6; 1 John 5:14; James 5:16).

1:3 *remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father,*

[In this verse we find the specific reasons for Paul's thanksgiving on behalf of these brethren.]

remembering without ceasing your work of faith - Notice the phrase, "work of faith." Many in the religious world are confused concerning the connection that faith has with works and salvation. The problem is usually their failure to realize that the word "works" is used in different ways in the Bible.

A. For example:

1. Paul will tell us in various passages that we are not saved by works (Ephesians 2:9; Romans 4:2, 4-5; Galatians 3:2, 5).
2. On the other hand, Paul will tell us in other passages that works are necessary and he commends various Christians for their works (Ephesians 2:10; Galatians 5:6; Philippians 2:12).
3. Other inspired writers will also point to the importance of works (James 2:14-26; 3:13; 1 Peter 1:17; 2:12; 1 John 3:12; Revelation 14:13).

4. In fact, Jesus tells us that faith is a type of work that we must do (John 6:28-29). [For additional information please see the appendices - FAITH AND WORKS.]
5. After carefully considering the above passages we learn certain points.
 - a. In the Bible, the word "works" is used in different ways. There are works of the old law, works of merit and works of obedience.
 1. There are no works of the old law that will save us. Today, we are required to have a specific kind of faith. It is the obedient faith of the New Testament.
 2. There are no works of merit that will save us, so that God owes us salvation. We cannot earn our salvation.
 3. However, there are works of obedience that are required for salvation.
- B. Genuine faith, whether it is before salvation (Romans 10:10) or after salvation, will always prompt obedience (1 Timothy 4:6; Hebrews 10:38-39).

These verses express what the Thessalonians were doing concerning their faith. It was a "work of faith." Their faith was an active obedient faith that resulted in them becoming Christians and their faith had continued to work, to keep them in Christ.

labor of love - The Bible teaches us that "love" is a motivating force. Biblical love is labor in action (Mark 12:29-31; Revelation 3:19). 2 Corinthians 5:14 says, "For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died." "Compels us" means, "to hold together, confine, secure, to hold fast, to constrain." Christ's love holds us together to our task. It was God's love that prompted Him to give His Son (John 3:16) and it was Christ's love that caused Him to give Himself (Ephesians 5:25).

- A. We must be a people of love (Colossians 2:2; 1 Peter 1:22; 2:17).

- B. Love must motivate us to action (John 14:15; 1 John 3:18; 5:3).

and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father
- Notice Paul emphasizes both "patience" and "hope."

- A. "Patience" is from the Greek word (HUPOMONE) that literally means, "To remain under." It is not a negative passive submission, but an active, manly endurance. It is not the compliant sufferer as much as it is the resilience of a stout-hearted soldier (James 5:11 and Job; Romans 2:7; 5:3-5; 15:4; Galatians 6:9; Matthew 10:22).
- B. "Hope" is the patience a Christian is to have based on their belief in God's promises (Romans 8:20-25; 1 Peter 1:3; 1 Corinthians 15:19; 1 Timothy 1:1). We must realize that in the context of God's word there is a **certainty** tied to hope. It is not simply a wish.

in our Lord Jesus Christ - The key word here is "in."

Ephesians 1:3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ."

1. Note also Romans 8:1; 2 Timothy 2:10; 1 John 5:11; Revelation 14:13.
2. Another important point here is the good we do, must be done "in Christ" if we want God to be glorified (Ephesians 3:21; John 14:6; 15:1-8; 2 Timothy 2:5).

in the sight of our God and Father - In other words, it is seen by God the Father (Psalm 139; 2 Timothy 1:12).

Hebrews 4:13, "And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account."

1:4 *knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God.*

knowing, beloved brethren - Notice how Paul expresses his closeness to the Thessalonians by calling them his "beloved brethren." The word "brethren" is found 17 times in 1 Thessalonians and another 7 times in 2 Thessalonians. It is found at least once in every one of the eight chapters of these two epistles.

your election by God - This same Greek word for "election" (EKLEGOMAI) is used several ways in the Scriptures.

- A. The word is used by Jesus of His choice of the twelve apostles (John 15:16).
- B. It is used by Paul in Ephesians 1:4 of God's eternal selection.
- C. The word (EKLEGOMAI) is found only 7 times in New Testament.
- D. It is always used of God's choice of men (Acts 9:15; Romans 9:11; 11:5,7-8; 2 Peter 1:10; 1 Thessalonians 1:4).
- E. Whatever form this word takes; verb, noun, etc., it is composed of two words which mean "to say or to speak out". Thus, it means to express one's choice. In this verse it is this fact: God has spoken out. He has selected His people. The brethren in Thessalonica had become, by their response to God's commands, the ones whom God had selected as His own.
- F. This election is always of character, not of an arbitrary selection (Luke 8:9-15). God the Father has chosen a type of individual to be saved (those who are obedient). God does not arbitrarily choose some to be saved and other to be lost. [For additional information please see the appendices - UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION.]

I. Personal Reflections.....1:5-3:13

A. Relating to their Condition 1:5-10

1:5 *For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.*

For our gospel did not come to you in word only - Notice what we learn about the gospel in Paul's letter to the Galatians.

Galatians 1:6-10, "I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.

For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ."

When Paul uses the phrase "our gospel" he is not speaking of ownership, but rather his privilege of proclaiming the gospel (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:14 with 1 Thessalonians 2:4). The gospel is not simply the preaching of an idea, it is the operation of a power (James 1:18-21; Acts 20:32; John 8:32; 17:17; Ephesians 6:17; Hebrews 4:12; 2 Corinthians 10:4-5).

Romans 1:16, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek."

but also, in power, and in the Holy Spirit - We must remember that the gospel is from heaven. Therefore, it is only reasonable to expect confirmation of the gospel from heaven.

Mark 16:20, "And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen."

Hebrews 2:4, "God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?"

John 3:2, "This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, 'Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.'"

We can also see in this verse evidence of inspiration (1 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Corinthians 2:13).

2 Timothy 3:16-17, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."

and in much assurance - When Luke wrote by inspiration to Theophilus he explained that the purpose of his writing was so, "that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed" (Luke 1:4). John explained that the truth can be known (1 John 2:21; 3:5; 5:13).

as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake - The conduct of Paul and his companions was consistent with the message they proclaimed.

The gospel was reinforced by the conduct of those who proclaimed it (Philippians 1:15-16). They did not preach Christ out of envy, strife, contention or insincerity. A Christian's conduct should be worthy of the gospel (Philippians 1:27). What a tragedy it is when the lives of some Christians contradict the message they proclaim.

1:6 *And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit,*

And you became followers of us and of the Lord - The Thessalonians had followed the good example of Paul and his companions as they followed in the example of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1). Notice just a few of the godly qualities we should have:

- A. Love (1 John 4:7-8)
- B. Humility (John 13:5-15)
- C. Compassion (Matthew 9:36)
- D. Holiness (1 Peter 1:16)
- E. Mercy (Luke 6:36)
- F. Forgiveness (Matthew 6:12)

There are many other qualities we could mention. However, the point is, we must fashion ourselves after the example of our Lord.

having received the word in much affliction - One simply needs to read Acts 17:1-11 to see the great affliction faced by the Thessalonians.

Acts 17:5-6, "But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, "These who have turned the world upside down have come here too."

Acts 17:13, "But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was preached by Paul at Berea, they came there also and stirred up the crowds."

This record is enough to show the misdirected zeal and stubbornness of these unbelieving Jews. Those who live godly will always suffer persecution (2 Timothy 3:12).

John 15:18-20, "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also."

with joy of the Holy Spirit - Notice they had received the word not only in much affliction, but also with the joy of the Holy Spirit. Their joy was a result of their confidence that they were suffering for the sake of the gospel of Christ that had been given by the inspiration of the Spirit. When the apostles were beaten for preaching the gospel they felt the same type of joy.

Acts 5:41, "So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name."

1:7 *so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe.*

so that you became examples - The Thessalonians were serving as good examples to other Christians. One of the greatest tools we can possess in our service to the Lord is our faithful example (1 Timothy 4:16). A good example benefits both in our evangelistic efforts and our work with our brothers and sister in Christ. These faithful brethren at Thessalonica were examples to all who believed.

to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe - Under Roman rule Greece was divided into two main parts. Macedonia was the region to the north and Achaia was the region to the south.

1:8 *For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything.*

For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place - This shows that the Thessalonians were evangelistic (Proverbs 11:30; Colossians 1:6, 23; 2 Timothy 2:24).

Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything - Their work of faith (1 Thessalonians 1:3) had spread to others.

James 2:17-18, "Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works."

These brethren had a good report because of their actions. Paul had converted these brethren and was very pleased with their growth (see next verse). We must always remember that actions speak louder than words alone.

1:9 *For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,*

For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you - In his travels, Paul heard from others concerning the conversion and great works of the Thessalonians.

and how you turned to God from idols - This specifically deals with their conversion. They had once been idol worshippers. In this verse we see the power of the gospel. We are reminded of the complete transformation that takes place when one obeys the gospel.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11, "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. **And such were some of you.** But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God."

to serve the living and true God - These brethren lived in the very shadow of Mount Olympus. This was the mythical center of the Greek gods and goddesses. The contrast is made between the false gods and dead idols which they once served, to the one "living and true God" (Isaiah 44:14-19; John 17:3; Acts 17:22-31).

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

and to wait for His Son from heaven - The word "wait" comes from the Greek word (ANAMENO), that Thayer defines as, "to wait for one, to await one whose coming is known or foreseen." The point is that Christians are waiting with assurance and desire. They long for His coming. Those in the world cannot desire His coming because they will be found unprepared.

Revelation 6:15-17, "And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?'"

whom He raised from the dead - The resurrection is referred to here and with it the ascension to Heaven is implied. Paul provided information concerning the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:12-20. The consequences of denying the resurrection are dreadful.

The key to the Christian's hope is Christ's resurrection.

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

This is our hope and it is valid only because of the resurrection. The exceeding greatness of God's power is seen in the resurrection (Ephesians 1:19-23).

even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come - The Christian's interest in Christ's coming is in the fact that He overcame death, and has provided a way of salvation and eternal life in heaven. The faithful will be spared from God's wrath upon the disobedient because of their own obedience to Jesus.

2 Thessalonians 1:7-9, "And to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power."

B. Relating to his Conduct.....2:1-12

2:1 *For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain.*

For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain - Paul

begins this chapter with the most important point, that his work in Thessalonica had been fruitful. Paul preached the word to the Thessalonians and the word bore fruit: some Jews; great multitude of devout Greeks; many of the chief women (Acts 17:4). Paul's preaching had a great result because the listeners received it as the word of God (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

2:2 *But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict.*

But even after we had suffered before - The Greek word for "but" is "ALLA." It is used to make a strong contrast. Paul's work in Thessalonica was the opposite of being vain. The persecution that Paul and Silas experienced brought the opposite result than expected by the Jews (and the devil).

- A. This persecution is expressed in two forms: Physical ("suffered before"); Mental ("spitefully treated").
- B. Faithful Christians always face persecution (Philippians 1:29; 1 Peter 4:4, 16).

2 Timothy 3:12, "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution."

- C. The treatment Paul and Silas suffered at Philippi would have discouraged and maybe even stopped men of weaker faith. But, Paul and Silas continued zealously in their work for the Lord.

and were spitefully treated at Philippi - The phrase "spitefully treated" is from the Greek word (HUBRIZŌ), that indicates an attitude of arrogant disrespect on the part of the oppressors. What happened in Philippi? First, Paul and Silas were brought before the magistrates (Acts 16:20). Second, they were beaten and imprisoned (Acts 16:22-23).

as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict - The gospel should be preached with boldness. A weak, shy, timid and unclear preaching of the gospel does not please God the Father (Acts 14:1-3; 13:46).

The idea here is not only that the preaching was courageous, but it was also clear.

Habakkuk 2:2, "Then the LORD answered me and said: 'Write the

vision and make it plain on tablets, that he may run who reads it."

We must never allow attacks by the devil to shut our mouths. Nor can we allow persecutions to compromise our preaching of the word.

The phrase "in our God" shows to us the source of Paul's boldness as he preached God's gospel message. We should also consider the fact that the suffering he faced did not stop when he left Philippi. Even in Thessalonica Paul's proclamation of the gospel was "with much conflict."

2:3 *For our exhortation did not come from error or uncleanness, nor was it in deceit.*

For our exhortation - "Exhortation" comes from the Greek word (PARAKLĒSIS) meaning, "Persuasive discourse, calling to one's side, for admonition, encouragement, or comfort" (A. T. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament, Vol. 4, p. 16).

did not come from error or uncleanness - Paul was preaching a message of truth and holiness.

1 Timothy 2:7, "For which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle—I am speaking the truth in Christ and not lying—a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth."

1 Thessalonians 4:7, "For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness."

nor was it in deceit - "Deceit" is a translation of the Greek word (DOLOS) that comes from DELLŌ meaning "to decoy." The word is used for a trick or bait that is used. In a figurative sense it means, craft, guile and subtility.

Paul's preaching and his manner of life could always hold up to the scrutiny of his enemies. Paul was not a hypocrite. He was God's servant. Deceit is a quality of the servants of Satan (2 Corinthians 11:15).

2:4 *But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts.*

But as we have been approved by God - "Approved" comes from the Greek word (DOKIMAZO) meaning, "to test, examine, prove, scrutinize (to see whether a thing is genuine or not), as metals." It means proved to be genuine. A form of this word is used twice in this verse (see "tests" below).

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

to be entrusted with the gospel - Paul had been entrusted with the gospel message. Jesus said Paul is a "chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel (Acts 9:15).

1 Corinthians 9:16, "For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!"

Teaching God's word is a grave responsibility (James 3:1). It is the **gospel** (Romans 1:16) that must be preached, not the opinions, doctrines and commandments of men (Matthew 15:9; Mark 7:7).

even so we speak, not as pleasing men but God - Paul did not seek to please men with his preaching. In other words, he did not preach to gain popularity. Paul's singular purpose was to please God.

Galatians 1:8-10, "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed. For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ."

2 Timothy 4:2-4, "Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables."

who tests our hearts - The word "tests" comes from the same Greek word (DOKIMAZO) translated as "to test, examine, prove, scrutinize (to see whether a thing is genuine or not), as metals." It means proved to be genuine.

Proverbs 17:3, "The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, But the LORD tests the hearts."

The only one we should be concerned with pleasing is our God. If He is pleased, then those who are seeking to please Him will also

be pleased. God knows what is in our hearts. He knows our very thoughts and attitudes (Psalm 139). Paul preached as one who knew that he would stand before God one day and give an account (Matthew 12:36; Romans 14:12).

2:5 *For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness—God is witness.*

For neither at any time did we use flattering words - "Flattering" comes from the Greek word (KOLAKEIA) meaning, "flattery, flattering discourse." This word involves the idea of selfish motives. It is flattery not merely for the sake of giving pleasure to others, but for the sake of self-interest.

Proverbs 26:28, "A lying tongue hates those who are crushed by it, and a flattering mouth works ruin."

Proverbs 28:23, "He who rebukes a man will find more favor afterward than he who flatters with the tongue."

Proverbs 29:5, "A man who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his feet."

as ye know - They could know this by reflecting on Paul's preaching and conduct while he was among them. In this way they were able to confirm these claims made by Paul.

nor a cloak for covetousness - "Covetousness" comes from the Greek word (PLEONEXIA) meaning, a "greedy desire to have more." Jesus said in Luke 12:15, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses." Paul wrote to Timothy, "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows (1 Timothy 6:10). Covetousness is often a motivation for false teachers (Romans 16:17; Philippians 3:18-19).

Titus 1:10-11, "For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, **for the sake of dishonest gain.**"

God is witness - The Thessalonians themselves could attest to Paul's external conduct (no flattering words). However, God, who knows the hearts of men, was also a witness to Paul's internal character (the lack of covetousness).

2:6 *Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ.*

Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others - We must always guard ourselves against sinful motives by recognizing the danger of seeking the favor of men (Galatians 1:10; Luke 6:26; 2 Corinthians 4:3-4).

when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ - What is Paul trying to say? Note three lessons to be learned:

- A. Those who preach the gospel are worthy to be supported by the gospel (1 Timothy 5:17-18; 1 Corinthians 9:6-15).
- B. Those who fill God's appointed positions of authority deserve honor and respect. We must give honor to whom honor is due (Romans 13:7; Hebrews 13:17).

Especially when that position is filled by one such as Paul who was meticulous in carrying out his responsibilities. Paul was an apostle and he deserved respect. [For additional information concerning qualifications of an apostle please see the appendices - ARE THERE MODERN-DAY APOSTLES?]

- C. Paul waived his right for financial support as a preacher of the gospel. He did not demand support from the Thessalonians. He also did not unjustly exalt himself over them.

2:7 *But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children.*

But we were gentle among you - Compare this with the conduct mentioned in verse 5. Paul's gentleness does not mean he used "flattering words."

"But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ" (Ephesians 4:15).

"Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves" (Matthew 10:16).

just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children - Here Paul explains the nature of his gentleness toward them. He uses the illustration of a mother nursing her baby. This beautiful image leaves no doubt concerning his love, devotion and

concern for these brethren.

2:8 *So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us.*

So, affectionately longing for you - The phrase "affectionately longing" comes from the Greek word (HOMEIROMAI) meaning, "to desire earnestly, to yearn after." The powerful language used in this verse shows Paul's zealous desire for their salvation.

we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God - The "gospel" is the good news of salvation. The fundamental elements being the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). However, it goes even deeper. The gospel is the good news that now because of the sacrifice of Jesus, man has a way to have a home in heaven if he obeys God's plan of salvation. What is God's plan of salvation?

- A. The first requirement is to **hear** the saving message of salvation (Romans 10:17). In other words, we must learn the truth before we can obey it.
- B. The second requirement is to have **faith** (belief) that Jesus is indeed the Christ the Son of God (John 8:24; Mark 16:15-16).

However, this is not the only requirement. Faith alone will not save (James 2:14, 17, 24).

- C. The third requirement of God's plan is **repentance**. The sinner is required to repent, which is composed of sorrow for sin and a change of will that results in a changed life (Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; 2 Corinthians 7:10).
- D. The fourth requirement is **confession**. The sinner is required to confess their faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God (Acts 8:37; Matthew 10:32-33; Romans 10:10).
- E. The fifth requirement is **baptism** (Mark 16:15-16; Matthew 28:18-19; Romans 6:3-4; 1 Peter 3:21). We must be baptized for the remission (forgiveness) of our sins (Acts 2:38).
- F. Then the Christian must **remain faithful** (Matthew 10:22; Romans 8:12-13; Galatians 5:1-6; Revelation 2:10).

but also, our own lives, because you had become dear to us - The Greek word (PSUCHE) for "lives" in this passage can also be translated as "souls." The word can have a variety of meanings. Sometimes it refers to the inner, eternal part of man as distinguished from the physical body. At other times it means the breath of life that makes one a living creature. It is in this sense that the word is being used in this verse. If necessary, Paul and his companions were willing to die for their brethren at Thessalonica.

2:9 *For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God.*

For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil - The Greek word for "labor" (KOPOS) is defined as "a beating, intense labour united with trouble." The Greek word for "toil" (MOCHTHOS) is defined as "painfulness, a hard and difficult labor, hardship, distress." This signifies the struggle to overcome difficulties or hardships. Paul was willing to pay whatever price to bring to them the gospel.

for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you - Paul worked as a tentmaker in order to not burden the Thessalonians with his financial needs (Acts 18:1-3). He did this so that none could accuse him of preaching for financial gain. Paul did not want anything to hinder his preaching of the gospel.

we preached to you the gospel of God - It is the "gospel of God" because it came as good news from God. The plan of salvation was from God, not man.

2:10 *You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe;*

You are witnesses, and God also - No one could rightfully question the conduct of Paul and his companions (1 Peter 2:11-12; Matthew 5:13-16). Not only did the Thessalonians know the truth, but obviously so did God (Romans 1:9; 2 Corinthians 1:23; Philippians 1:8). God knows all (Psalm 44:21; 139:4; 147:5; 1 John 3:20; Hebrews 4:13).

how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe - This emphasizes to us the powerful influence of a good example (Ezra 7:10; Acts 1:1; 20:28; 1 Timothy 4:16). The words "devoutly" and "justly" are similar, but "devoutly" refers to one's responsibility to God, while "justly" refers to one's responsibility to his fellowman. "Blamelessly" means that no blame concerning wrong doing could rightfully be made against him.

2:11 *as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children,*

as you know how we exhorted - "Exhorted" comes from the Greek word (PARAKALEŌ) meaning, "to call to one's side, to address, speak to, which may be done in the way of exhortation or instruction."

and comforted - "Comforted" comes from the Greek word (PARAMUTHEOMAI) meaning, "to speak to by way of admonition, or to calm, console and encourage."

and charged every one of you - "Charged" come from the Greek word (MARTUROMAI) meaning, "to give evidence, bear record, report, implore."

Let us take a moment and notice what the Bible teaches concerning how we must preach and teach.

1 Thessalonians 2:11, As you know how we **exhorted**, and **comforted**, and **charged** every one of you, as a father does his own children."

1. Exhort
2. Comfort
3. Charge (testify)

2 Timothy 4:2, "Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. **Convince, rebuke, exhort**, with all longsuffering and teaching."

1. Convince
2. Rebuke
3. Exhort

John 16:8, "And when He has come, He will **convict the world of sin**, and of **righteousness**, and of **judgment**."

1. Convict (admonish, convince) the world of sin
2. Convict the world of righteousness
3. Convict the world of Judgment

as a father does his own children - In verse 7 Paul used the mother's love as an example, now he uses the example of a father's love and care for his children. Paul was a spiritual father to these Thessalonians. However, he was never addressed as "Father Paul."

Matthew 23:9, "Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven."

2:12 *that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.*

that you would walk worthy of God - The word "walk" is used by Paul to refer to their daily conduct (Romans 6:4; 13:13; 2 Corinthians 10:3; Galatians 5:16; Ephesians 2:10; 5:8; 1 John 1:7; 2:6; 2 John 1:6). The word "worthy" comes from the Greek word (AXIŌS) meaning, "suitably, appropriately, after a godly sort." Imagine a set of balances with God on one side and our daily conduct on the other side (Ephesians 5:1).

who calls you into His own kingdom and glory - As stated before (verse 8) the world is called to salvation through the gospel (2 Thessalonians 2:14). [For additional information please see the appendices - ARE WE CALLED?]

The "kingdom" is simply another way of describing the church (Matthew 16:16-18; Colossians 1:13-18).

In Matthew 4:17 we see, "From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" The kingdom was "at hand" (near), in regard to time, not distance. He told His disciples, "Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power" (Mark 9:1). The promise Jesus made was that some who were in His audience would see the kingdom arrive during their lifetime. **Therefore, the kingdom came into existence in the first century.**

Paul wrote in Colossians 1:13, "He has delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son." When Paul said "us" he meant himself and the church at Colossae. **Therefore, the kingdom and the church are one and the same.** Today many do not believe the kingdom has come and are waiting for its arrival. This would mean that none of the disciples, Paul, or the brethren at Colossae were in the kingdom. However, the Scriptures say that they were in the kingdom. The kingdom is the church and it is here now.

C. Relating to his Concern.....2:13-3:13

2:13 *For this reason, we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of*

men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.

For this reason, we also thank God without ceasing - This statement gives us greater understanding of Paul's habits concerning prayer.

1 Thessalonians 5:17, "Pray without ceasing."

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

Philippians 4:6, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God."

because when you received the word of God which you heard from us - Notice that Paul makes it clear that the message he preached was "the word of God." This shows us the important work of a preacher (Romans 10:14-17; 2 Timothy 2:2). The word "received" comes from the Greek word (PARALAMBANŌ) meaning "to take to, to receive with the mind, to join to one's self, to accept or acknowledge one to be such as he professes to be, not to reject, not to withhold obedience." The progression is seen clearly in this verse. Paul preached, they heard and received (Acts 2:41).

you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God - The word "welcomed" comes from the Greek word (DECHOMAI) meaning, "to receive favorably, give ear to, embrace, make one's own, approve, not to reject." These brethren realized the value of the gospel and welcomed it as the inspired word of God (2 Peter 1:19-21).

2 Timothy 3:16-17, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."

which also effectively works in you who believe - The phrase "effectively works" means that God's word works with energy and power in those who believe it; it has no effect on the lives of those who refuse to believe it. The word of God is described as "living and powerful" (Hebrews 4:12).

James 1:21, "Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls."

Acts 20:32, "So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of

His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified."

2:14 *For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Judeans,*

For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus - This is not saying the Thessalonians looked to the congregations which are in Judea for authority, but as good examples of righteous living in the midst of persecution. Judea was the place where the first congregations were established. They faced horrible persecution by the unbelieving Jews (see Acts chapters 1-8). The Thessalonians imitated them by staying faithful even while undergoing terrible persecution.

For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Judeans - Paul told Timothy, "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12). Persecution is one of the results of receiving the word.

- A. The Thessalonians became imitators of the churches in Judea (Acts 1:8). This was the main homeland of the Jews. Jerusalem was its capital.
- B. This is where the church began (Acts 2:47).
- C. Jesus warned His followers that those following Him would be persecuted (John 15:18-27).
- D. The Jewish Christians were persecuted (Acts 4:1-3, 17, 21; 5:25-33, 40-42; 6:8-15; 7:54-60; 8:1-4).
- E. The Thessalonians also suffered persecution (Acts 17:5-9; 1 Thessalonians 1:6; 2:1).

2:15 *who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men,*

who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us - This is Paul's inspired description of the Jews:

- A. They "killed the Lord Jesus" (Acts 2:36, 3:15). They did not directly kill Jesus, because they did not have that authority (John 18:31),

but they caused it to be done, and for that reason they were charged with His murder.

- B. They "killed their own prophets" (Matthew 5:12; 21:35-36; 22:6; 23:37).
- C. And he says, they "have persecuted us" (Acts 17:5-9).
- D. Paul had deep sympathy for the persecuted Thessalonians. His condemnation of their persecutors showed not only his solidarity with his brethren, but also the value of the gospel the enemies tried to keep from the Thessalonians.

and they do not please God - Because of their actions the Jews did not please God.

and are contrary to all men - "Contrary" comes from the Greek word (ENANTIOS) meaning, "opposite, antagonistic, against, opposed as an adversary." God's word teaches that all, Gentiles and Jews alike, need the gospel (Acts 26:23; Romans 1:16; 3:9; Galatians 3:27-28; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). However, these unbelieving Jews were seeking to turn men away from their **ONLY** source of life, the GOSPEL OF CHRIST!

2:16 *forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up the measure of their sins; but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost.*

forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved - The Jews would have supported Paul's teaching if he would have told the Gentiles to be circumcised to become Jews, but they did not like him teaching the Gentiles that they were equal to the Jews while in their uncircumcised state. Paul made it clear to the Gentiles that they had every right to the grace of God, just like the Jews. A perfect example of the Jews attitude is seen following Paul's sermon at Antioch.

Acts 13:42-45, "So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath. Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. On the next Sabbath almost, the whole city came together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul."

so as always to fill up the measure of their sins - In rejecting God, and keeping

the truth from the Gentiles, they filled up the measure of their sins. God allows men to continue in wickedness because He is patiently giving them time to repent (1 Peter 3:20; 2 Peter 3:9; Romans 2:4). God allows evil men to continue in this way, so, that if they refuse to repent, and He must punish them, His righteous judgment will be beyond dispute (Genesis 15:16; Amos 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13, 2:1, 4, 6).

Notice a few of the warnings to the Jews from the prophets:

Isaiah 1:4, "Alas, sinful nation, A people laden with iniquity, A brood of evildoers, Children who are corrupters! They have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked to anger The Holy One of Israel, they have turned away backward."

Jeremiah 6:28, "They are all stubborn rebels, walking as slanderers. They are bronze and iron, they are all corrupters."

Malachi 3:7, "'Yet from the days of your fathers You have gone away from My ordinances and have not kept them. Return to Me, and I will return to you,' says the LORD of hosts. But you said, 'In what way shall we return?'"

Matthew 3:7, "But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, 'Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?'"

but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost - The sins of the Jews were full. Their iniquities were completed in their rejection of Jesus as the Christ and their persecution of His disciples. So, their destruction was at hand.

Wilber Fields in his book, *Thinking Through Thessalonians*: College Press, Joplin, Missouri, p. 71) wrote:

"God's wrath against the Jews was particularly demonstrated at the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Already at the time when Paul wrote this epistle, the great rebellion of the Jews against the Romans was taking form. When the rebellion finally came in 66 A.D., it led to a bloody war, in which the walls, temple, and much of the rest of Jerusalem were demolished and burned down. 97,000 people were carried away captive into slavery, and eleven hundred thousand (1,100,000) perished, many by starvation and killing one another."

2:17 *But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire.*

But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence - The affliction and persecution was so strong that Paul had to leave the city for a time (Acts 17:10). The phrase "having been taken" comes from the Greek word (APORPHANIZŌ) meaning, "to take or separate." The root of this word is used to express the idea of being made an orphan. Paul is making a very strong statement.

not in heart - The Thessalonians continued to be on Paul's mind and in his heart, even when he was physically separated from them (1 Thessalonians 3:1-2, 7-8). His thoughts and concerns were very much with them (cf. Colossians 2:5).

endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire - Paul had a great desire to be with them again. We do not know all that Paul did when he was trying to get back to them, but we should not assume his lack of success was an absence of desire or effort (Romans 1:11, 13).

2:18 *Therefore, we wanted to come to you—even I, Paul, time and again—but Satan hindered us.*

Therefore, we wanted to come to you—even I, Paul, time and again - Plans had been made, time and again, but had fallen through. Paul had not been able to return to these brethren.

but Satan hindered us - Paul leaves no doubt concerning the reality and activity of Satan (Ephesians 2:2; 4:27; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Acts 26:18; 1 Timothy 5:15; 2 Corinthians 11:3, 14-15). Other inspired writers also provide to us information concerning Satan and his works (1 Peter 5:8; Revelation 12:9; Luke 22:31). "Hindered" comes from the Greek word (EGKOPTO) used to describe an army destroying a road or taking out a bridge to slow the progress of their enemy. We don't know the specifics, but Paul knew who was behind his difficulties in returning to Thessalonica.

2:19 *For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?*

For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? - "Crown" comes from the Greek word (STEPHANOS) that describes, "a woven garland which was given as a prize to victors in Grecian games." The word "rejoicing" comes from the Greek word (KAUCHĒSIS) meaning, "the act of glorying." It gives the impression of joy outwardly expressed or inwardly felt.

A Christian's salvation does not depend on the faithfulness of his converts. However, there is joy in seeing them remain faithful, and this is the "crown of rejoicing" spoken of here. The converts final reward will not be given until Christ's return, but it was possible for Paul to experience the "joy" and "hope" of their reward by seeing their faithfulness.

It would be difficult to over-emphasize the magnitude of Paul's feelings here. This attitude of Paul helps explain the concern we see in this context for their faithfulness or lack of it. If the Thessalonians chose to leave Christ Paul's hope would vanish, his joy would be gone and his crown of rejoicing would wilt.

Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? - One can imagine the joy of Paul when these Thessalonians ceased being servants of sin and became servants of righteousness (Romans 6:17-18). But Paul knew his work was not done. This initial conversion was simply the beginning. Exhortation and additional instruction would follow (Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 2:42; 1 Peter 2:2; 2 Peter 3:18). His work would not be complete until these brethren stood in the very presence of Jesus Christ at His return (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17; 2 Thessalonians 1:3-8).

2:20 *For you are our glory and joy.*

For you are our glory and joy - The Thessalonians were the fruit of his suffering and zealous teaching efforts. Paul gloried and rejoiced in them. He saw them grow daily into stronger and more faithful servants of Christ.

3:1 *Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone,*

Therefore - We must remember that men have divided the Bible into chapters and verses. This verse refers back to Paul's discussion in chapter 2:17-20.

when we could no longer endure it - "Endure" comes from the Greek word (STEGŌ) meaning, "(literally) to roof over, that is, (figuratively) to cover with silence (endure patiently), forbear, suffer." Paul could no longer wait to hear news concerning the Thessalonians. He chose to suffer being left alone in Athens, so that he could send his companions to them to learn about their spiritual condition.

we thought it good to be left in Athens alone - The Greek word (KATALEIPŌ) translated as "to be left" can be used to express a sense of desolation.

Paul's use of language here is quite interesting. Was it "good" to be "left alone?" The idea is that to know the state of the Thessalonians, and where they stood, was better than the help and assistance that Paul would have gained from those he was sending. Paul's concern for the churches is one of his greatest attributes (Philippians 1:23-24; 2 Corinthians 11:23-28; Philippians 2:1-5).

3:2 *and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith,*

and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ - Timothy is described as a "brother," "minister" and "fellow laborer."

He was a spiritual "brother" to Paul as a member of God's family (1 Timothy 3:15; Galatians 4:4-7; Romans 8:16-17).

He is also described as a "minister of God." This is another way of saying he was a servant of God. Minister is not an exalted title as some use it today. It simply means "servant."

He was also described by Paul as a "fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ." Paul and Timothy worked together to spread the good news of salvation in Christ Jesus (1 Corinthians 3:9; Philippians 4:2-3).

to establish you and encourage you - To "establish" (STĒRIZŌ) means, "to make stable, to strengthen, make firm" (see verse 3). To "encourage" (PARAKALEŌ) means, "to call to one's side, to address, speak to, which may be done in the way of exhortation or instruction."

Philippians 1:25, "And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith."

1 Thessalonians 5:11, "Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing."

1 Thessalonians 5:14, "Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all."

concerning your faith - Paul wanted these brethren to be people of faith, who devotedly obeyed God's commands. He had concerns that their faith might falter under the constant persecution they faced. Paul wanted Timothy to stress to

them that the troubles they faced did not mean their faith was vain. He needed to encourage them to remain steadfast in their faith even while facing extreme persecution.

3:3 *that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this.*

that no one should be shaken by these afflictions - It is during the time of afflictions that new Christians fall away. This reminds me of the warning Jesus gave when He explained the parable of the sower or more correctly the parable of the soils.

Luke 8:11-15, "Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away. Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity. But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience."

for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this - "Appointed" is translated from the Greek word (KEIMAI) that means metaphorically, "to be (by God's intent) set, i.e. destined." Faithful Christians always face persecution.

John 16:33, "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

Acts 14:21-22, "And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, 'We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.'"

John 15:18-19, "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you."

2 Timothy 3:12, "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will

suffer persecution."

- 3:4 *For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know.*

For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation - The phrase "we told you before" means, Paul had dealt with the topic of "tribulation" (pressure, trouble, distress) when he was with them (2 Timothy 3:12; Philippians 1:29; 2 Timothy 1:7-8).

just as it happened, and you know - They had learned this lesson not only from the teachings of Paul, but also from firsthand experience (Acts 17:5-10).

- 3:5 *For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain.*

For this reason - Paul knew what these brethren were facing. He knew the challenges they faced due to the many troubles and persecutions (1 Corinthians 9:27).

Jeremiah 20:7-9, "O LORD, you induced me, and I was persuaded; You are stronger than I, and have prevailed. I am in derision daily; Everyone mocks me. For when I spoke, I cried out; I shouted, 'Violence and plunder!' Because the word of the LORD was made to me a reproach and a derision daily. Then I said, 'I will not make mention of Him, Nor speak anymore in His name.' But His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, and I could not."

If the great servant, Jeremiah, was tempted to stop preaching, how would these new converts in Thessalonica stand up to the continual attacks being made on their faith?

when I could no longer endure it - Paul could no longer wait to hear news concerning the Thessalonians. He desperately wanted to know how their faith was holding up.

I sent to know your faith - Paul's main concern was not their physical well-being, but their spiritual standing, their faith. Christians can overcome physical abuse and even death, but they cannot overcome losing their faith (3 John 1:2).

lest by some means the tempter had tempted you - The "tempter" refers to the devil (Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13). Temptation is used in two different ways in this context:

- A. Hardships and afflictions (trials)
- B. Enticement

1 Corinthians 10:13, "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it."

and our labor might be in vain - Paul was concerned that Satan may have succeeded in weakening their faith, and that his own labors might have therefore come to nothing.

[Verse 6 begins a new section. Timothy had returned with news concerning these brethren.]

- 3:6. *But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also to see you—*

But - Paul knew that they could have surrendered to the temptations and afflictions. The enemy could have won. The word "but" shows the contrast to what could have happened.

now that Timothy has come to us from you - The word "now" is very interesting. It could indicate an immediate action on Paul's part to sit down and write this epistle (letter) to the Thessalonians in response to the good news he had received.

and brought us good news of your faith and love - Timothy had brought "good news" concerning the faithfulness and demonstrations of love from the brethren at Thessalonica. The phrase "good news" is from the same Greek word (EUAGGELIDZO) used by the inspired writers to indicate the preaching of the gospel. Paul must have been thrilled to hear this good report! Proverbs 25:25 states, "As cold water to a weary soul, so is good news from a far country."

- A. Timothy's report included:
 1. Good news about their faith (inward religion)
 2. Good news about their love (outward religion)

3. Good remembrance and fondness for Paul

and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also to see you - This shows the special relationship that existed between Paul and the brethren at Thessalonica. They had a unique closeness with Paul because he had brought to them the message of salvation. True disciples of the Lord will always cherish the relationships they have with their brothers and sister in Christ as the family of God (Mark 3:32-35; Romans 8:14-16; Ephesians 2:19).

3:7 *therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith.*

therefore, brethren - Notice the word "brethren" used here. Once again this shows his closeness, love and concern for them.

in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith - "Affliction" comes from the Greek word (THLIPSIS) meaning, "pressure, anguish, burdened, persecution, tribulation, trouble." The word "distress" comes from the Greek word (ANAGKĒ) meaning, "necessity, imposed either by the circumstances, or by law of duty, calamity." In verse 2 of this chapter Paul wanted them to be comforted and now he was comforted by them.

Notice this quote from Leon Morris:

"Up to this point Paul had had little to encourage him. In four successive centers there had been discouragement. A promising beginning had been followed by forcible disruption in Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea, and in Athens he had had little success. Small wonder that he began his preaching at Corinth 'in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling' (1 Corinthians 2:3). But when the messengers came from Thessalonica they brought such a report of the continuing steadfastness of the converts that Paul saw that the blessing of God had after all rested upon his work there, and this so caused his spirits to rise that he was able to give himself much more energetically to the work he was doing. This appears to be the meaning of 'Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ' (Acts 18:5). Out of this sense of relief and reassurance Paul wrote his first letter to the Thessalonians, and it is clear that he wrote with a full heart" (*The Epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians*, p. 14).

3:8 *For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord.*

For now, we live - The phrase "now we live" is figurative. Paul was not saying that his physical life depended on the faithfulness of the Thessalonians. The expression is used to say, "to live and prosper, to be happy, blessed." The good news concerning the faith and love of the Thessalonians had brought "life" to him. Christians always experience joy when they hear of the faithfulness of their brethren (2 John 1:4; 3 John 1:4).

if - This is the "biggest" word in the Bible! It is a conditional term. Before the result can be had ("we live"), the condition (the Thessalonians standing fast in the Lord) must be met.

Romans 11:22, "Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, **if** you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off."

you stand fast in the Lord - The phrase "stand fast" comes from the Greek word (STĒKŌ) meaning, "to stand firm, to persevere, to persist."

Ephesians 6:11, "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil."

Ephesians 6:13-17, "Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which, you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

1 Corinthians 15:1-2, "Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain."

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

3:9 *For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God,*

For what thanks can we render to God for you - When Paul heard of the faithfulness of the Thessalonians, he knew that he owed it to God the Father to

give thanks. Yes, Paul had worked to the point of exhaustion on behalf of these brethren, but he knew that it was God that had given the increase (1 Corinthians 3:6-9). The phrase "render to" comes from the Greek word (ANTAPODIDŌMI) meaning, "to requite, recompense, repay." This carries the idea of something that is due.

for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God - Again, their faithful life was a joy to Paul. His question is basically asking, "How can I thank God enough for your faithfulness?"

3:10 *night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith?*

night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face - This was Paul's constant and continual prayer (1 Thessalonians 5:17). It was also a fervent prayer (James 5:16; 1 John 5:14).

and perfect what is lacking in your faith? - Paul's prayer is two-fold in desire:

- A. "that we might see your face" - This whole context shows how Paul desired to be among his brethren in Thessalonica.
- B. "and perfect what is lacking in your faith" - His desire to see them was not simply for social reasons. His desire to see them was based on their spiritual needs. He wanted to perfect (complete) that which was lacking. As strong as their faith was, there was still room for growth. There is never a time in a Christian's life when there is no longer a need to grow spiritually. This is certainly true with new converts (1 Corinthians 3:1-3; 1 Peter 2:2)!

[Next Paul becomes even more specific concerning petitions to the Father on their behalf.]

3:11 *Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you.*

Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ direct - Notice how "our God and Father Himself" is connected with "our Lord Jesus Christ." This link emphasizes Christ's oneness with the Father. In fact, the Greek word translated as "direct" (KATEUTHUNŌ) is a singular verb. Subjects and verbs must agree with one another in number (singular or plural). Thus, if a verb is singular, its subject must also be singular; if a verb is plural, its subject must also be plural. A singular verb demands a singular subject. This verse clearly shows

that the Father and Son are one.

There are several verses where the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all mentioned in one passage (Matthew 28:19, John 6:62-65, Philippians 2:5-11, 1 Peter 1:2). The Scriptures also teach that God the Father, God the Spirit and God the Son are one. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one in work (John 4:34; 16:13-15), creation (Ephesians 3:9; Genesis 1:2; Job 26:13-14), authority (Revelation 2:1,7; Hebrews 1:1-4), love (John 14:21-23; Romans 5:5), witness (John 8:18;16:8-14), doctrine (John 7:16; 14:26; 16:15), will (John 6:38; 16:8-13) and judgment (John 5:22, 30; 16:11).

There is only one essence of God (Deity), but there are three Persons within that essence. The Godhead means three distinct Persons - Father, Son and Holy Spirit in one distinct God.

We must not view the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as "attributes" of God, for each of these three Persons in the Godhead "are called God." So, you see the three Personages in the Godhead are not attributes of God, but they each have all the attributes of God. The Bible tells us there is only one God, and yet there is distinctly God the Father, God the Son and God the Spirit. There is only one God (Deity), but there are three Persons within that essence.

direct our way to you - The word "direct" means, "to make straight, guide" The word is used to describe "the removal of the hindrances to coming to one." This is the opposite of "hindered" in 1 Thessalonians 2:18. Paul wants the way to be cleared so he can see these brethren.

3:12 *And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you,*

And may the Lord - Spiritual growth comes ultimately from the Lord. We can grow spiritually when we follow His example and teachings found in the inspired Scriptures (Galatians 5:22-23; 1 Peter 2:2; 2 Peter 3:18; Philippians 4:8; 2 Peter 1:5-10; 1 Peter 1:13-16).

make you increase and abound in love to one another - Our love for one another must be constantly growing.

John 15:12, "This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you."

and to all - The Thessalonians loved each other, and indeed all men. Paul is

encouraging them to increase in these attributes (Mark 12:30,32; Galatians 6:10).

just as we do to you - This shows us that Paul and his companions practiced what they preached.

3:13 *so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.*

so that - This means that Paul's desire and request in the previous verse had an ultimate goal in mind.

He may establish your hearts blameless - It should be made clear that "blameless" does not mean sinless - but rather, that no blame could be rightfully laid on them because they had dealt with their sins in the proper way.

in holiness before our God and Father - Anyone associated with God must maintain holiness (Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8; Leviticus 11:44-47; 1 Peter 1:13-16). He is the one "to whom we must give account" (Hebrews 4:13).

at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ - Paul has closed all three chapters with a reference to the coming of our Lord. This refers to the Lord's second coming in judgment. As we will see in the next chapter the Lord will not set foot upon this earth again, but we will meet Him in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:17). The Lord's coming should always be on our minds as we consider the choices we make in this life.

with all His saints - Who are these saints? The word "saints" literally means "holy ones."

A. Does this refer to angels?

Matthew 25:31, "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory."

2 Thessalonians 1:7, "And to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels."

B. Does this refer to the faithful who had previously died?

1 Thessalonians 4:14, "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep"

in Jesus."

C. Could it have reference to both?

The Scriptures teach that the Lord will bring with Him both, "those who sleep in Jesus," and His "mighty angels." Therefore, we can conclude that "His saints" in this verse refers to one, or the other, or both.

II. Paul's Instructions4:1-5:28

A. Walk in Holiness4:1-8

4:1 *Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God;*

Finally, then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus - The word "urge" expresses the idea of beseeching, asking or requesting (Romans 12:1). The word "exhort" conveys the idea of calling to one's side to speak to. Paul was doing both, "in the Lord Jesus Christ." This emphasizes not only their relationship to Christ, but also their responsibility to Christ.

that you should abound more and more - The Christian life is the more abundant life. In John 10:10 Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." We must never be satisfied with where we stand.

1 Corinthians 15:58, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."

Colossians 1:10, "That you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God."

just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God - Paul had taught the Thessalonians the truth (see next verse; also 1 Thessalonians 2:13). Paul had also lived the truth setting for them the proper example to follow (1 Corinthians 11:1; Philippians 3:17). The Christian life is often described as a walk. This emphasizes the continual action of righteousness demanded and expected. Notice the many things we learn about the Christian's walk just from the one book of Ephesians:

Ephesians 2:10, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for

good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."

Ephesians 4:1, "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called."

Ephesians 4:17, "This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind."

Ephesians 5:2, "And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma."

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

Ephesians 5:15, "See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise."

4:2 *for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus.*

for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus - Those things taught to them by Paul were the commandments of Christ (1 Corinthians 14:37). Jesus said in John 14:15, "If you love Me, keep My commandments." Commandments from the Lord require obedience.

Matthew 7:21, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven."

Hebrews 5:8-9, "Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him."

Revelation 22:14, "Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city."

4:3 *For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality;*

For this is the will of God - Notice how concerned Paul is that the brethren consider God's will. God had given them free will to make their decision to either

obey or disobey His commandments. God's will for them was obedience, but He did not force them to obey Him. However, they could never please Him without obeying Him. Pleasing God requires us to bring our will into harmony with His will. We are required to change. God will never change to please us.

your sanctification - Sanctification comes from the Greek word (HAGIASMOS) that signifies the process that ends in holiness. It means to be separated from sin and consecrated to God. It is being set apart for God's purpose.

A. It is God who sanctifies us when we obey.

1 Thessalonians 5:23, "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Hebrews 2:11, "For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren."

B. God sanctifies us by His word.

John 17:17-19, "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth."

Acts 20:32, "So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified."

that you should abstain from sexual immorality - Sanctification demands purity. It could be that "sexual immorality" is specifically mentioned by Paul because it was a prevalent sin among the people living in Thessalonica. The English phrase "sexual immorality" is a translation of the Greek word (PORNEIA) meaning fornication. This refers to any illicit sexual intercourse. Fornication is the broader term which includes any sexual act such as adultery, homosexuality, incest, premarital sex, prostitution and bestiality. In 1 Corinthians 6:13, Paul stated, "the body is not for sexual immorality." In 1 Corinthians 6:18, he commanded, "Flee sexual immorality." In Hebrews 13:4 we are warned, "fornicators and adulterers God will judge."

4:4 *that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and*

honor,

that each of you - Note that no one is excluded in this admonition.

should know how to possess his own vessel - "Possess" comes from the Greek word (KTAOMAI) meaning, "to get, acquire, obtain or possess." "Vessel" comes from the Greek word (SKEUOS) used to indicate, "household utensils, domestic gear, the sails and ropes of a ship." The word is used metaphorically for a man of quality, a chosen instrument. The Greeks, in their writings, would use this word to refer to the physical body.

In the Scriptures it is also used to refer to the physical body.

2 Corinthians 4:5-7, "For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen **vessels**, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us."

1 Peter 3:7, "Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker **vessel**, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered."

in sanctification and honor - Paul commands the Thessalonians to keep their bodies pure from all uncleanness. There is no honor in sexual immorality. Those who submit themselves to this sin have disgraced their own bodies. It is true that sexual desire is natural, but it must be satisfied only in a marriage relationship approved by God (Hebrews 13:4).

4:5 *not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God;*

not in passion of lust - "Passion" comes from the Greek word (EPITHUMIA) meaning, "desire, craving, longing, desire for what is forbidden." "Lust" is a feeling so powerful that we lose our self-control and become a slave to our own desires. How do we control our desires? By keeping our minds pure. Purity of thoughts produces pure actions.

Philippians 4:8, "Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is

any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things."

Matthew 5:8, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

like the Gentiles who do not know God - The Thessalonians were Gentiles, but they had obeyed God's plan of salvation becoming followers of Christ. Therefore, they were expected to not follow the sinful practices of the unbelieving Gentiles. Paul told the Ephesians the same thing.

Ephesians 4:17-19, "This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness."

Those Gentiles who disobeyed God did not know Him. They were separated from Him because they chose to reject the truth (Romans 1:20-25).

4:6 *that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified.*

[We must remember the context. Verse 6 lies between the thoughts of sexual immorality and lust on the one side and uncleanness on the other. Notice the phrase, "in this matter."]

that no one should take advantage of - The phrase "take advantage of" comes from the Greek word (HUPERBAINŌ) meaning, "to overstep the proper limits, to go beyond the bounds." Paul has in mind the boundaries of what God has revealed concerning sexual conduct.

1 Corinthians 4:6, "Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to think **beyond what is written**, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other."

2 John 1:9 (ASV), "Whosoever **goeth onward** and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God: he that abideth in the teaching, the same hath both the Father and the Son."

and defraud his brother - A man who commits fornication has sexual relations

with a woman who is another man's wife or some man's unmarried daughter. In this way his sin is against his brother. The word "brother" is not limited in this context to a Christian brother. This brother is speaking about the brotherhood of mankind. He defrauds his brother by his sinful actions. "Defraud" (PLEONEKTEŌ) means, "to gain or take advantage of another, to overreach." God will punish all those who commit such a grievous sin.

in this matter - The matter under discussion is fornication, lust and uncleanness. No one can commit fornication without defrauding others. It is a sin that always wrongs and hurts our fellow man, not just ourselves. Therefore, it is a sin against others, our own body (1 Corinthians 6:18) and against GOD (Psalm 51:4).

because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified - The avenger is one who satisfies the required justice by punishing the wrongdoer. When Paul was discussing the authority of the governing official he said:

Romans 12:19, "Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'vengeance is mine, I will repay,' says the Lord."

In our verse, it is the Lord who will punish the fornicator. The day of judgment is in mind here, but it may not be the only thing in mind. Punishment for these sins can also come immediately in the form of the consequences these sins produce in one's life (STIs, STDs, HIV).

4:7 *For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness.*

For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness - Notice the word "holiness" in this verse. Paul has already used the term "sanctification" twice in this same context (verses 3 and 4). "Holiness" and "sanctification" are translations of the same Greek word (HAGIASMOS). The word means, "separated from sin and consecrated to God." Christians are set apart by God for service to Him in holiness (2 Corinthians 6:14-18).

2 Corinthians 7:1, "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

1 Peter 1:15-16, "But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, 'be holy, for I am holy.'"

4:8 *Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit.*

Therefore, he who rejects this does not reject man, but God - The word "rejects" comes from the Greek word (ATHETEŌ) meaning, "to treat null and void, to regard as of no account." Notice how the word is used in the Scriptures:

Luke 7:30, "But the Pharisees and lawyers **rejected** the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him."

Galatians 2:21, "I do not **set aside** the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain."

To disregard these teachings concerning spiritual purity is not to disregard man, but God. Jesus told the seventy who were sent on the limited commission:

Luke 10:16, "He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me."

who has also given us His Holy Spirit - Again, we see Paul making an indirect reference to inspiration.

1 Thessalonians 2:13, "For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe."

To disregard His teaching is to say that, God is one who can be disregarded. God gave the apostles His Holy Spirit so that they could know His will. The apostles then delivered the will of God to mankind. When men reject the teachings of the apostles they are actually rejecting God.

WHO IS AFFECTED BY FORNICATION?

- A. Fornication is a sin against one's own body (1 Corinthians 6:18).
- B. Fornication is a sin against one's fellow man (1 Thessalonians 4:6).
- C. Fornication is a sin against God (1 Thessalonians 4:8).
- D. Fornication is a sin against the Holy Spirit (1 Thessalonians 4:8).

Therefore, we should heed the instructions to possess our vessel (body) in

sanctification and honor (1 Thessalonians 4:4).

B. Walk in Love 4:9-10

4:9 *But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another;*

But concerning brotherly love - Two of the most obvious characteristics of Christians in the first century was:

- A. The purity and holiness which characterized their lives and
- B. The love they had one for another.

Paul had dealt with the first and now he turns to the second. The phrase "brotherly love" comes from the Greek word (PHILADELPHIA) meaning, "love of brothers or sisters, brotherly love or in the New Testament the love which Christians cherish for each other as brethren."

This Greek word for love is found six (6) times in the New Testament.

Romans 12:10, "Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another."

1 Thessalonians 4:9, "But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another."

Hebrews 13:1, "Let brotherly love continue."

1 Peter 1:22, "Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart."

2 Peter 1:5-7, "But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love."

you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another - Paul said there was no need to exhort them further

concerning this characteristic. The duty to love each other was not new to the New Testament. In the Old Testament this concept was taught as well.

Leviticus 19:18, "You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD."

However, this command is given a greater and deeper meaning in the New Testament. Christians by their example of brotherly love are demonstrating the love Jesus brought to the world.

4:10 *and indeed, you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more;*

and indeed, you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia - Here is another reason why Paul had no need to exhort them. He knew they understood the importance of brotherly love because they were doing it (2 Corinthians 8:1-6).

But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more - Mediocrity and status quo are great enemies of spiritual growth. No matter what we accomplish, we must never be satisfied with where we are (1 Corinthians 15:58). There is always room to improve. This is mentioned several times in this letter.

1 Thessalonians 3:12, "And may the Lord make you **increase and abound** in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you."

1 Thessalonians 4:1, "Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should **abound** more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God."

C. Walk in Diligence 4:11-12

4:11 *that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you,*

that you also aspire to lead a quiet life - The word "aspire" (PHILOTIMEOMAI) means, "to strive earnestly, make it one's aim."

"Quiet" comes from the Greek word (HĒSUCHAZŌ) meaning, "to rest, cease from labor." It is used to describe, "those who are not running hither and thither, but stay at home and mind their business."

2 Thessalonians 3:12, "Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness

and eat their own bread."

to mind your own business - It is true that there is a degree to which we are to be concerned about what others are doing (Philippians 2:4; Galatians 6:1-2). However, our attitude and purpose must be emphasized here. There is a sense in which we must "mind our own business."

1 Peter 4:15, "But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters."

What about judging others? Does this mean we should never be concerned with others?

Matthew 7:1, "Judge not, that you be not judged."

Matthew 7:5, "Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

John 7:24, "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment."

Certain types of judging are clearly condemned by the Scriptures.

- A. Hypocritical judging is condemned (Matthew 7:1-5).
- B. Judging by appearance is condemned (John 7:24; Philippians 3:2).
- C. Judging harshly is condemned (Matthew 5:7; Titus 3:2).
- D. Judging falsely is condemned (Proverbs 19:5).
- E. Self-Righteous judging is condemned (Luke 18:9-11).

Righteous judgment is **not** condemned, it is required (John 7:24). Righteous judgment is judging according to God's word. His word should always be our standard to determine right and wrong.

1 Corinthians 5:3, "For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed."

1 Corinthians 10:15, "I speak as to wise men; judge for yourselves what I say."

1 Thessalonians 5:14, "Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all."

and to work with your own hands - There seemed to be a misunderstanding among the Thessalonians concerning the second coming of Christ. Some of them may have been thinking His coming would happen in the next few days, weeks or months, so they should quit their jobs now to prepare. Passages in 2 Thessalonians strongly imply such an idea.

2 Thessalonians 3:10, "For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat."

It could be that with this spare time and lack of funds they had become busybodies in the lives of others and a burden needing financial support.

Good and decent labor is honorable. It should be remembered that work was assigned in the garden of Eden even before sin entered the world (Genesis 2:15).

as we commanded you - This was done when Paul was in their presence.

4:12 *that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing.*

that you may walk properly toward those who are outside - The Christian's walk includes his entire life. The word "properly" (EUSCHĒMONŌS) means, "in a seemly manner, decently, honestly."

Romans 13:13, "Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy."

1 Corinthians 14:40, "Let all things be done decently and in order."

There is a degree to which we should **not** be concerned with what the world thinks. Christians will always be persecuted by the world, but this should not discourage us from doing what is right (Luke 6:26; Galatians 1:10; 1 Peter 4:4).

There is also a sense in which we **must be** concerned with the thoughts of the world, so we don't bring reproach upon Christ and His church or hinder the gospel (1 Peter 4:14-16; 1 Corinthians 9:19-23). The example we set is important.

and that you may lack nothing - Instead of spending their time as idle busybodies, Paul commands them to labor diligently and conduct themselves honestly so as to earn their own living. If they were idle, they would quickly become dependent on others for support. Those in the world might claim that Christianity made men lazy and worthless. Therefore, Paul commands them to work diligently to be independent, self-respecting and respected.

D. Walk in Hope 4:13-18

4:13 *But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.*

But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren - Paul uses this expression often to open a new section of thought (Romans 1:13; 11:25; 1 Corinthians 10:1; 11:3; 12:1; 2 Corinthians 1:18; Philippians 1:12; Colossians 2:1). This was a signal for them to consider well the instructions he is about to give.

concerning those who have fallen asleep - "Asleep" comes from the Greek word (KOIMAŌ) meaning, "to put to sleep, to slumber; figuratively to be deceased, dead."

This verb (KOIMAŌ) is found 18 times in the New Testament.

In 4 of these it is used literally to refer to those who are asleep (Matthew 28:13; Luke 22:45; John 11:12; Acts 12:16).

In the other 14 uses (including this verse) it is used to refer to those who are dead. Paul is going to teach them concerning those who have died in Christ.

lest you sorrow as others who have no hope - The "sorrow" spoken of here is not the natural sorrow we experience when a loved one dies, but the sorrow of distress about the future. To feel sorrow when a loved one passes away is normal and right. We see this when Jesus sorrowed for the loss of Lazarus (John 11:35). However, there is a clear difference between the sorrow we feel when a Christians passes from this life compared to one who dies having rejected Christ with no hope of a joyous eternal life after the resurrection.

4:14 *For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him*

those who sleep in Jesus.

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again - Here Paul introduces an inconsistency in their reasoning. Why would they think that those Christians who had already died before the Lord's return were going to miss out? Christ died and was raised again. This is the core of the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). The message Paul had preached in Thessalonica centered on this fact.

Acts 17:3-4, "Explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.' And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas."

All of the preaching in the book of Acts centered on this fact (Acts 2:24, 32; 3:15, 26; 4:10; 5:30; 10:40; 13:23, 30). Jesus was, "declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead" (Romans 1:4).

even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus - There is a slight question that arises concerning the phrase "in Jesus". The literal translation is "through Jesus". This point does not really pose a problem in our understanding of what is being taught. Those who are under consideration here are the faithful - "at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, with all His saints" (1 Thessalonians 3:13). They shall return with Him.

When Christ returns, God will raise the dead, specifically, in this context, Paul was discussing the dead in Christ, those for whom the Thessalonians were concerned.

Romans 8:11, "But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you."

Since "the body without the spirit is dead" (James 2:26), Christ will bring the spirits of the faithful dead with Him at His second coming, having taken them from Paradise (Luke 16:19-31). Note the statement of Paul in 1 Thessalonians 3:13, "at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints."

1 Corinthians 15:50-53, "Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but

we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality."

In the "twinkling of an eye," the souls will be reunited with their own bodies, the bodies will be changed from corruptible to incorruptible and the glorified saints will meet the Lord in the air (1 Corinthians 15:35-49, especially 50-57). The Thessalonians did not need to worry about those Christians who slept in Jesus; they would be especially blessed! Note Paul's firm assertion, since "we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus."

Colossians 3:4, "When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory."

4:15 *For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep.*

For this we say to you by the word of the Lord - Here is yet another reference to the inspiration of Paul's message.

that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord - Does Paul's use of the word "we" in this verse teach that Christ was expected to come in Paul's lifetime? No, Paul was simply using the language of a man who did not know when Christ would return. However, he did know that it could be any moment and he did understand the need for preparation. Paul's desire was that all would be prepared.

will by no means precede those who are asleep - "Precede" comes from the Greek word (PHTHANŌ) meaning, "to come before, to get the start of." Paul's point is simple. Those who are alive when Christ returns (whenever that is) will have absolutely no advantage over those who sleep (who have died in the Lord).

[We are now going to notice one of the fullest descriptions concerning what will take place when Christ returns.]

4:16 *For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.*

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout - Christ in person will come down from Heaven in the same way in which He left (Acts 1:9-11). It will not be a substitute or an assistant but THE LORD HIMSELF!

Revelation 1:7, "Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen."

"Shout" comes from the Greek word (KELEUSMA) that is used to describe a shout of command: "a chariot driver to his horses, a shipmaster to the rowers, a commander to soldiers." This is a shout with a ring of authority, not of urgency. This is the very "shout" of our Lord.

John 5:28, "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will **hear His voice.**"

Psalms 50:3-4, "Our God shall come, and shall **not keep silent**; A fire shall devour before Him, and it shall be very tempestuous all around Him. He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that He may judge His people."

with the voice of an archangel - The Scriptures teach that when Jesus comes again, He will be "with His angels" (Matthew 16:27). Michael is called the archangel (Jude 1:9; Revelation 12:7). The Greek here (ARCHAGGELOS) is defined as, "chief of the angels."

and with the trumpet of God - In history trumpets were often used to signal the approach of important events, especially those of conquest or victory (Exodus 20:18; Numbers 10:1-9; Joshua 6:1-5; Judges 6:34-35; 1 Samuel 13:3). The coming of Christ will mark His final and complete victory over all His enemies (1 Corinthians 15:24-26). Therefore, it will be appropriate to have this momentous event heralded by the trumpet of God.

And the dead in Christ will rise first - Remember in verse 15 Paul said that those who remain "will by no means precede those who are asleep." We know this is not teaching a first and second resurrection because there will be only one literal resurrection. Everyone, good and bad, will be raised in the same hour.

John 5:28-29, "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation."

The Greek word for "first" in this verse (PRŌTON) means, "at the first, before anything else is done." Paul is saying that the dead in Christ will be raised before the living in Christ are changed and taken up to meet Christ.

4:17 *Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus, we shall always be with the Lord.*

Then we who are alive and remain - Notice, there will be men and women alive when Christ returns. Mankind is not going to annihilate itself as some are saying. After the dead are raised, then those who are alive and remain shall be changed (Philippians 3:20; 1 Corinthians 15:51-58).

shall be caught up together with them in the clouds - "Them" refers to the dead in Christ which have been raised. All the faithful will be caught up together in the clouds. God's word connects the coming of Christ to the clouds (Revelation 1:7; Matthew 24:30). The presence of Deity is often associated with clouds and smoke (Exodus 19:18; Isaiah 6:4; Psalm 18:11-12; Matthew 17:5).

to meet the Lord in the air - The literal reading is "to a meeting of the Lord in the air." The word "meet" is translated from the Greek word (APANTĒSIN) that is actually a noun. It is a meeting in the air. Notice that Christ will not set foot on the earth when He comes. The earth does not become the heavenly home for the faithful. The earth "will be burned up." [For additional information please see the appendices - WILL HEAVEN BE ON EARTH? and WILL THE EARTH REMAIN?]

2 Peter 3:10-11, "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness."

And thus, we shall always be with the Lord - The word "thus" refers to the condition described in the passage. The righteous being changed, given an incorruptible body and living in the constant presence of the Lord. This shows that no sin will ever be committed by the righteous after the resurrection. This wonderful truth is also taught in Revelation 22:11.

4:18 *Wherefore comfort one another with these words.*

Wherefore comfort one another with these words - "Comfort" is the same word (PARAKALEŌ) which is translated as "exhort" in other passages. The coming of Christ and the resurrection of the dead are both a comfort and a motivation. These events are a joy and an incentive for us to serve Christ faithfully. Paul continues his pattern. Once again, he closes this section just as we have seen him close the previous sections - with the coming of Christ.

Review

In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 Paul provided details concerning what will happen when Christ returns.

- A. Those who sleep will be brought with Him (verse 14)
 - B. The Lord Himself shall descend with a shout (verse 16)
 - C. The voice of the archangel (verse 16)
 - D. The trump of God (verse 16)
 - E. The dead in Christ shall rise first (this is contrasted with the saints that are still living, not the dead who are wicked) (verse 16)
 - F. We which are alive will be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air (verse 17)
 - G. And so, shall we ever be with Jesus (verse 17)
-

[As we enter our study of chapter 5 we see Paul continues his discussion of Christ's second coming. The events of His second coming are set forth to encourage the Thessalonians to stay steadfast in their faithfulness to the Lord.]

E. Walk in Light.....5:1-11

5:1 *But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you.*

But concerning the times and the seasons - "Times" comes from the Greek word (CHRONOS) meaning, "a space of time." "Seasons" comes from the Greek word (KAIROS) meaning, "a measure of time for what time brings, the state of the times, the things and events of time." The questions they had were, "How long until Christ returns?" and "What will the events of the day be when He comes?" It is not surprising that they would be curious about these things. However, they had clearly already been told what they could be told.

you have no need that I should write to you - Paul must have instructed them on

these matters while in their presence and they knew all that they were allowed to know concerning these things.

In Matthew chapter 24, Jesus speaks of the signs that will surround a certain event. The event He speaks of is the destruction of Jerusalem that occurred in A.D. 70. Jesus said in verse 34, "Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place." In verse 36 Jesus changes topics and begins to speak about His second coming. He says, "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only." There are some in the religious world today who fail to notice this dividing line in Matthew 24. In Luke 21:20-36, between verses 33 and 34 we see the same change of topics. [For additional information please see the appendices - UNDERSTANDING MATTHEW 24.]

5:2 *For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.*

For you yourselves know perfectly - Today, men want to know "perfectly" when Christ will come. And it seems the Thessalonians were no different. "Perfectly" comes from the Greek word (AKRIBŌS) meaning, "precisely." Paul tells them they already knew that nothing could be known precisely, concerning the time of His return.

that the day of the Lord - This expression is used frequently in the Old Testament. It is applied to numerous occasions when God's judgment is poured out on sinful men.

- A. In Amos 5:18-20 it refers to Israel's destruction by Assyria.
- B. In Zephaniah 1:14-18 it is used concerning Judah's and Jerusalem's destruction by Babylon.
- C. In Joel 2:1-3 it refers to the plague of locusts at hand.
- D. In 2 Peter 3:10, it is applied to the end of the world. It has reference to a day of impending doom upon wicked men.

so comes as a thief in the night - The comparison is to the sudden and unexpected arrival of a thief. Numerous passages compare the Lord's coming to that of a thief.

Matthew 24:43, "But know this, that if the master of the house had known

what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into."

2 Peter 3:10, "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up."

Revelation 3:3, "Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore, if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you."

Revelation 16:15, "Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame."

5:3 *For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.*

For when they say, "Peace and safety!" - Oh, how little men know about the true danger their soul is facing. Proclaiming "peace and safety" has always been the trick of the false teacher:

Ezekiel 13:10, "Because, indeed, because they have seduced My people, saying, 'Peace!' when there is no peace—and one builds a wall, and they plaster it with untempered mortar."

Jeremiah 6:14, "They have also healed the hurt of My people slightly, Saying, 'Peace, peace!' When there is no peace."

Micah 3:5, "Thus says the LORD concerning the prophets Who make my people stray; who chant 'Peace' while they chew with their teeth, but who prepare war against him who puts nothing into their mouths."

then sudden destruction comes upon them - "Destruction" comes from the Greek word (OLETHROS) meaning, "ruin, destroy, death." It does not mean, "annihilation" or "obliteration," but rather, total and complete ruin. In 2 Thessalonians 1:9 the same word is used and means separation from God.

2 Thessalonians 1:6-10, "Since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God,

and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting **destruction** from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed."

as labor pains upon a pregnant woman - There are passages in the Old Testament that use the illustration of a pregnant woman's "labor pains" to emphasize the suddenness and pain associated with an event (Isaiah 13:6-8; Jeremiah 4:31). The main emphasis here is probably the suddenness.

And they shall not escape - "Shall not" is a strong phrase. Literally it is, "They shall (most certainly) not escape" (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:15).

[As we began this chapter, Paul introduced the "day of the Lord". In this discussion, he spoke of the "sudden destruction" from which they (the wicked) shall not escape. As we begin with verse 4 Paul is now going to make a contrast. Where in earlier verses he spoke of the wicked, he will now speak of the "brethren" who must be children of light.]

5:4 *But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief.*

But you, brethren - The Greek here is very emphatic. The brethren are just as far removed from the wicked as they can be.

are not in darkness - "Darkness" represents evil and sin, just as "light" represents goodness and righteousness.

Romans 13:12, "The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore, let us cast off the works of **darkness**, and let us put on the armor of **light**."

2 Corinthians 6:14, "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has **light** with **darkness**?"

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

Ephesians 5:11, "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of **darkness**, but rather expose them."

Ephesians 6:12, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the **darkness**

of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places."

Colossians 1:13, "He has delivered us from the power of **darkness** and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love."

1 Peter 2:9, "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of **darkness** into His marvelous **light**."

1 John 1:5-7, "This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no **darkness** at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in **darkness**, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the **light** as He is in the **light**, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin."

so that this Day should overtake you as a thief - "That day" refers to the day of Christ's second coming (the day of judgment). Although these brethren did not know the day Christ would return, they **KNEW HE WOULD RETURN** and, therefore, if they were living properly, His coming would not overtake them.

5:5 *You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness.*

You are all sons of light and sons of the day - This is a beautiful description of the Christians character. Notice the connection made concerning "light" and "day." Christians do not live their lives in the darkness of sin. Children of God live their lives in the light of truth and righteousness. Christians have nothing to hide (Philippians 2:15).

We are not of the night nor of darkness - Those who follow after sin love to fulfill their evil desires in the night. It is often in the night that the wild sinful parties and evil actions take place. Perhaps, the world thinks the darkness will hide their sins from God. However, the Bible clearly teaches that their evil deeds will be brought into the light.

Luke 8:17, "For nothing is secret that will not be revealed, nor anything hidden that will not be known and come to light."

1 Corinthians 4:5, "Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God."

5:6 *Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober.*

Therefore, let us not sleep - The Greek word Paul uses in this verse (KATHEUDŌ) for "sleep" is different from the one he used in 1 Thessalonians 4:13 (KOIMAŌ) which was used to refer to death. The word for "sleep" in this verse (KATHEUDŌ) is used to describe moral indifference (Mark 13:36; Ephesians 5:14). Christians cannot be apathetic to the way they act or carry themselves. They cannot be indifferent about spiritual matters.

as others do - So many in our world today live unconcerned about these spiritual matters (1 Corinthians 16:13; Matthew 24:42; 25:13; Colossians 2:8).

but let us watch and be sober - The "watch" mentioned here is watching for the coming of the Lord (Philippians 3:20).

Matthew 24:42, "Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming."

Matthew 25:13, "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming."

Matthew 26:41, "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (cf. Mark 13:33-37).

Luke 21:36, "Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man."

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

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

Christians are not only watching for His coming, but they are longing for it (Titus 2:13). Christians should be constantly on the watch. They watch for:

- A. Satan's devices (2 Corinthians 2:11)
- B. Their own soul (1 Peter 2:11; 3 John 1:2)

C. Their brethren (Galatians 6:1-2)

The phrase "be sober" comes from the Greek word (NĒPHŌ) meaning, "to be sober, to be calm and collected in spirit, to be temperate, dispassionate, circumspect." These qualities are important as we prepare ourselves for Christ second coming. The word can also be used to condemn all kinds of excess (1 Peter 1:13; 5:8).

The Greek word (NĒPHŌ) literally means to be free from intoxicants (see next verse). God commands every Christian to be free from the influence of intoxicating beverages.

Drunkenness is often condemned in the Bible (Matthew 24:48-50; Luke 12:45-46; Ephesians 5:18; Galatians 5:19-21). It should be understood that drunkenness is a matter of degrees. A person does not instantly go from sober to drunk. If a person has one drink of alcohol they are one drink drunk.

In the book of Proverbs, we find several warnings concerning the dangers of alcohol.

Proverbs 20:1, "Wine is a mocker, Strong drink is a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise."

Proverbs 23:20-21, "Do not mix with winebibbers, Or with gluttonous eaters of meat; for the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, And drowsiness will clothe a man with rags."

Proverbs 23:29-35, "Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaints? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who linger long at the wine, those who go in search of mixed wine. Do not look on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it swirls around smoothly; at the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like a viper. Your eyes will see strange things, and your heart will utter perverse things. Yes, you will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea, or like one who lies at the top of the mast, saying: 'They have struck me, but I was not hurt; they have beaten me, but I did not feel it. When shall I awake, that I may seek another drink?'"

[For additional information please see the appendices - SCRIPTURES CONDEMNING THE USE OF ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES and ARGUMENTS USED FOR SOCIAL DRINKING.]

5:7 *For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night.*

For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night -
This verse describes the conduct of those who are unprepared. Paul has already spoken of those who are "of the darkness" or "of the night." However, he has also told the brethren that they are not "of the darkness" or "of the night," but, rather, they are "children of light, and "children of the day" (verse 5).

5:8 *But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation.*

But let us who are of the day - Paul now turns his attention to the conduct of Christians.

be sober - Once again (see notes on verse 6) "sober" comes from the Greek word (NĒPHŌ) meaning, "to be sober, temperate, circumspect." The Greek word (NĒPHŌ) can also be used to condemn all kinds of excess.

1 Peter 1:13-16, "Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be Holy, for I am Holy."

1 Peter 5:8-9, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world."

putting on the breastplate of faith and love - The phrase "putting on" is very interesting. Notice how this phrase is used in the Scriptures:

Galatians 3:26-27, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have **put on** Christ."

Colossians 3:12-13, "Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, **put on** tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do."

This describes for us the daily apparel of Christ's followers. Christians are

enrolled in the army of God as soldiers (2 Timothy 2:4), and need spiritual armor to be clothed properly for the battle against Satan. Paul often used the illustration of armor (2 Corinthians 6:7; 10:4; Ephesians 6:13-17). The "breastplate" was a piece of metal, covering the soldier's chest, thus protecting the most vital parts of his body. The Christian's breastplate is composed of "faith and love."

and as a helmet the hope of salvation - Notice in this verse that faith, love and hope are linked together (1 Thessalonians 1:3; 1 Corinthians 13:13). Also notice that hope is tied to salvation. This must have reference to the culmination of salvation. That is a faithful Christian soldier standing in the very presence of God when the smoke of battle has finally cleared.

5:9 *For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,*

For God did not appoint us to wrath - The "us" in this verse refers to the "children of light" and "children of the day." Those who are watchful, sober, vigilant and prepared. It is not referring to specific individuals, but rather, a specific type of individual. This type of individual is not of darkness and of the night, and unprepared.

Notice the word "appoint." The Bible does NOT teach that God has arbitrarily chosen some specific individuals to be lost and some to be saved. There are not those who have been appointed to life or death regardless of what they do.

God's word teaches that we are free moral agents with the ability to accept or reject God's commandments, thus determining whether we will ultimately be saved or lost. God has determined that He will save those who obey His plan of salvation (Romans 1:16).

The call to salvation is the gospel which has gone out to all (2 Thessalonians 2:14). Those who obey it are appointed to eternal life, and those who reject the gospel and its message of salvation are appointed to be damned eternally. God will judge all on that final day based on what they have done. The righteous will have life. The wicked will face the second death. Each person determines what his/her destiny will be (Romans 2:3-11).

Notice the word "wrath." This of course speaks of the "wrath" of God the Father. There are many individuals today who no longer think about God's wrath. Probably because there are many preachers today who no longer preach about God's wrath. We must never doubt God's wrath toward the

wicked.

Psalms 38:1, "O LORD, do not rebuke me in Your wrath, nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure!"

Psalms 90:11, "Who knows the power of Your anger? For as the fear of You, so is Your wrath."

Matthew 3:7, "But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

Romans 1:18, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness."

Romans 11:22, "Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off."

Ephesians 5:6, "Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience."

But to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ - All of mankind desperately needs salvation (Luke 19:10; Romans 3:10, 23; 6:23; 1 John 1:8-10), and salvation only comes, "through our Lord Jesus Christ" (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Corinthians 3:11; 2 Timothy 2:10). These men and women of Thessalonica had obeyed the gospel and were striving to remain faithful so they would be prepared for Christ's return. They are the ones who were appointed to salvation, not to wrath!

5:10 *who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.*

who died for us - The Lord Jesus Christ gave His life for all men (John 3:16; Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; 1 Timothy 1:15).

Philippians 2:8, "And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross."

Romans 6:3-4, "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized

into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore, we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."

Galatians 2:20-21, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain."

that - There was a purpose or a reason for Christ's sacrifice.

whether we wake or sleep - Whether we are alive when He returns or we are dead and buried the results are the same.

we should live together with Him - Paul assures the Thessalonians that the purpose of Christ's sacrifice was to secure for His people a life which no death could interrupt or destroy.

John 11:25-26, "Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?'"

Notice the phrase. "together with Him." The emphasis here is on fellowship.

2 John 1:9, "Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son."

It will make no difference to the Lord whether we have already died or remain alive when He returns (Philippians 3:10).

5:11 *Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.*

Therefore comfort each other - Remember 1 Thessalonians 4:18. This section of the epistle which deals with the second coming of Christ is now ended and Paul exhorts them to comfort themselves with these truths. The verb tense Paul uses for "comfort" here indicates continuous action. It is not a one-time only comforting, it must be ongoing.

and edify one another - "Edify" means to build each other up.

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

Romans 15:2, "Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification."

Ephesians 4:29, "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers."

just as you also are doing - Paul's command to "comfort" and "edify" was not to, begin doing these things, but to continue doing them. He did not want them to lose focus and grow discouraged or apathetic in their faith.

F. Walk in Obedience 5:12-22

5:12 *And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you,*

And we urge you, brethren - The tone of this phrase is a respectful request from an apostle (Romans 12:1). It is a request that should be obeyed.

to recognize those - To "recognize" does not mean you should simply know who they are. The Greek word (EIDŌ) translated as "recognize" means, "to know the worth of, to appreciate the value of" these individuals. It conveys the idea of, "having regard to, to cherish, pay attention to those mentioned."

who labor among you - "Labor among you" is the first of three phrases describing the elders. [For additional information please see the appendices - THE ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST.]

- A. When we consider the responsibilities of elders, it should help us to recognize that we are dealing with those who do great labor and work for the Lord's church (1 Timothy 3:1-7).
- B. A second point is that the elders labor "among" the brethren. 1 Peter 5:1 says, "The elders **who are among you** I exhort." Elders are only over one congregation. An eldership cannot oversee several congregations, even if the congregations are in the same city or area. Those who are chosen to serve as elders are "among you."

and are over you in the Lord - The second descriptive phrase in this verse indicating that this refers to the elders is, "over you in the Lord." The elders are described as "bishops" that means overseers (1 Timothy 3:1).

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

Hebrews 13:17, "Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you."

Christians must understand that God's line of authority in the church includes men who serve in the position of overseers (elders). Therefore, the Bible's principles of authority, and subjection to authority apply.

and admonish you - The third descriptive phrase in this verse indicating that this refers to the elders is, "admonish you." "Admonish" comes from the Greek word (NOUTHETEŌ) meaning, "warn, exhort, place in one's mind." How are the elders to "admonish?" By making sure that God's word is taught in the classes and from the pulpit (Acts 20:28). The elders are to be teachers (1 Timothy 3:2), but others, like preachers and Bible class teachers, can also be involved in the teaching. However, it is the responsibility of the elders to oversee that the things being taught are true to the Scriptures. The principle of the watchman also applies here (Ezekiel 3:17-19; 33:6-7).

5:13 *and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves.*

and to esteem them very highly in love - Here we find the responsibility of the congregation to "esteem" the elders "very highly in love." The members should recognize the work and responsibility of the elders and appreciate those who fill this role. "Love" is stated as the motivation for the congregation's "esteem" for these men. We should have no doubts concerning the critical need to select those men to oversee the congregation who are fully qualified according to the standards of God's word (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). How many congregations have failed because they did not select men who were biblically qualified to serve as elders?

for their work's sake - The esteem and value given to these men resides in the fact that these men are bringing glory to God by laboring in this great "work."

Be at peace among yourselves - The elders can serve "with joy and not with grief" when the congregation is at peace (Hebrews 13:17). However, if there is fighting and chaos among the members it will cause heartache and sorrow for the elders. The congregation can support their elders by being at peace.

5:14 *Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all.*

Now we exhort you, brethren - In 1 Thessalonians 5:12 Paul notes the responsibility of the elders to admonish the congregation. In this verse, Paul is encouraging all of the brethren to watch for the spiritual condition of their brethren. The elders are responsible for the congregation, but that does not mean that fellow Christians have no responsibility in this matter.

warn those who are unruly - "Warn" comes from the Greek word (NOUTHETEŌ) meaning, "to put in mind, to caution or reprove gently, admonish." "Unruly" comes from the Greek word (ATAKTOUS) meaning, "disorderly, out of ranks, deviating from the prescribed order or rule."

This word was used as a military term to describe a "soldier who is out of step, or out of rank, or the army moving in disarray." It is one who is out of place or out of order. This describes a soldier who does not perform his duty. When a Christian sees a brother or sister in such a condition a warning is required.

Galatians 6:1-2, "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."

James 5:19-20, "Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins."

1 Peter 4:8, "And above all things have fervent love for one another, for 'love will cover a multitude of sins.'"

comfort the fainthearted - "Comfort" comes the Greek word (PARAMUTHEOMAI) meaning, "to speak to by way of admonition, or to calm, console and encourage." The word "fainthearted" is used to describe one who lacks courage - whether naturally or because of the circumstances (Hebrews 12:12-13). Sometimes Christians need to be encouraged.

uphold the weak - The word "uphold" (ANTECHOMAI) means, "to care for, hold to, support." This refers to those who are spiritually weak or even those who are weak in their conscience.

A. Spiritually weak

1 Thessalonians 3:2, "And sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith."

1 Thessalonians 3:10, "Night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith?"

Romans 15:1 (KJV), "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves."

B. Weak in conscience

1 Corinthians 8:12, "But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ."

be patient with all - "Patient" comes from the Greek word (MAKROTHUMEO) meaning, "to persevere patiently and bravely in enduring misfortunes and troubles." This word is the opposite of being exasperated and short-tempered (1 Corinthians 13:4; 2 Thessalonians 3:5; 1 Timothy 6:11).

5:15 *See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.*

See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone - The Thessalonians were facing many persecutions. Paul gives them this warning because they could be tempted to strike back at their tormenters.

Proverbs 20:22, "Do not say, 'I will recompense evil'; wait for the LORD, and He will save you."

Romans 12:17-19, "Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'vengeance is mine, I will repay,' says the Lord."

1 Peter 3:8-9, "Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for

one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing."

Leon Morris wrote, "Faced with opposition from both Jews and Gentiles, and with some differences within the church itself, this must have been exceedingly difficult for the Thessalonians, yet Paul does not hesitate to put the matter plainly to them. Christian teaching is not meant to be applied only when circumstances are easy. Christianity is a robust faith, empowered with a divine dynamic, and is to be lived out even under the most trying circumstances" (*The Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians*, pg. 101).

but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all - The same example of love, forbearance, kindness, returning good for evil, that was seen so clearly in Jesus, must also be seen in the life of Christians.

Matthew 7:12, "Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets."

Acts 10:34, "Then Peter opened his mouth and said: 'In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality.'"

Galatians 6:10, "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith."

5:16 *Rejoice always,*

Rejoice always - Christians should be people of joy (Philippians 4:4). Jesus often said, "Be of good cheer" (Matthew 9:2, 22; 14:27; Mark 6:50; 10:49; Luke 8:48; John 16:33). In what should the Christian rejoice?

Romans 5:1-2, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and **rejoice in hope of the glory of God.**"

1 Corinthians 13:4-6, "Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but **rejoices in the truth.**"

5:17 *pray without ceasing,*

pray without ceasing - Paul is not teaching that Christians must spend every minute of their lives in prayer. If that were the case it would leave them no time for other required duties such as evangelizing the lost. Paul is saying that Christians should never stop being disciples of prayer.

Mark 1:35, "Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed."

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

Philippians 4:6, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God."

1 John 5:14, "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us."

James 5:13, "Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms."

James 5:16, "Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much."

5:18 *in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*

in everything give thanks - Christians are people of thanksgiving (Philippians 4:6; Ephesians 5:20). Notice the phrase, "in everything." Is it possible to be thankful even when things go bad? We should look to the example of Jesus. When the people of certain cities (Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum) rejected Him, Jesus prayed, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight" (Matthew 11:25-26). The thankfulness of Jesus arose out of His recognition of the divine sovereignty and providence of the Father. Christians can always be thankful when they recognize and accept God's will.

for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you - To do the will of God is to yield ourselves to obeying His commands. This phrase "the will of God" could be said of all three directives - rejoice, pray and give thanks.

5:19 *Do not quench the Spirit.*

Do not quench the Spirit - "Quench" comes from the Greek word (SBENNUMI) meaning, "to suppress, stifle." The Holy Spirit inspired the writers of the New Testament concerning the words they wrote (John 16:13; 2 Peter 1:21). Therefore, to "quench" the Spirit would be to quench, suppress or stifle the word of God; or the influence the word of God can have on one's heart.

Quenching the Spirit can also refer to quenching the miraculous gifts of the Spirit that occurred in the first century church. The word's Paul preached were confirmed by the miraculous works of the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:11; 14:10; 16:18; 19:11-12; 20:10-12; 28:5, 8).

Mark 16:20, "And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen."

The Thessalonians had seen the miraculous abilities given to Christians, which only came through the laying on of the apostles' hands.

Acts 8:18-19, "And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, 'Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit.'"

It is important to note that since the ability to impart miraculous gifts was only given to the apostles, it follows that after the apostles died no one ever received these miraculous gifts again. Therefore, when the last apostle died and the last person they laid their hands on died, there was no one on earth who could perform miracles.

Miracles came to an end at the beginning of the second century. They served their purposes and were taken away as promised.

1 Corinthians 13:8-10, "Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away."

We have the written word of God in its fullness. Paul said that it is all sufficient for our needs (2 Timothy 3:16-17). We need to study it,

apply it and live by it. It alone will judge us in the last day (John 12:48).

5:20 *Do not despise prophecies.*

Do not despise prophecies - A prophet was one who God would use to reveal His word to others. Prophecy involved teaching (1 Corinthians 14:31, Ephesians 4:11-13) and at times the telling of future events (Acts 11:27-28; 21:10-11). A prophet was only allowed to speak what God told him to speak (Numbers 22:18-20, 38; 23:12).

We know there are no prophets today, because the Bible makes it clear that prophecies would come to an end once the revealed will of God was complete (1 Corinthians 13:8-10). God has completed His revelation by providing all the instruction we need, in written form, in the Bible (2 Peter 1:3; 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

There are no prophets today because we do not need prophets. We have the complete revealed word of God. If someone claims to be a prophet today they are contradicting God's word. They are a false prophet.

We must remember that the Thessalonians were living in a time of miraculous revelation. Let us take a moment to consider the miraculous gifts of the first century.

A. What was the purpose of the miraculous gifts?

Mark 16:20, "And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and **confirming the word** through the accompanying signs. Amen."

Hebrews 2:4, "God also **bearing witness** both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?"

B. What were the miraculous gifts?

1 Corinthians 12:7-11, "But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of **wisdom** through the Spirit, to another the word of **knowledge** through the same Spirit, to another **faith** by the same Spirit, to another **gifts of healings** by the same Spirit, to another the **working of miracles**, to another **prophecy**,

to another **discerning of spirits**, to another different kinds of **tongues**, to another the **interpretation of tongues**. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills."

C. When did the miraculous gifts cease?

1 Corinthians 13:8-10, "Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away."

The Holy Spirit was the one who empowered those who prophesied for the purpose of giving God's revelation to man. To despise prophecies, would be to quench the work of the Spirit, and thus remove one's self from the life-giving revelation of God (Ephesians 4:30). Today, if we turn our back on the Spirit's work (the inspired word of God), we can, in a sense, quench the Spirit and despise prophecies. [For additional information please see the appendices - MIRACLES HAVE CEASED.]

5:21 *Test all things; hold fast what is good.*

Test all things - "Test" comes from the Greek word (DOKIMAZŌ) meaning, "to test, examine, prove, scrutinize, to see whether a thing be genuine or not." Paul is warning the Thessalonians to not accept what someone is preaching or teaching until it is proven to be true by the inspired word.

1 John 4:1-2, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but **test the spirits**, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God."

Philippians 1:9-10, "And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all **discernment**, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ."

Hebrews 5:12-14, "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a

babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to **discern both good and evil.**"

hold fast what is good - The phrase "hold fast" comes from the Greek word (KATECHŌ) meaning, "to keep secure, keep firm possession of, to possess." Once the Thessalonians have proved that the teaching is from God they are to accept it and hold fast to it.

Proverbs 23:23, "Buy the truth, and do not sell it, also wisdom and instruction and understanding."

Romans 12:9, "Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good."

The disciples should hold on to the truth because it is of the greatest value.

John 8:31-32, "Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, 'If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.'"

5:22 *Abstain from every form of evil.*

Abstain from every form of evil - The word translated "abstain" literally means "run in the other direction." It is true that if something even appears to be evil it should be avoided (Romans 14:16), but this verse is actually saying that we should abstain from every form of evil. Each and every time evil appears, we should abstain from it. We should hate evil in every form it takes (Amos 5:15; Psalm 97:10).

Romans 12:9, "Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good."

Some people are willing and even eager to give up certain evil practices, but insist on keeping others thinking those sins are not as bad. However, this verse makes it clear that we must turn our backs on every kind (form) of evil.

Conclusion 5:23-28

5:23 *Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Now may the God of peace Himself - God the Father is the God of peace. We

were separated and alienated from Him because of our sins, but He provided His Son to pay the price for our sins. Therefore, we can have peace with our God through the gift of the precious blood of His Son.

Colossians 1:19-20, "For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross."

Ephesians 2:13-16, "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity."

sanctify you completely - The Thessalonians were being completely sanctified. The word "sanctify" means, "to be set apart and devoted to the service of God." This is accomplished by obedience to the word of God.

John 17:17, "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth."

Acts 20:32, "So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified."

and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless - Paul has already said that he wanted them to be sanctified wholly, totally and completely. It is unlikely that Paul's main point is the distinction between the soul and spirit. However, he does indirectly show that there is a distinction between the two. We also see this in the book of Hebrews.

Hebrews 4:12, "For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

The challenge is that often the "soul" and "spirit" are used interchangeably in Scriptures. Very simply put, the "spirit" is what links us to God the Father and separates us from the rest of creation. Our minds, personalities, emotions, etc. dwell here. The

"soul" on the other hand is that which animates our bodies. Again, this is not a hard and fast rule.

What does being "preserved blameless" mean? Paul's desire for the Thessalonians is that their entire being is "preserved blameless." That means in obedience to the truth of God that has sanctified them, and that their "blameless" state would continue until Christ comes again. Notice the verse says "blameless" and not sinless. We can never be sinless (Romans 3:23; 1 John 1:6-10), but we can be "blameless" if we do those things God requires us to do to receive forgiveness.

at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ - It should be noted that every chapter of this epistle has ended with the same thought - the coming of the Lord.

5:24 *He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.*

He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it - Those things that Paul desires for the Thessalonians will occur, because God has promised, and He is faithful. They had been called by the gospel (2 Thessalonians 2:14), and the rewards of the gospel will be theirs because God has promised it. God will make good all of the promises He has made to man. He has promised to both reward the faithful, and punish the disobedient. God has always been faithful, and He will always be faithful (1 Corinthians 1:9; Titus 1:2).

5:25 *Brethren, pray for us.*

Brethren, pray for us - Just as Paul was a man of prayer, he desired the prayers of others (Philippians 4:6; 1 Timothy 2:1-2, 5-7). Even an apostle needed the prayers of his brethren for encouragement, and that he would be able to stand steadfast in the truth, and to be bold in his teaching "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27).

It is also interesting to consider that an apostle felt the need for the prayers of his brethren, even though he was an inspired man. What do we learn from this? This shows that inspiration did not protect the one inspired against doing wrong. Inspiration only guaranteed that the one inspired would not make any mistakes in his teaching. An inspired man could still do something wrong in his personal life, even though he had taught God's word correctly (1 Corinthians 9:27; Galatians 2:11-12).

5:26 *Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss.*

Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss - In the culture of the day, a kiss was a part of the standard greeting. This was the eastern manner of greeting, just as the hand-shake is the manner of greeting in the west.

Paul's command concerning a "holy kiss" was a clear restriction against impure motives during the greeting. If people greet one another with a kiss it must be a **holy** kiss. "Holy" means "pure, sanctified and godly." Such greetings could obviously provide an opportunity for lust or impure thoughts. Paul's command concerning the "holy kiss" was given to regulate a practice already in existence, rather than establishing a new law demanding that all Christian must kiss when they greet each other (see Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20 and 2 Corinthians 13:12).

5:27 *I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read to all the holy brethren.*

I charge you - This term (HORKIZŌ) is closely linked to the commands one would find in the military. It describes one of higher rank giving to one of lower rank a command with the full expectation that it would be obeyed.

by the Lord - This magnifies the authority of the command (2 Timothy 4:1-2).

That this epistle be read to all the holy brethren - The phrase "all the holy brethren" refers to all the Christians. Everyone was to hear what Paul had to say on these matters. Notice that God's word is for all! There is no clergy-laity system in the Lord's church. Paul did not say to read this to the leaders only and then they could decide what to teach the congregation.

5:28 *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.*

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you - Paul wishes "grace" to these brethren.

Grace literally means "unmerited favor." Grace is unearned but not unconditional. It means blessings from God that the sinner does not deserve or merit. Salvation is thus conceived as something given to man, not as a matter of debt, but as an undeserved gift. In short, man cannot achieve heaven by works of merit, but works of obedience are required (Ephesians 2:8-9; James 2:20-26; Titus 2:11-14). [For additional information please see the appendices - FAITH AND WORKS]

Amen - "Amen" literally means "so be it." The word "Amen" started as a Hebrew word (Numbers 5:22), that was transliterated into Greek and then eventually into English. The word comes from a Hebrew root word that means "to build up or

support; to be firm or faithful, to trust or believe; to be true or certain." It is also used as an adverb at the beginning of a speech to mean "surely, of a truth, truly" (Matthew 5:18; Mark 3:28; John 3:3). At the conclusion of a sentence it is used to mean "so it is, so be it, may it be fulfilled." When the word is used as an adjective it means "firm or true." Some dictionaries claim that when "Amen" is used at the end of a prayer it means approval of what is being said. However, our approval does not make it true. It is more correct to think of it as "this is true, or may it come to pass, or may it be fulfilled."

FINIS

APPENDICES.....

FAITH AND WORKS

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FAITH AND WORKS

- I. Can we be saved by our own works?
 - A. Ephesians 2:8-9 - "For by grace you have been saved through faith and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works lest anyone should boast."
 - B. 2 Timothy 1:8-9 - "Saved...not according to our works but according to His own purpose."
 - C. Romans 11:6 - "And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace, otherwise work is no longer work."

- II. In Romans 4:1-25 Paul is correcting a false belief that man could be saved by his own "perfect works." If a man could do a "perfect work" (one's life being that work — completely void of sin), then there would be no need for God's grace.

Paul argues that God would then be indebted to that person due to their perfect life (4:4). Abraham's righteousness was "by faith," not his own "perfect work," or God would have owed Abraham a debt, and no grace would have been necessary.

But we see that grace AND faith were needed to justify him.

- III. We have seen that we are justified by faith as a result of God's grace (unmerited favor). BUT is it necessary to "obey God in order to receive this grace?"
 - A. 1 Samuel 15:22 - "Then Samuel said: Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams."
 - B. Ecclesiastes 12:13 - "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man."
 - C. John 14:15 - "If you love Me, keep my commandments."
 - D. Romans 6:17-18 - "But God be thanked that though you were the servants of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, ye became slaves of righteousness."

It is, therefore, necessary to obey God in order to receive His grace, and

to become servants of righteousness!

- IV. Why are we God's servants; what is our purpose?
- A. Ephesians 2:10 - "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, [What kind of works? Our own? No!] which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."
 - B. Notice that these are not our own works, but the works that God Himself prepared for us to do.
 - C. Compare Ephesians 2:8-9; 2 Timothy 1:8-9; Romans 11:6; 4:4-5.
- V. What are these works which these verses refer to?
- A. 1 Thessalonians 1:3 - "Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love..."
 - B. Hebrews 6:10 - "For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love."
 - 1. God desires all to do the same thing (v. 11).
 - 2. Be not slothful (v. 12).
 - C. Galatians 5:6 - "For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love."
 - D. Romans 16:26 - "But now has been made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures has been made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith."
- We can see by these passages that faith is supposed to do something.
- VI. Can we receive the grace of God in vain?
- A. 2 Corinthians 6:1 - "We then as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain."
 - B. In 1 Corinthians 15:10, Paul said he had not received the grace of God in vain — "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me."

- C. It should be noted here that the grace of God caused Paul to labor (work), and if he would not have worked, the grace would have been in vain!
 - D. Through faith we are justified by works:
 - 1. Done in obedience to God's commandments,
 - 2. Which are a result of His grace.
- VII. Other examples of faith which led to works which led to perfect faith.
- A. Noah was led by faith to build an ark (Hebrews 11:7).
 - 1. He and his family would not have been saved by faith alone.
 - 2. Without works they, as well as their faith, would have been dead.
 - B. The bronze serpent (Numbers 21:4-9).
 - 1. Israel's belief in what God said led them to obey and to look upon the serpent.
 - 2. They could have believed all day long, but without obeying and looking upon the serpent they were without hope.
 - C. The wall of Jericho (Joshua 6:1-21).
 - 1. God's promise was not put into action until some works were done.
 - 2. The people had to walk around the city for seven days until God would work His works.
 - 3. Until that last command was obeyed God would not cause the walls to fall.
 - D. Naaman the leper (2 Kings 5:1-19).
 - 1. A work of faith led Naaman to obey the prophet by doing something.
 - 2. He evidently believed he would be healed or he would not have sought the prophet in the first place — but that was not enough!

3. He scoffed at a simple command to go and dip in the Jordan river BUT until that command was obeyed the man continued to be a leper!
4. It is amazing how people today scoff at a simple command like baptism in the same way.
5. Work is a result of God's commands through faith. Nothing more and nothing less is acceptable to God.

CONCLUSION

We are not saved by works of our own, but we are saved by a working obedient faith that submits to God's commands to gain access to the blood of Christ.

- A. Faith in itself is dead.
 1. We must do the will of God, not just be hearers only (Matthew 7:21-23; 25:35-40).
 2. God has shown time and time again that He will not carry out a promise until conditions are met.
 3. That condition is obedience to His word which, when obeyed, are works which He has prepared for us to walk in.
- B. Let us not accept the grace of God in vain by NOT doing the works which He commanded.
 1. In Revelation 2:10 John writes, "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life."
 2. This was not a dead faith but was one of action and works, and became their work of faith and labor of love.

Through faith we are justified by works done in obedience to God's commands, through which His grace is given!

THE PATTERN OF PRAYER

There is a clear pattern set forth in the Scriptures for prayer. We are to pray to God the Father, through Jesus Christ with the assistance of the Holy Spirit. When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray He said, "When you pray, say: 'Our Father in heaven'" (Luke 11:1-2). It is clear that our prayers are to be directed toward God the Father through Christ our mediator (John 14:13-14; 15:16; Hebrews 7:25; Romans 8:34; 1 John 2:1; 1 Timothy 2:5). Christians are blessed to have direct access to the Father through Jesus Christ (Hebrews 10:19; 4:16; John 16:20-23).

Those who want to pray to Jesus are actually seeking to pray to Jesus alone, ignoring the clearly defined roles of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in our prayers. Is it Scriptural to just pray to Jesus? The answer is obviously, "No." There is no way to separate (or isolate) the Son from the Father and the Holy Spirit (John 17:21). We have no authority to cut God the Father and the Holy Spirit out of our prayers.

The Bible teaches that with the help of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:26) we pray "to" (or more accurately "through") Jesus and then He delivers our prayers as our mediator (1 Timothy 2:5) to the Father. This is the only biblical process or pattern taught for our prayers.

Those who say, "I want to just pray to Jesus," have a fundamental misunderstanding of the Godhead.

Any so-called "example" they can point to of someone praying to Jesus we could simply ask, "Did God the Father have a part in that prayer?" and "Did the Holy Spirit have a part in that prayer?" If they say, "No" they have denied the Godhead. If they say, "Yes" we simply ask them to explain, "What part did the Father and Holy Spirit have in that prayer?" Obviously, they are not following the pattern for prayer set forth in the Scriptures. We are to pray to God the Father, through Jesus Christ with the assistance of the Holy Spirit.

They want to pray directly to Jesus without involving the Father and the Holy Spirit. But, knowing what we know about the Godhead, how would that even work? We know all three are involved in our prayers, and the Bible teaches us **how** they are involved. Denying the clear pattern for prayer is just as bad as denying the clear pattern for the church, worship or obeying the gospel. Let us stay true to the pattern set forth in God's word!

UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION

The second doctrine of Calvinism, Unconditional Election, is based on the first, Total Hereditary Depravity. Calvinists say that since mankind is totally depraved and cannot respond in faithful obedience to the invitation of Jesus -- people cannot choose for themselves to obey or disobey God -- then God had to choose for mankind. Unconditional Election states that God chose some to obey and some to disobey.

Unconditional Election is the belief that God, with no regard to the will of man, made an eternal choice of certain persons unto eternal life and some to eternal damnation and that number is so fixed that it cannot be changed.

Rooted in Calvin's view of the sovereignty of God, Unconditional Election is also referred to as the doctrine of predestination.

This article will examine the doctrine of Unconditional Election by defining predestination; analyzing the misused texts used to support it; and citing some Scriptural objections to it.

PREDESTINATION DEFINED

"The doctrine that the salvation or damnation of individuals has been foreordained by God; the determination beforehand of future events." (Webster's Dictionary, 1977 edition, p.289)

To understand predestination, one must understand the Greek word **proorizo**. This Greek word is translated three different ways in the King James Version of the Bible: "predestinated," "ordained," "determined before." It is translated "foreordained" in every occurrence in the American Standard Version of the Bible. It means, "To limit or mark out beforehand; to design definitely beforehand, ordain beforehand, predestine." (The Analytical Greek Lexicon, p, 345) It "...denotes to mark out beforehand, to determine before, foreordain." (Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, p. 307) A.T. Robertson says it means, "To define or decide beforehand." (Word Pictures in the New Testament, p. 517)

A summary from Scripture reveals that predestination refers to Jehovah's creation of man and His determination beforehand of the conditions through which man might live with Him eternally. It concerns the Father's predetermination that all people who meet His conditions would live eternally in heaven and all who refuse submission to those conditions would suffer eternal damnation.

TEXTS MISUSED TO SUPPORT UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION

Acts 4:28. Calvinists use this text to say that God purposed all things before the foundation of the world. One must ask, "What was 'determined before?'" The answer is the death of Jesus. Jesus' death had been prophesied as part of God's plan to save mankind. (Luke 22:21, 22; Acts 2:22, 23) The Jews did

not realize that they were fulfilling God's plan. God did not force them to kill His Son. They were accountable for their actions.

Acts 13:48. The argument here is that God, before the foundation of the world, appointed only certain individuals to life. This verse does not state that those who were ordained to eternal life were given it apart from their own will. Belief is made a condition to eternal life. Thus, as many as had been appointed put on Christ, or met the conditions. Reversing the sentence causes the true thought to be clearer: Those who believed became part of those who had been appointed to eternal life.

Romans 8:28-30. The argument from this passage is that God, before the foundation of the world, predestinated certain individuals to salvation. Under consideration in this passage are "those who love God" (v. 28), not just a few who God loves and "those who are called according to His purpose." (v. 28) One is not called by a still small voice or by a direct operation of the Holy Spirit but by the gospel. (2 Thessalonians 2:14) Those who hear, believe, and respond in obedience are referred to as being "called." (Galatians 1:6; Hebrews 9:15; 1 Peter 2:9)

This passage is a statement of God's entire purpose and its succession of events. God determined to send mankind a Savior to die for all who would come to Him. Then He foreordained it all before the events actually took place. In that sense, God predestinated our salvation. God foreordained that anyone who accepted His call would be conformed to the image of His Son. It is the confirmation that is predestined, not the acceptance. Those who accepted the gospel call were then justified and glorified.

1 Corinthians 2:7. The argument from this passage is the predestination of God elected certain individuals to salvation. The context shows clearly that it is God's plan of redemption that was ordained (predetermined) before the ages. The wisdom and power of God in reference to salvation are revealed in the gospel (Romans 1:16). In times past, it had been a mystery, i.e., not fully revealed. Even the prophets did not understand it. (Note vv. 8-10) Now it is revealed as the wisdom of God (Ephesians 3:3,4).

Ephesians 1:4, 5, 11. The argument is that certain individuals are predestinated and others are not and that if one was not one of those predestinated, he is eternally damned and there is nothing he can do about it. In reality, it is a particular **group** or **class** of people that God chose before He made the world. It is those who are "in Him," i.e., those in Christ.

- a. Verse 4a. The apostle Paul and the others were part of that class

which God chose before the foundation of the world. Those "in Him" (this class or group) are the predestinated ones.

- b. Verse 4b. The kind of life these should live is predestinated.
- c. Verse 5. The adoption was predestinated.
- d. Verse 11. One is an heir of eternal life because he is a part of that predestinated group.

A school teacher, on the first day of class, told his students that some would pass and some would fail the course they were about to take. He then described the things necessary for one to be of those who would pass. At the end of the school year, just as the teacher had said, some passed and some failed. Since the teacher predestinated the outcome before he began, did it mean that he caused each individual to either pass or fail and that there was nothing they could do about it? No. Likewise, God predestinated before He made the world that He would choose those "in Christ" and revealed those things necessary for one to be in Him. It is therefore up to each individual to do those things necessary to be found in Christ and have salvation.

SCRIPTURAL OBJECTIONS TO UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION

God has given mankind freedom of choice. He gave Adam and Eve the freedom of choice (Genesis 2:16-17). Their choice was plain -- obey and live or disobey and die. Their choice was made through and by their own will having been influenced by Satan. Who is willing to say that since God foreknew the outcome that He forced or ordained Adam and Eve to sin (James 1:13-14)? Mankind today still has freedom of choice (Joshua 24:15). People can choose today whether or not they will serve God (Revelation 22:17). Both the Psalmist (Psa. 119:30) and Mary, the sister of Martha (Luke 10:42), are examples of this principle.

God is impartial -- no respecter of persons (2 Chronicles 19:7; Acts 10:34-35; Romans 2:11; 1 Peter 1:17). If Unconditional Election is true then God has indiscriminately condemned those who will be eternally damned while favoring those who are of His elect. Calvinists who insist that since God is sovereign and can arbitrarily choose who to save do not realize that if God were to do that He would violate His own nature for He is also just (Psalm 89:14). God has not exempted anyone from the opportunity to obtain eternal life (1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9).

Salvation is not wholly dependent on God. The origin of salvation is utterly dependent on Him (Ephesians 2:4-10). The reception of salvation is dependent on man (Revelation 22:17; Philippians 2:12). The reception of salvation comes through meeting the conditions God has provided through His grace. God placed on man the responsibility of obtaining the salvation which He foreordained or predestinated. God foreordained the gospel (1 Corinthians 2:7-8; 2 Timothy 1:9-10), but man must obey it in order to receive the benefits of it (1 Peter 4:17). God predestinated that Christ should die for man (1 Peter 1:20; Revelation 13:8), but man must obey Him to

receive His blessings (Hebrews 5:9). God foreordained that redemption would be in Christ (Ephesians 1:4-7) but man must do those things to be found in Him (Galatians 3:26-27). The church was predestinated (Ephesians 3:9-11), but one must be baptized into it to be a part of it (1 Corinthians 12:13). God wants all persons saved (1 Timothy 2:3-4; 2 Peter 3:9). He has not arbitrarily doomed any individual without giving him a chance at eternal life.

Unconditional Election nullifies the great commission (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16). Nothing could be more foolish than to preach the gospel to all if only people whom God arbitrarily chooses are able to understand it. If nothing can change anyone's status in relation to salvation or condemnation, why preach it? Why warn people to flee from the wrath to come (Matthew 3:7)? If they are elect, they will not incur the wrath of God regardless of what they do or do not do. If they are not elect, they cannot flee anyway. Unconditional Election nullifies the universal invitation of Christ (Matthew 11:28-30; Revelation 22:17). Why would Jesus plead with people to do the impossible?

CONCLUSION

The Bible does teach predestination but not the Unconditional Election that Calvinists teach. It does not teach that individuals have been foreordained to life or death no matter what they do. It states that we are free moral agents with the ability to accept or reject God's commandments thus determining whether we will ultimately be saved or lost.

The predestination or foreordination of God determined that He would save sinful man through the sacrifice of His Son. Those who would respond to the gospel, His power unto salvation (Romans 1:16), and its call (2 Thessalonians 2:14) would become part of His elect. Those who reject the gospel and its message would be damned eternally. God will render judgment on all in the final day based on what they have done. The righteous will have life. The wicked will face the second death. Each person, not the predestination of God, determines what his/her destiny will be (Romans 2:3-11).

ARE THERE MODERN-DAY APOSTLES?

By: Dave Miller, Ph.D.

The incredible diversity of viewpoint that exists in religion today is startling and disconcerting. We are witnessing a breakdown of respect for authority in American culture, as well as a tremendous increase in personal opinion and feelings as the standard of authority. Consequently, we now have a veritable smorgasbord of doctrinal variety in religion. Such is the nature of pluralism. One is likely to see anything and everything perpetrated in the name of religion and/or Christianity. The only solution to such a situation is to reaffirm the inspiration and authority of the Bible. The Bible is the only written document on this planet that is the standard of authority in life and in religion (see Miller, 1996, pp. 430-446,462-471).

THE DEFINITION OF AN APOSTLE

Such being the case, we must go to the Bible to determine God's will with regard to modern-day apostles. When we do so, we first learn that the word "apostle" comes from the Greek word APOSTOLOS, which means "one sent from or forth, a messenger, delegate" (Arndt and Gingrich, 1957, p. 99; Thayer, 1901, p. 68). The term is used in the New Testament in two distinct senses. It can refer to an individual who is sent by other humans to accomplish a particular mission or task. The term is so used to refer, for example, to Barnabas (Acts 14:14). He was an "apostle" in the sense that he accompanied Paul on an evangelistic trip. Jesus is said to be our "Apostle" in the sense that He was sent to atone for our sins (Hebrews 3:1).

The term "apostle" also is used in a second sense—what we might call an **official** sense. That is, "apostle" can refer to individuals who were officially and divinely selected to serve as Jesus' original representatives—"ambassadors" (2 Corinthians 5:20). Jesus handpicked the original twelve apostles (Matthew 10:1-5; Mark 3:13-19; Luke 6:12-16; 9:1-2). Of these original twelve, Judas betrayed the Lord as predicted by the Old Testament (Psalm 41:9; John 13:18-19; 18:1-5). Instead of repenting, he cinched his apostasy by committing suicide (Matthew 27:3-5; John 17:12). Consequently, a successor to Judas was selected by divine decree (Acts 1:16-26).

Only one other apostle in the official sense is alluded to in the New Testament—Paul. His appointment to apostleship was unique and unparalleled in that he was chosen for a specific first century task (Acts 9:15; 22:14-15; 26:16-18; 1 Corinthians 15:8-9; Galatians 1:11-12,15-16). Christ selected him to introduce the message of Christianity to the Gentile world (Romans 11:13; 15:16; Galatians 2:8; Ephesians 3:8). Paul was careful to document the fact that his apostleship was by divine appointment (e.g., Romans 1:5; 1 Corinthians 1:1; Galatians 1:1,16).

THE QUALIFICATIONS OF AN APOSTLE

When one assembles all the relevant New Testament data, at least three

qualifications emerge as prerequisite to one becoming an apostle in the official sense (Hayden, 1894, p. 33, expands these credentials to seven in number). First, an apostle had to have seen the Lord and been an eyewitness of Christ's resurrection (Acts 1:22; 22:14; 1 Corinthians 9:1). Second, an apostle had to be specifically selected by the Lord or the Holy Spirit (Matthew 10:5; Mark 3:13-14; Luke 6:13; Acts 1:26; 9:15; 22:14-15,21; 26:16). Third, an apostle was invested with miraculous power to the extent that he could perform miracles. The power to perform miracles included the capability to confer the ability to work miracles to other individuals through the laying on of his hands (Mark 3:15; 16:17-20; Luke 9:1-2; John 14:12,26; 15:24-27; 16:13; Acts 2:43; 4:29-31,33; 5:12,15-16; 6:6; 8:14-18; 19:6; 2 Timothy 1:6; Romans 1:11; Hebrews 2:3-4). Jesus referred to His bestowal of miraculous capability upon the apostles when He promised they would be "endued with power from on high" (Luke 24:49).

THE WORK OF AN APOSTLE

The apostolic office was unquestionably a temporary office for the early church (though apostolic appointment was for life). Its essential purpose was twofold. First, apostles were commissioned by Jesus to launch the Christian religion (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-48). This purpose was achieved by means of the initial presentation of the Gospel to the whole world (Colossians 1:23), and the establishment of the church of Christ (Acts 2). Second, apostles were largely responsible for making the New Testament available—first in oral form and, more specifically, in written form (1 Corinthians 14:37; Galatians 1:12; Ephesians 3:3-4; 1 Thessalonians 5:27; 2 Thessalonians 2:15; 3:14; 1 Peter 1:12; 2 Peter 1:12-21; 3:15-16).

These two central tasks are set forth clearly in the New Testament. In Matthew 16, Jesus declared that He would build His church after His resurrection from hades (vs. 18). He then explained that it would be the apostles who would instigate initial entrance into Christ's church (hence the significance of "keys"—vs. 19). This commencement of the Christian religion and the church of Christ would be achieved by means of the apostles "binding" and "loosing" the doctrinal tenets and principles of Christianity that Heaven had previously bound or loosed [the Greek uses the perfect passive and should be translated "will have been bound/loosed in Heaven" as in the NASB (cf. Matthew 18:18-20; John 20:22-23)]. Peter and the apostles articulated the terms of entrance into the kingdom of Christ for the first time on the Pentecost that followed Christ's resurrection (Acts 2:14ff.).

In Ephesians 4, after summarizing Christianity in terms of seven core concepts (vss. 1-6), Paul described the initial sequence of events that recounted the advent of Christianity (vss. 7-16). Paul noted that: (1) after His crucifixion, Jesus descended into the Hadean realm; (2) He then was resurrected; (3) He ascended back to Heaven; (4) upon His ascension, He dispensed gifts; (5) the apostolic office was included in the reception of these miraculous capabilities; (6) the purpose of these gifts was to equip and edify the church; (7) the preparation provided to the infant church by these gifts was temporary ("till" is an adverb of time connoting **when** the miraculous gifts were to

terminate), in that the same preparation soon would be available through the completed revelation, i.e., "the faith." [By "completed revelation" we do not mean completed **canon**. We mean that all of God's communication to humanity would have been revealed. See the New Testament discussion contrasting "mystery" with "made known" (Romans 16:25-26; 1 Corinthians 2:7-10; Ephesians 3:1-11). In the meantime, the process of producing copies of the various New Testament documents and circulating them far and wide would have been occurring rapidly and extensively from the very moment of their production by the inspired writers (cf. Colossians 4:16, 1 Timothy 5:18, where Luke 10:7 is already known and classified as "Scripture," and 2 Peter 3:15-16, where Paul's epistles are already circulated and recognized as "Scriptures"). Further, the reference to "the faith" in Ephesians 4:13 cannot refer to a time when all people or all Christians will achieve unity in faith. Such a circumstance will never occur. Paul was referring to the time when all people would have access to all of God's communication to man, thus giving them the potential for attaining spiritual maturity ("a perfect man" vs. "children"). See Miller, 2003].

Once all of the information necessary to the promotion of the Christian religion was revealed to the early church (through oral means made possible by the distribution of the gifts), the church would have the means available to grow and mature in Christ (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:8-13). While prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers [the words "pastors and teachers" share the same article in the Greek, and so should likely be construed to mean "pastor-teachers," i.e., a single function in which pastors (those selected by the local congregation to serve as elders or shepherds) were endowed with the miraculous ability to teach inspired information not yet made available in written form] were part of this early development of Christianity (Ephesians 4:11), the office of an apostle was the primary means by which Christ accomplished the inauguration of His religion.

The apostles had the sole responsibility of executing the will of the Son of God in founding, organizing, and fully equipping the church of Christ on Earth, that she might fulfill her heaven-borne mission, until Jesus comes again (Hayden, p. 22). That is why Paul could say two chapters earlier that the household of God (i.e., the church) was built on the **foundation** of the apostles and prophets (Ephesians 2:20; cf. 3:5; Revelation 21:14). That is why he informed the Corinthian Christians:

God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? (1 Corinthians 12:28-30).

The apostles are said to be "first" in the significance and criticality of their divinely appointed role. The apostles specifically described their unique role in the early church as entailing giving themselves to "the word of God" and "the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:2,4).

THE DURATION OF AN APOSTLE

Once the church of Christ was established and Christianity was given its initial presentation (cf. Colossians 1:23), the apostolic office **faded from the scene** along with the age of miracles. As an eyewitness of Christ's resurrection, Paul referred to himself in relation to the other apostles as "**last of all**" (1 Corinthians 15:8). Neither apostles nor miraculous gifts was needed any longer. They had served their temporary purpose (Mark 16:20; Acts 4:29-31; 13:12; 14:3; Romans 15:18-19; Hebrews 2:3-4; cf. Exodus 4:30). Miraculous gifts functioned as scaffolding while the church was under initial construction, and were removed once the structure had been completed (1 Corinthians 3:10; 13:11; Ephesians 4:13-14). The book we call the Bible is the totality of God's written revelation to the human race. Consequently, people now have access to **everything they need** (2 Peter 1:3) to enter into a right relationship with God via Christianity and the church of Christ. The apostles "had no official successors. From the nature of their duties, there could be no succession" (Hayden, pp. 20-21). **Apostles, quite simply, are no longer needed!**

NO APOSTLES TODAY

Unfortunately, several groups that claim affiliation with the Christian religion allege to have apostles among them, including Catholicism, Mormonism, and some pentecostal groups. This claim is unbiblical. No person living today can meet the qualifications given in Scripture for being an apostle. No one living today has been an **eyewitness** of Christ's resurrection. Christ has selected no one living today for the apostolic role. No one living today possesses the miraculous capabilities of an apostle. We should not be surprised that people would falsely **claim** to be apostles. Jesus warned that false prophets would come in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they would be ravening wolves (Matthew 7:15). Paul described some of his opponents in these words:

For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore, it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

Further warning was issued to the Galatian churches: "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:8). Anyone claiming to be an apostle today who teaches anything **in addition to** the New Testament is clearly not an apostle of Christ!

Peter added his voice on the same subject: "But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction" (2 Peter 2:1). No wonder John admonished: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1; cf. Matthew 24:11,24). In the Revelation, the church at Ephesus was commended because they "tested those who

say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars" (Revelation 2:2).

Catholicism maintains that Peter was the supreme bishop, even over the other apostles, and that every pope since Peter is an apostolic successor to Peter. The pope is selected after literally hours and days of deliberation by cardinals in the Vatican. The only apostle in the Bible that was not handpicked by Christ in person was Matthias. Yet he was not selected by mere men deliberating and debating his potential. He was selected by the casting of lots—which was simply another way for Jesus to do the selecting (Acts 1:26; cf. Proverbs 16:33).

It is incredible to think that any human beings living today would presume to appoint apostles. In pinpointing the credentials of an apostle, Luke (Acts 1) made it abundantly evident that to qualify as an apostle a person would have to have **seen** the Lord and been an **eyewitness** of His resurrection. That is why Paul was careful to state: "Am I not an apostle? ...Have I not **seen the Lord?**" (1 Corinthians 9:1, emp. added). In recounting his conversion, he quoted Ananias as having said, "The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and **see the Just One**, and hear the voice of His mouth. For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard" (Acts 22:14-15, emp. added). What alleged modern-day apostle could make such a claim?

The New Testament also makes clear the fact that an essential characteristic of an apostle was that he had been selected by Deity. When Jesus was on Earth, He handpicked the first twelve apostles. After His departure from Earth, the disciples cast lots to select a successor to Judas. Their method allowed no input from mere humans—except in the recognition that two men possessed all the qualifications necessary to be an apostle. Casting lots allowed **God** to do the selecting. Divine control in the selection process by casting lots was common in Old Testament history (see Leviticus 16:8; Numbers 26:55; 33:54; 34:13; Joshua 14:2; 18:6,10; 19:51; cf. Acts 13:19; 1 Samuel 14:42; Nehemiah 10:34; Psalm 16:5). Solomon claimed: "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord" (Proverbs 16:33). Indeed, Peter's prayer on the occasion shows that the decision already had been made by the Lord before the actual casting of lots: "...show which of these two **You have chosen**" (Acts 1:24, emp. added). The summary statement regarding Matthias—"he was numbered with **the eleven** apostles" (Acts 1:26; cf. Matthew 28:16; Mark 16:14; Luke 24:33)—gives way to a return to the expression "the twelve" (Acts 6:2; cf. Acts 2:14). The text states: "You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen to take part in this ministry and apostleship" (Acts 1:24-25). Paul also was handpicked by Jesus—to be a "chosen vessel" (Acts 9:15). No human being on Earth today can claim he has been personally singled out and chosen by Jesus to be an apostle.

A third proof that no apostles exist on Earth today is the fact that New Testament apostles were empowered by God—not only to perform miracles—but also to **convey miraculous power to other people** who then could work miracles themselves. This characteristic is demonstrated in detailed fashion in Acts: "Now when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money" (Acts 8:18). The issue of modern-day apostles may be settled very quickly! To

authenticate their claim to be apostles, they must be able both to perform miracles as well as confer miraculous power to others. The apostles of Jesus in the New Testament demonstrated their apostolic status without hesitation. Anyone today who claims to be an apostle should be willing to do the same. No such ability exists today.

ORIGINAL APOSTLES WERE SUFFICIENT

A fascinating passage in the New Testament sheds further light upon this notion of modern-day apostles. That passage is Matthew 19:28. There Jesus informed Peter and the other apostles: "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." A related passage is Luke 22:29-30 which says, "And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as my Father bestowed one upon Me, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

These verses are Christ's figurative declarations describing the role of the twelve apostles in the establishment of the church and the dissemination of the gospel proclamation (cf. Bales, 1957, pp. 187-223). The "regeneration" refers to the Christian era, which began at Pentecost, during which time spiritual regeneration became possible through the blood of Christ (Titus 3:5). It is an equivalent expression with the "time of reformation" (Hebrews 9:10). The throne of Christ's glory refers to His present location at the right hand of God (Acts 2:34-36; Ephesians 1:20; 1 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 1:13; 8:1; 10:12-13). The "judging" done by the apostles refers to the rule that the apostles exerted while they were on Earth, setting in place the features of New Testament Christianity (Matthew 16:19; John 20:22-23). The "twelve thrones" refers to their complete authority from Christ to implement Christ's will until the end of time—which they presently do today **through their authoritative writings—found only in the New Testament**. The "twelve tribes" is a figurative way to refer to the church—the spiritual Israel (Galatians 6:16; James 1:1; cf. Romans 2:28-30; Galatians 3:29).

Neither Christ nor the original apostles needs successors or representatives on Earth today. They continue to rule and reign over the kingdom through the work that they achieved in the first century, and that is preserved for all in the New Testament. Christ is **now** on His throne ruling and reigning. The apostles also are on the thrones assigned to them by Christ. To suggest that the apostles have modern-day successors is to discount and discredit the current rule of the apostles. Neither Christ nor the apostles has abdicated their authority or their current rule to any humans on Earth.

Additionally, the fact that Jesus declared that **all twelve apostles** would occupy thrones in the kingdom proves that Peter had no greater authority than the other apostles. The apostles were **equal** in their reception and wielding of the authority delegated to them by Christ. Yet the Catholic Church claims that the immediate successors to Peter were Linus (from A.D. 67 to 79), Cletus (from A.D. 79 to 91) and Clement (from A.D. 91 to 100). They agree that the apostle John would have still been alive throughout this period (see G.C. Brewer's discussion as quoted in Bales, pp. 208-

210). The doctrine of the primacy of Peter means that the first three of the alleged successors of Peter would have exercised authority over the still-living apostle John—who had been handpicked by Christ Himself! The very John whom Jesus placed on one of the twelve thrones would have been **under** the authority, knowledge, and power of three popes who had not been selected to be among the original Twelve! (see also Hayden, pp. 22-33). Hayden aptly summarized the New Testament position regarding modern-day apostles:

The thirteen apostles chosen, ordained and endowed by the newly crowned Messiah faithfully and fully executed their commission. When they entered into everlasting rest, the church was established, with all needful ministries to edify, extend and perpetuate it throughout all coming centuries. Then the extraordinary, which was necessary to found a new institution, was succeeded by the ordinary, which is sufficient to teach, regulate and govern the subjects of Christ's kingdom according to the laws that went forth from Jerusalem. The revelation of God was completed. The word of faith is henceforth nigh every believer, even in his mouth and in his heart. The apostolic office ceased, and evangelists and pastors became the permanent teachers and superintendents of the church (pp. 33-34).

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ARE WE CALLED?

There is no biblical indication that the preacher or elder (pastor) requires a special "calling."

1. The New Testament gives no indication that a preacher must be called by God in the same way that prophets and high priests were called in the Old Testament (Jeremiah 1:5; Hebrews 5:4). Moreover, the New Testament never applies the terminology of "calling" to preachers or pastors (bishops, elders), but only to the Christian life in general (2 Timothy 1:9; Hebrews 3:1). The Bible makes it clear that all mankind is called to obey by the gospel (2 Thessalonians 2:14).

2. If the New Testament taught that preachers or elders must be specially called by God, it seems that there would be some sort of discussion of how that happens and how to discern whether one has really been called. Instead, Paul writes, "This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop (pastor, elder), he desires a good work (1 Timothy 3:1). Paul doesn't say, "If anyone wants to be an elder, he must have a special, supernatural, subjective call from God." He simply explains that if anyone wants to be an elder, he desires a good thing. He then goes on to give the qualifications. But having a supernatural calling from God is not given as part of the requirements.

Too often people hear a phrase and make assumptions without intending to do so. People talk about God calling and forget to ask: How does God call people?

"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me" (John 6:44-45).

"How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!" But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our report?" So, then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:14-17).

"As you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory. For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe" (1 Thessalonians 2:11-13).

God calls people to Himself through the message of the Gospel. "For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe" (1 Corinthians 1:21). The calling goes out to all people equally. Whether they heed that call depends on their attitude toward that message, whether they believe it or reject it.

"Called" is another way to say "invited" or "encouraged to come."

"You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers; just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children, so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory" (1 Thessalonians 2:10-12).

This passage tells us who does the calling: God. It also tells us what we are called to: His kingdom and glory. But it doesn't directly state how that calling takes place.

Unfortunately, people have a habit of filling in missing information with imaginative answers. But we don't have to guess. We merely have to look in other places for the answer.

"But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. It was for this **He called you through our gospel**, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us" (2 Thessalonians 2:13-15).

It is through the teachings in the Bible that we are called by God.

WILL HEAVEN BE ON EARTH?

There are some who claim that with the second coming of Christ the earth will be purified by fire. Subsequently, this material planet will be the residence of the faithful throughout eternity.

In other words, a “new earth” will be what we commonly think of as “heaven.” As one writer stated it: “earth shall become heaven.”

Though the idea is very popular — particularly with those who subscribe to various millennial doctrines — there actually is no solid basis for it. The so-called “proof texts” for the doctrine, when closely examined, do not support it at all.

The heaven-on-earth dogma is but another example of not understanding the nature of figures of speech, as such are frequently employed in the sacred text.

The Distinction between Heaven and Earth

One of the clearest distinctions in the Bible is that which exists between heaven (the abode of God, the “heaven of heavens” — Deut. 10:14; Psa. 115:16) and the earth. It requires but a few passages to establish this premise.

In warning about oaths, Christ forbade swearing by heaven, the throne of God, or by earth, His footstool (Mt. 5:34-35). Jesus taught His disciples to pray that God’s will be done on earth, as in heaven (Mt. 6:10). The Savior declared that one must not lay-up treasures on earth, where thieves might confiscate them. Rather, one’s treasure should be heavenly in nature (Mt. 6:19).

The Christian’s hope is to be realized “in the heavens” (Col. 1:5). It is an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, that **fades not away**, reserved **in heaven** for us (1 Pet. 1:3-4). How is this passage to be explained if the heaven of Peter’s statement will, in fact, fade away and give place to an eternal existence **on earth**? Peter must harmonize with Peter (2 Pet. 3:13)!

Our reward, grounded in our citizenship, will be in heaven, whence also we wait for our Savior (Phil. 3:20). Christ is not returning from heaven to be with His people on a reconstructed earth. He is returning to take His people home to the Father.

When Jesus declared: “In my Father’s house are many mansions” (Jn. 14:2-3), He clearly was speaking of heaven. This scarcely can be doubted. He then said: “I **go** to prepare a place for you.” He spoke of going to His Father in heaven. Subsequently, He promised to come again and receive His people so that “where I am, you may be also” (i.e., that they might abide in heaven with Him).

By His death and subsequent ascension, “He **dedicated for us**, a new and living way, through the veil” (Heb. 10:20). Entering within the veil (typified by the tabernacle’s holy of holies), the Lord functioned as a **forerunner** for us (Heb. 6:20). Does that sound like a trip to the renovated earth? What serious Bible student ever suspected that the holy of holies was a type of a renewed earth?

It is useless to continue to pile up passages that demonstrate **heaven is not earth and earth is not heaven**, when biblical writers employed **literal** language.

But it is alleged that a **new heaven and a new earth** await us. It is an earth that will have been renovated, reconstituted and purified from the contamination of sin.

Does this proposition apply to the **earth only**? Or to both “the heavens and earth”? Both are mentioned in the four biblical texts that speak of a “new heaven(s) and new earth.”

The passages that mention a “new heavens and a new earth” are Isaiah 65:17; 66:22; 2 Peter 3:13. And Revelation 21:1 speaks of “a new **heaven** and a new earth.” The evidence will demonstrate unequivocally that these expressions are uniformly used in **figurative** senses. In not a solitary case do they refer to the **literal heaven** or **literal earth**.

Old Testament References to “New Heavens and Earth”

Isaiah was God’s prophet of doom and deliverance. Doom was to be visited upon the kingdoms of ancient Israel and Judah for their spiritual apostasy. Ultimate deliverance was to be accomplished by the coming of Jehovah’s Messiah and the establishment of His regime.

Isaiah 65:17-25

In this final section of chapter 65, the prophet describes the creation of a “new heavens and a new earth.” In this instance, this is a symbolic description of the **Messiah’s reign** during the Christian age. As man lives upon the earth and partakes of the blessings of the heavens, so these expressions become figures signifying his environment. Hence, the “new heavens and a new earth” is merely descriptive of the **new realm** that will replace the Mosaic period. The “former things,” i.e., the elements of the Mosaic system, will pass away (Isa. 65:17).

Paul sets forth a similar truth in the New Testament. “Wherefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature: the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new” (2 Cor. 5:17-18). The new creation is described as rejoicing in Jerusalem — an atmosphere of joy. This is, of course, spiritual Jerusalem, not the material city. God will rejoice in Jerusalem and joy in His people. The parallelism reveals that Jerusalem is a **body of people**, not the literal city.

Isaiah further declares that the sound of weeping will pass away (Isa. 65:19). The language does not suggest that in the future kingdom, its subjects (Christians) will never know tears or sadness (cf. Acts 20:31; Phil. 3:18). Rather, it is simply a negative way of emphasizing the joy characteristic of that new atmosphere. The thrust of verse 20 seems to be this. In the new regime, quantity (in terms of time) will not be nearly so important as quality. Hailey catches the spirit of the passage.

In Jehovah’s eternal nature, time is not an element to be reckoned with, for with Him a thousand years are as a day, and vice versa (cf. Psalm 90:4; II Peter 3:8). He measures activities by the accomplishment of the several

aspects of His purpose, not by years. In the new order each citizen, whether for a brief moment (e.g., Stephen — Acts 7) or for a lengthy period (e.g., Paul, John), will fulfill his mission in God's purpose. It is not the length of one's day that counts. And the sinner, regardless of the length of his days, is accursed. He will suffer the consequence of his deeds and die in his sins, regardless of when they were committed (519).

It is clear that the new heavens and new earth of Isaiah 65:17ff are not the same as that mentioned in Revelation 21:1ff, for in the former there is sin, death, etc., whereas in the latter these things do not exist (cf. Rev. 21:4; 22:15). The spiritual prosperity of the new age is symbolically described with a motif that the ancient Jew would appreciate. Houses are built, vineyards are planted, and fruit is harvested (21). No more will God deliver them into the hands of their enemies who will take spoil of their produce; rather, their prosperity will be protracted (22).

Jehovah's spiritual seed (cf. Gal. 3:29) will not labor in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58), nor will God bring calamity upon them, as He had done with old Israel when they rebelled against Him (23). In the new Zion, the Lord will be ready, without special prompting, to respond to the needs of His people (24). Jesus declared that the Father knows our needs even before we ask (Mt. 6:8).

Finally, in language reminiscent of chapter 11, verses 6-9, the prophet describes, in verse 25, the peaceful nature of those who inhabit the kingdom of God in the new age. The New Testament clearly shows the Messianic fulfillment of these glorious predictions **in the church** (Rom. 15:12); they do not relate to a future millennium — nor a glorified earth following the Day of Judgment.

Isaiah 66:10-24

In this section, we have the prophet's second reference to "the new heavens, and the new earth" (22). Again, there is a symbolic description of the Messianic age and spiritual Zion's glorious future.

Here, Jerusalem is described as a mother whose milk nourishes her children, and the offspring rejoice in the glory of their mother (10-11). As Zion enlarges her borders, encompassing even the nations (i.e., the Gentiles), the serenity of the new system spreads itself like a peaceful river. The new Jerusalem will be cared for as a mother feeds and caresses her child (12). God will comfort his children with the tenderness of a mother (13). Will God forsake His people? Never. He will preserve them, and in that, they will rejoice. They will flourish like tender grass under the providential hand of the Lord. On the other hand, their enemies will experience Heaven's indignation (14).

Jehovah's judgment upon the wicked is described as a visitation of fire (cf. Psalm 97:3). Like one riding a war-chariot, the Creator will fiercely deal with His enemies (15). With flames of vengeance and with the sword of justice, God will judge the ungodly — and they will be many (16). Note that the judgment of this context is not merely local; it

is upon “all flesh.” Following the motif of paganism and certain violations of the law of Moses, the prophet warns that those who live in rebellion to God will come to an end (17). Though some see in this a reference to the destruction of the Jewish nation, it may reach beyond that to the final Judgment.

The Lord is fully familiar with both the thoughts and works of men, and the time assuredly is coming when He will gather all nations together; as He renders judgment, His glory will be universally manifest (18; cf. Romans 2:5). Again, a primary application may be the devastating destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. If the destruction of Jerusalem is alluded to in the earlier verses, those who escaped that disaster (i.e., Christians — cf. Matthew 24:15ff) will go into other regions of the antique world taking the gospel to the nations. The “sign” of verse 19 might be the destruction of the Jewish nation that triggered this evangelistic thrust.

By means of the proclamation of the gospel, “brethren” would be brought from the nations unto Jehovah’s holy “mountain”, i.e., the church (cf. 2:2-4; 11:9). The influx is figuratively described as the coming of caravans to Jerusalem where the people worship God (20). From these nations, the Lord will utilize certain people as “priests and Levites,” i.e., as those suitable to worship Him (21). This clearly reveals the figurative nature of the language. Under the Mosaic system, priests and Levites were not Gentiles (cf. 1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 5:9-10).

The perpetuity of Jehovah’s spiritual “seed” is affirmed; the seed and name will remain in the new dispensation (figuratively called the “new heavens and the new earth” — cf. 65:17) (22). Borrowing from the imagery of Judaism, which would be familiar to the people of that day, Isaiah speaks of the worship of the new age. All flesh (Jew and Gentile) will worship together according to Heaven’s prescribed way (23). In contrast, those who neglect Jehovah’s will are described as having been slain; their dead bodies are clearly in view. Moreover, their destruction is abiding, for, symbolically speaking, their worm does not die and their fire is not quenched (24). This clearly suggests the eternal punishment of the wicked. Jesus employs these words as a description of the final punishment of hell (cf. Mark 9:48).

Isaiah’s two uses of the expression “new heavens, and new earth” as figures of speech for the regime of the kingdom of Christ should prepare the New Testament student to understand that subsequent uses of the phrase could likewise be symbolic — as indeed the evidence will indicate.

New Testament References

We find several references in the New Testament which the “New Earthers” attempt to employ as support for their novel doctrine.

2 Peter 3

One of the proof-texts allegedly in support of the “renewed earth” viewpoint is 2 Peter 3:10.

The 3rd chapter of Peter's second letter may conveniently be divided into five segments:

1. The apostle's reminder of a divine message previously given (1-2).
2. A warning regarding certain skeptical mockers (3-4).
3. The Flood of Noah's day as a "type" of the coming Judgment (5-7).
4. The day of the Lord (8-10).
5. The coming Judgment as an incentive to holy living (11-18).

Our focus will be upon what is specifically said regarding the destiny of the material "heavens and the earth." Peter declares that the "heavens shall pass away with a great noise." The term "heavens" (plural) refers, not to the place where God is (Matthew 6:9), but to those realms where the birds fly (Ezekiel 31:6; cf. Matthew 8:20), and beyond to that region of the stars and planets (Genesis 1:14; 22:17).

Of special interest is the term "pass away" (PARERCHOMAI) — 30 times in the NT). While the word may occasionally be used in a temporal sense (cf. "passed by"; Mark 6:48), frequently it takes on an eternal significance. For example, the Lord contrasted the temporal nature of heaven and earth with the eternal duration of His word — the former will "pass away," the latter never will (Matthew 24:35).

In this sense the term signified: **"to come to an end and so no longer be there, pass away, disappear"** (Danker, 776). Danker, et al. list 2 Peter 3:10 and Revelation 21:1 under this definition. In his commentary on Luke, Alfred Plummer contended that the term "pass away" (Luke 21:33) signified that "everything material will cease to exist" (1908, 485). There is no sense of a "renewal" in the term.

In a passage regarding the Day of Judgment, John writes that "the earth and the heaven fled away; that there was found no place for them" (Revelation 20:11). Where is the "restoration" in that? There "is found no place for it"! As Plummer expressed it: "The destruction of the world is complete . . . they [the material earth and heaven] are annihilated" (1908, 474).

The apostle continues by saying that the "elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat" (cf. 11). The term "elements" (STOICHEIA) refers to the very fundamental components of an object, e.g., the letters of an alphabet. With reference to material objects, the word has to do with "the first and simplest component parts . . . the primary matter" (Liddell & Scott, 1501). "Dissolved" (from LUO) is found three times in verses 10-12.

In this case, the word means **"to reduce something by violence into its components parts, destroy"** (Danker, 607). The writers further comment: "Of the parts of the universe, as it is broken up and destroyed in the final conflagration 2 Pt. 3:10-12." Add to this the term "melt" (TEKO) in verse 12 (cf. Isaiah 34:4). Those who see a "restoration" or a "purification" in these terms have "Urim and Thummim" far more formidable than those claimed by Joseph Smith, Jr.! Now we come to the term rendered "burned up" (KJV; ASV).

In the earlier translations of this passage, the fate of the earth is described as being “burned up” (KJV; ASV; RSV; JB; NASB). The New World Translation and some of the later translations read “discovered,” “laid bare,” or “exposed” (see NIV; ESV). Supposedly, this rendition provides support for the position that the earth will not be destroyed; rather, it will be refurbished. The difference in the translations results from a variation in ancient Greek manuscripts.

A number of scholars believe that the textual evidence perhaps slightly tips in favor of HEURETHESETAI “found, discovered,” but, as Metzger noted, though this word seems to be “the oldest reading,” it scarcely makes any “acceptable sense” and “seems to be devoid of meaning in the context.” Several substitutions occur in other ancient sources, e.g., “found dissolved,” “will disappear,” “will be found useless,” “shall not be found,” etc. (706). Thayer suggested that “discovered” is “strange and improbable” (261). Lenski, who endorsed the “purified” earth concept, commented that the variant “shall be found or discovered” is “out of the line of thought” in the context (347).

Thus, numerous modifications exist. The term KATAKAESETAI “burned up,” has fairly good textual support (the Alexandrian Ms, A.D. 5th C., along with several others of later date). As Caffin suggested, “burned up” is “well supported, and suits the context better” (68; cf. v. 11).

Even if the term, “found,” was the original word, the expression likely would indicate “shall be found for destruction, i.e., unable to hide themselves from the doom decreed by God” (Thayer, 261). Danker suggested the sense would be to “discover” or lay bare for a judicial sentence (412). Kistemaker also sees this as a reference to God’s judgment of “the earth and all man’s works” (337).

When the companion terms in the context are factored in, e.g., “pass away,” “dissolved,” and “melt,” together with the fact that no one has ever found anything remotely related to “renovated,” “refurbished,” or “purified” in the passage, it is totally irresponsible to argue from this context for a reconstitution of the earth following the Day of Judgment — despite the widespread denominational support for this idea. This notion, incidentally, is closely related to the dogma of premillennialism. One millennialist has written:

Of the new creation’s theme concerning the new physical-material creation of the future, both the OT and NT suggest that God’s covenant promises involve a millennial milieu of peace and harmony in the physical and animal creation” (Mare, 1201).

Professor Mare contended that the capital of the “new heavens and new earth” would be the “New Jerusalem.” Is this supposed to be a literal, reconstructed “city of Jerusalem”? Apparently so! Note Mare’s reference to the “new physical-material creation.”

Henry Thiessen wrote: “There is abundant reason for holding that this is a literal city. It has foundations, gates, walls, and streets” (517). Are the “walls” and “gates” to keep people in or out? And who would that be?

Chapter 3 concludes with the affirmation that we “look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwells righteousness.” One thing is certain: this is not the material heavens and earth, for they are gone! Nothing could be clearer. For more about this, see the discussion of Revelation 21 to follow.

Revelation 21

In a thrilling vision, the apostle John saw “a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth are passed away; and the sea is no more” (1). Plummer suggests this three-fold division “represents the whole of this world” (1950, 500-501). For the final time, we are introduced to the “new heaven and a new earth.” One thing is certain, the “new” is not the same as the old (i.e., material/physical). The nature of the “new heaven and new earth” may logically be demonstrated quite simply.

Just as our present environment is called heaven and earth (we draw our sustenance from the air and land), even so, our future state of existence **figuratively** is designated as a “new heaven and new earth.” That this is an allusion to heaven itself can be demonstrated logically. In logic, there is a maxim that states: Things equal to the same thing are equal to each other. If $A = B$, and $B = C$, it follows that $A = C$. If we are promised “heaven” as our final dwelling place, and we are promised a “new heavens and a new earth,” yet there is but “one hope” (Ephesians 4:4), it necessarily follows that the “new heaven and earth” and “heaven” are synonymous — the former a figurative expression; the latter the literal designation. See also the comments of Guy N. Woods (189).

On the other hand, if one views the items mentioned in Revelation 21 in a “material/physical” sense, numerous problems arise. For example, if the language is literal, how can “Jerusalem” be both a “city” and a “bride”? If literalism prevails, why is Jerusalem a “city” in one verse, yet the “tabernacle” in another (2-3)? Are not these mere figures of speech that represent the “peoples” of God (3b)? How many other things in the Apocalypse must be literalized, e.g., incense, instruments of music, horses, a serpent, dragons, harlots, etc.?

Here is another interesting question. If the “new earth” is to be both the “material and **physical**,” as professor Mare contended, what will happen on the last day of earth’s history? Since all dead bodies that come forth from the grave will be “spiritual,” and not “physical” (1 Cor. 15:44), won’t the Lord, following the renovation of the earth, have to reconstitute the spiritual body, making it conform once more to the “physical/material” earth? If the “earth” is to be renewed, what about: “the works that are therein” (2 Pet. 3:10)? What are these “works,” and will they too be renewed?

The fact is, this idea of “transforming” the earth had its origin in the pseudepigrapha literature of the inter-biblical period, and not anywhere in scripture. For instance, in the book of 1 Enoch, there is this statement: “I will transform the heaven and make it an eternal blessing; and I will transform the earth and make it a blessing” (45:4). There are numerous other references of similar import.

The scholarly J.W. Roberts commented on this circumstance.

Some apocalyptic writers had thought that the present earth would merely be transformed (Jubilees 1:29; Enoch 45:1), though others predicted that “the first heaven will pass away, a new heaven will appear” (Enoch 91:16). This accords with the New Testament expectation (Matt. 5:18; 2 Peter 3:12; Heb. 12:27), though John does not describe the process of destruction. He has said, “earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them” (20:11) (179).

Professor Frank Pack was entirely correct when he noted:

This new heaven and new earth is that which is spoken of by our Lord. It would appear that this is best understood as the vision of **heaven itself**, thought of in terms of the New Jerusalem, the heavenly city in the new heaven and the new earth (II.93; emp. mine).

Romans 8

In a marvelous passage designed to provide comfort for afflicted children of God, Paul affirms that the “sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed to us-ward” (Romans 8:18). He continues by suggesting that “the creation,” with great anticipation, awaits the revealing of God’s children (19-23). He notes that this “creation” at one time was subjected to vanity, not willingly, but by the Lord.

There is the hope, however, that eventually the creation will be set free from the “bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God.” Paul describes “the whole creation” as experiencing the pangs of childbirth. The inspired writer concludes this section by affirming that Christians also, who possess the first-fruits of the Spirit, groan (i.e., suffer difficulties) waiting for our adoption, even the redemption (i.e., the resurrection) of our bodies.

The most difficult aspect of this narrative is the allusion to “the creation,” and particularly what is meant by Paul’s affirmation that the “whole creation” anxiously anticipates its deliverance from the bondage of corruption. How is the term “creation” employed in this setting?

The matter cannot be ascertained merely by looking at the word *KTISIS* (creation) for that expression is used in a variety of senses in the Bible. For example:

It is employed of the material creation in some passages (Romans 1:20,25; Colossians 1:15). At other times, it denotes humanity in general (Mark 16:15; Colossians 1:23). It also is used occasionally in a special sense of Christians (Galatians 6:15; 2 Corinthians 5:17). It is obvious,

therefore, that the context must determine the meaning of the word in a particular setting.

With reference to “the creation” in Romans 8:19ff, Paul affirms that the creation was subjected to the bondage of corruption and that ultimately there is a promised deliverance from that state into a new glorious existence. What is the meaning of this controversial promise?

First, many assert that this context contains the pledge of a restoration of the entire material/physical creation at the time Christ returns to establish an earthly kingdom (Shank, 23). Such theories, however, cannot represent the correct view of this passage.

As noted already, the Bible clearly teaches that the material universe will utterly be destroyed at the second coming of Christ (Matthew 24:35; 2 Peter 3:1-13; Revelation 20:11; 21:1). Moreover, there is absolutely no suggestion in the scriptures that any eternal reward has been provided for animals (cf. 2 Peter 2:12; Jude 10). No interpretation can be placed upon Romans 8:19ff, therefore, that forces these verses into conflict with other clear affirmations regarding the destiny of this earth.

An **obscure** passage must yield to the **clearer**.

Second, does “the creation” refer to the “unredeemed portion of humanity” (Coffman, 305)? That hardly seems likely, for Paul asserts that this creation will be delivered “into the liberty of the glory of the children of God” (21). How is that applicable to the unbelieving world?

Nothing but a resurrection of condemnation awaits unregenerate humanity (John 5:29). Moreover, the Bible establishes elsewhere the principle that those out of harmony with God do not live in joyful anticipation of coming judgment; they await such in fear and trembling (cf. Isaiah 33:14; Hebrews 10:27).

Third, does the phrase, “the creation,” refer to the church? Obviously not, for “the creation” is said to look forward to the revealing of the sons of God (19). In addition, the apostle declares: “And not only so, but ourselves **also** . . . groan . . . waiting for our adoption” (23). It is clear that Christians are treated as a group separate from “the creation.”

What, then, is the meaning of this controversial context wherein the “whole creation” appears to anticipate deliverance? The most reasonable explanation, with fewest difficulties, is this. Paul, in these passages, has **personified** the creation. He figuratively represents it as longing for deliverance as a prelude to that time when its **purpose** shall have been completed.

When God’s redemptive plan is brought to fruition, earthly affairs are ended. The righteous will obtain their reward in “the new heavens and the new earth” (2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1), which is **heaven itself**.

Just as there is a link between man’s physical body and his new, resurrected spiritual body; even so, figuratively, there is a connection between the present creation and a new creation wherein eternal righteousness abides.

This type of argument certainly is not without precedent in the Scriptures. In

Psalm 114, the inspired writer describes the deliverance of Jehovah's people from Egyptian bondage. In conjunction with that glorious event, various elements of the creation are depicted as cooperating with, and rejoicing at, Israel's freedom. The sea saw it and fled, the mountains skipped as rams, the hills frolicked like little lambs, and the earth trembled. The Old Testament is replete with this type of symbolism (cf. Psalms 96:12; 98:8; Isaiah 35:1; 55:12).

No one contends that the language in these passages is literal. In view of other clear biblical indications, why should such an assumption be made with reference to Romans 8? There simply is no need for that.

The Earth Abides Forever

The claim is made that the earth will abide "forever" (Ecclesiastes 1:4). But the Hebrew term OLAM can be used of a **temporal** span (cf. Exodus 12:14; Numbers 25:13). When employed of material things, it is qualified by "the revealed truth that heaven and earth shall pass away, and it is limited by this truth" (Girdlestone, 317).

Pioneer Preachers

It is argued that a number of the pioneer preachers subscribed to the "renewed earth" theory. Indeed, they did, and many of them also endorsed various shades of "millennialism." But one must recall that these worthies were working their way out of numerous errors that cluttered the denominational community, and that is considerably different from leaving a solid background of Bible teaching, and carelessly wandering into the maze of sectarian ideology.

The beliefs of the "fathers" were not inspired, as much as we may otherwise honor them. In the final analysis, the question is: What do the scriptures actually teach? And the fact is, the idea of a renovated earth, constituting an eternal **material** domain for the redeemed, does not have the support of the Bible. It reflects a carnal mentality that apparently cannot envision a purely spiritual environment in which humanity could be happy eternally.

<https://christiancourier.com/articles/will-heaven-be-on-earth>

WILL THE EARTH REMAIN?

Text: Psalm 37:1-22

- I. All should understand that the earth was never created to be a permanent home to mankind.
 - A. In contrast to the eternality of Jesus' words, the earth and its heaven will cease - Mark 13:31.
 - B. God is eternal, but the world He made will wear out and be cast away - Hebrews 1:10-12.
 - C. The physical world is temporary - 2 Corinthians 4:18.

- II. 2 Peter 3:10 - The very elements, the substance of the world, will be destroyed.
 - A. The Jehovah Witnesses object saying it is like the flood. The people were destroyed, but the world remained to be repopulated.
 - 1. However, look at verse 6. The word "world" does refer to the population, but in verse 10 the word is "earth."
 - 2. Not only is the earth destroyed, but also the heavens. In the plural sense this refers to both the sky and outer space.
 - B. Another attempt is to translate "destroyed" as "discovered."
 - 1. Actually, some variant manuscripts do include the word "discovered" at the end of verse 10.
 - 2. However, the variants still contain "in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat."
 - 3. In addition, 2 Peter 3:12 reads the same, even in the variant manuscripts.
 - 4. If "discovered" was the proper ending in verse 10, it would mean "discovered for destruction". Its presence does not alter the overall meaning of the text.

- III. A subtle piece of evidence

- A. Genesis 8:22 tells us that as long as the earth remains, the cycle of day and night will not end.
 - B. Yet in end, there will be no night in the new Jerusalem - Revelation 21:23-25.
 - C. You can't claim it is just in heaven - Revelation 21:10.
 - D. With the ending of night, the implication is the ending of the earth.
- IV. Verses used to support the claim of an eternal earth.
- A. The claim is that God's purpose in creating the world was to create a paradise that was lost by Adam and Eve.
 - 1. God's purpose cannot be thwarted. Hence, God will accomplish His plan in the future.
 - 2. The problem with the argument is that the Bible doesn't say that God intended to make this world a paradise.
 - 3. The blessings are in the heavenly places - Ephesians 1:3-4.
 - 4. God's eternal purpose is in Christ, not in the earth - Ephesians 3:10-11.
 - 5. It was God's eternal purpose to save mankind through Jesus - 2 Timothy 1:9-10.
 - B. Some use Isaiah 45:18 and argue that the earth cannot be destroyed because God made it to be inhabited. If it was destroyed then it was created in vain.
 - 1. The fault here is that the earth has been inhabited and God's purpose in using this world has been accomplished.
 - 2. When a house is built, it might stand for generations, but eventually it becomes too old to maintain. Eventually it is torn down to make room for something else. Does this mean that the builder of the home made it in vain? Of course not, it served as a dwelling for many years. It served its purpose.
 - 3. Recall Hebrews 1:10-12 - The world will wear out and be

discarded.

- C. Another favorite verse is Psalm 37:9-11.
1. The argument is that meek have not yet inherited the earth, so it remains to be fulfilled in the future. Thus, they claim, the earth will remain forever (see verse 18).
 2. First, the word translated “earth” is a general term which can refer to the earth as a whole or in part.
 - a. For instance, it can be translated “land” as in Psalm 105:42-45 which refers to Israel inheriting the land of Canaan after their wanderings in the wilderness.
 - b. That inheritance would remain so long as Israel remained faithful - Deuteronomy 16:20.
 - c. If they sinned, God would remove them from the land - Deuteronomy 28:58-64.
 - d. If they repent, God would return them to their inheritance - Deuteronomy 30:1-5.
 3. Such did happen to the Israelites.
 - a. The northern tribes were removed from their inheritance - 2 Kings 21:13-15.
 - b. The southern tribes’ inheritance was given to others - Lamentations 5:1-2.
 - c. Yet God promised to let Israel return to its inheritance, but the nations who lived in the land could remain if they turned to God - Jeremiah 12:14-17; Ezekiel 47:13-14, 21-23.
 - d. It was the faithful, the meek, the righteous who were allowed to return to the inheritance. - Zephaniah 3:10-13; Zechariah 8:6-12.
- D. A similar verse is Matthew 5:5.

1. In this verse, no mention is made of eternity.
 2. God gives favor to the afflicted, the humble or the meek (depending on your translation) - Psalm 147:6.
 3. As we showed “inherit the earth” is an allusion to possessing the land of Canaan - Judges 18:9-10.
 4. It was the land of rest - Deuteronomy 12:10.
 5. Israel did not remain faithful and could not possess the land of rest, so such a place of rest remains - Hebrews 4:3-11.
 6. That rest will come when the first things (this world) has passed away - Revelation 21:4.
 7. Our inheritance is in heaven - 1 Peter 1:3-4.
- E. But God said the earth abides forever - Psalm 104:5; Ecclesiastes 1:4.
1. The word “forever” does not necessarily mean eternity.
 - a. The same word is used in Ecclesiastes 1:10 to describe the ancient times before. The world had a definite starting point. It has not existed eternally.
 - b. Sacrifices were “forever” - Leviticus 24:9. Yet those sacrifices came to an end - Hebrews 9:25-28.
 - c. The temple was built to be used forever - 2 Chronicles 2:4. Yet that temple no longer stands.
 2. In reality the word is defined to mean a long, indefinite period of time.
- F. Those looking for an eternal earth, ignore the fulfillment in the New Testament - Isaiah 11:1-10.
1. They point out that the lion hasn't lain with the lamb.
 2. But note that Paul quotes this passage and applies it to Christ - Romans 15:12.

- G. Probably a more humorous passage used is Isaiah 65:21-25.
 - 1. A beautiful description of paradise.
 - 2. But notice the verses prior - Isaiah 65:17-20.
 - 3. Think that this is describing heaven or as the Jehovah Witnesses claim, a paradise on earth? Look again at verse 20. There are sinners present! (By the way, even the New World Translation mentions this.)
 - 4. In heaven, righteousness dwells - 2 Peter 3:12-13.
 - 5. Sinners are not present there - Matthew 25:46.

- V. No, the earth is not meant to remain for eternity.
 - A. It has a purpose and will one day wear out.
 - B. God has promised to destroy it.
 - C. Yet a promised land of rest remains. One that is truly eternal.
 - D. It is reserved for the faithful, the meek, the righteous.
 - E. Will you not become a child of the promise? - Galatians 3:26-29.

UNDERSTANDING MATTHEW 24

The teachings of Jesus recorded in Matthew 24 are commonly misapplied by people in the religious world. To gain a better understand of what Jesus taught, we must first turn to Matthew 23 and see the context of Jesus' statements. In this chapter, Jesus brings numerous charges against the Jewish leaders for their mistreatment of God's Law (Matthew 23:1-32). He then concludes His condemnation by prophesying the consequences of their errors (Matthew 23:33-36). The Jews had killed God's people in the past. Though this current generation thought they were above such misdeeds, Jesus stated that they would continue to kill righteous people. They were not above the misdeeds of their forefathers, they were just as guilty. The punishment for killing God's people would fall upon this very generation.

This is a shocking statement to those who had been expecting a rebirth of the Jewish nation! As Jesus and the disciples were leaving Jerusalem, the disciples were pointing out to Jesus the glories of the temple. Jesus used the opportunity to emphasize His point. He stated the temple would be destroyed - to the point that not one stone would be left upon another. Now to the Jews, such a destruction of the temple could only mean the end of Jerusalem, their nation, and the world. When they had a private moment with Jesus, they asked him three questions:

1. When will these things happen?
2. What will be the sign of your coming?
3. What will be the sign of the end of the age?

As we read through the gospels, we are struck with the fact that Jesus often answers the actual question asked and not the question the person thought they were asking. His answer to His disciple's questions is no different. To the disciples, all three questions dealt with the same event, but Jesus' answer shows there are two events being asked about. In Matthew 24:4-34, He answers the question about the end of Jerusalem. In Matthew 24:36-25:46, He addresses the topic of the end of the world.

The Destruction of Jerusalem (Matthew 24:4-34)

Jesus warns his disciples that the destruction of Jerusalem would be soon. In fact, it would occur in their generation (Matthew 23:36; 24:34). The words translated "this generation" do not refer to an age, but to the people living at the time Jesus was speaking. For example, in Matthew 11:16-19, Jesus scolds the people of that generation for not giving heed to John and Jesus. Later, Jesus said there would be some of that generation who would not see death before Jesus' kingdom was established (Matthew 16:28).

The times leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem would be unusual. There would be an increase in the number of wars, famines, and earthquakes (Matthew 24:6-

8). The persecution of the disciples would also increase (Matthew 24:9-13). These predictions have been supported by historians of the time period between A.D. 50 and A.D. 70, when Jerusalem was destroyed.

In addition to general signs, Jesus gives his disciples specific signs to watch for which would tell them that the destruction of Jerusalem would be soon. Before Jerusalem would be destroyed, the gospel would be preached to the whole world (Matthew 24:14). Paul stated this was accomplished in Colossians 1:23. Just prior to the destruction, the "abomination of desolation", which Daniel prophesied, would take place. In Luke's account of these same matters, Jesus said that the Roman army would surround Jerusalem just prior to the desolation (Luke 21:20). Josephus speaks of a tyrant, named Simon, who slew the priests "as they were about their sacred duties. . . many persons, who came thither with great zeal from the ends of the earth, to offer sacrifices at this celebrated place . . . fell down before their own sacrifices themselves, and sprinkled that altar . . . with their own blood; till the dead bodies of strangers were mingled together with those of their own country, and those of profane persons with those of the priests, and the blood of all sorts of dead carcasses stood in lakes in the holy courts themselves." This happened just prior to the Roman army marching on Jerusalem.

These signs would give those who paid heed to them plenty of advance warning (Matthew 24:32-33). When they saw the signs, Jesus urges his followers to flee Jerusalem as fast as they possibly could (Matthew 24:16-22). He urged them to pray that the time would not come when flight would be hindered, such as during the winter or on the Sabbath when the gates of Jerusalem would be closed. Jesus also warned them not to delay because of misleading statements by people falsely calling themselves the Christ (Matthew 24:23-28). Many people would ignore Jesus' warnings because of these people. However, the Christians have their warning (Matthew 24:24-25). According to traditional history, Christians heeded their Master and not one Christian perished in the destruction of Jerusalem.

The destruction prophesied in verses 4-34, while severe, was limited only to Jerusalem and the nation of Israel. Descriptive terms are used to show the severity of this destruction which are similar to the terms used for the destruction of Babylon (Isaiah 13:9-11, Joel 2:10) and of Egypt (Isaiah 11:12; 19:1).

Transition (Matthew 24:35)

Jesus assures His listeners in Matthew 24:35 that these things will happen and God will not alter what Jesus has just prophesied.

The End of the World (Matthew 24:36-25:46)

Jesus now moves to a new topic, concerning when the end of the world will take place. Unlike the end of Jerusalem, the time for the end of the world is not known - even Jesus did not know when the end will be (Matthew 24:36). Notice that Jesus calls this

event "that day." This is the same phrase used by Paul (1 Thessalonians 5:2) and Peter (2 Peter 3:10-13) in regard to the end of the world.

The end of Jerusalem would be preceded by unusual events, but at the end of the age, the times will appear to be normal (Matthew 24:37-39). Paul said people would be thinking contented thoughts of peace and safety (1 Thessalonians 5:3). Nothing unusual would precede the end. No warnings, no signs, nothing to mark the event in advance.

Without advance warning, there is no possibility of preparing for the end at the last moment. Therefore, we must be prepared for the event to happen at any time (Matthew 24:42-45; 1 Thessalonians 5:4-11). Nor will there be an opportunity to hide from this event (Matthew 24:40-41; 1 Thessalonians 5:3). This will be a universal judgment (Matthew 25:31-46), whom no one can escape.

Compare the two halves of Jesus' answer to His disciples:

Destruction of Jerusalem Matthew 23:36-24:35	Destruction of the World Matthew 24:36-25:46
The time is identifiable.	The time is unknown.
It will occur in "this generation."	It will happen on "that day."
The events prior will be unusual.	The events prior will be typical.
There will be advance warnings - the example of the fig tree.	There will be no warning - the example of the thief.
The judgment will be local - on the nation of Israel.	The judgment will be universal.
Specific signs of the coming judgement can be seen.	No advance sign of the end will be found.
There will be time to escape the judgment.	There will be no time for flight.

Too often, people mix the events from the destruction of Jerusalem (Matthew 24:4-34) with the events dealing with the end of the world (Matthew 24:36-25:46). This leads people to believe they can predict the end of the world, even though Jesus clearly states that there will be no warning. We must be prepared for the Master to return at any moment.

<http://lavistachurchofchrist.org/LVarticles/UnderstandingMatthew24.htm>

SCRIPTURES CONDEMNING THE USE OF ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES

There are more Scriptures condemning the use of alcoholic beverages than will be found on the subjects of lying, adultery, swearing, cheating, hypocrisy, pride, or even blasphemy.

Genesis 9:20-27 - Noah became drunk; the result was immorality and family trouble.

Genesis 19:30-38 - Lot was so drunk he did not know what he was doing; this led to immorality

Leviticus 10:9-11 - God commanded priests not to drink so that they could tell the difference between the holy and the unholy.

Numbers 6:3 - The Nazarites were told to eat or drink nothing from the grape vine.

Deuteronomy 21:20 - A drunken son was stubborn and rebellious.

Deuteronomy 29:5-6 - God gave no grape juice to Israel nor did they have intoxicating drink in the wilderness.

Deuteronomy 32:33 - Intoxicating wine is like the poison of serpents, the cruel venom of asps.

Judges 13:4, 7, 14 - Samson was to be a Nazarite for life. His mother was told not to drink wine or strong drink.

1 Samuel 1:14-15 - Accused, Hannah said she drank no wine.

1 Samuel 25:32-38 - Nabal died after a drunken spree.

2 Samuel 11:13 - By getting Uriah drunk, David hoped to cover his sin.

2 Samuel 13:28-29 - Amnon was drunk when he was killed.

1 Kings 16:8-10 - The king was drinking himself into drunkenness when he was assassinated

1 Kings 20:12-21 - Ben-Hadad and 32 other kings were drinking when they were attacked and defeated by the Israelites.

Esther 1:5-12 - The king gave each one all the drink he wanted. The king was intoxicated when he commanded the queen to come.

Psalms 75:8 - The Lord's anger is pictured as mixed wine poured out and drunk by the wicked.

Proverbs 4:17 - Alcoholic drink is called the wine of violence.

Proverbs 20:1 - Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging.

Proverbs 23:19-20 - A wise person will not be among the drinkers of alcoholic beverages.

Proverbs 23:21 - Drunkenness causes poverty.

Proverbs 23:29-30 - Drinking causes woe, sorrow, fighting, babbling, wounds without cause and red eyes.

Proverbs 23:31 - God instructs not to look at intoxicating drinks.

Proverbs 23:32 - Alcoholic drinks bite like a serpent, sting like an adder.

Proverbs 23:33 - Alcohol causes the drinker to have strange and adulterous

thoughts, produces willfulness, and prevents reformation.

Proverbs 23:34 - Alcohol makes the drinker unstable

Proverbs 23:35 - Alcohol makes the drinker insensitive to pain so he does not perceive it as a warning. Alcohol is habit forming.

Proverbs 31:4-5 - Kings, princes, and others who rule and judge must not drink alcohol. Alcohol perverts good judgment.

Proverbs 31:6-7 - Strong drink could be given to those about to perish or those in pain. Better anesthetics are available today.

Ecclesiastes 2:3 - The king tried everything, including intoxicating drink, to see if it satisfied. It did not.

Ecclesiastes 10:17 - A land is blessed when its leaders do not drink.

Isaiah 5:11-12 - Woe to those who get up early to drink and stay up late at night to get drunk.

Isaiah 5:22 - Woe to "champion" drinkers and "experts" at mixing drinks.

Isaiah 19:14 - Drunken men stagger in their vomit.

Isaiah 22:12-13 - The Israelites choose to drink; their future looks hopeless to them.

Isaiah 24:9 - Drinkers cannot escape the consequences when God judges.

Isaiah 28:1 - God pronounces woe on the drunkards of Ephraim.

Isaiah 28:3 - Proud drunkards shall be trodden down.

Isaiah 28:7 - Priests and prophets stagger and reel from beer and wine, err in vision, and stumble in judgment.

Isaiah 28:8 - Drinkers' tables are covered with vomit and filth.

Isaiah 56:9-12 - Drinkers seek their own gain and expect tomorrow to be just like today.

Jeremiah 35:2-14 - The Rechabites drank no grape juice or intoxicating wine and were blessed.

Ezekiel 44:21 - Again God instructed the priests not to drink wine.

Daniel 1:5-17 - Daniel refused the king's intoxicating wine and was blessed for it along with his abstaining friends.

Daniel 5:1 - Belshazzar, ruler of Babylon; led his people in drinking.

Daniel 5:2-3 - The king, along with his nobles, wives, and concubines, drank from the goblets which had been taken from God's temple.

Daniel 5:4 - Drinking wine was combined with praising false gods.

Daniel 5:23 - God sent word to Belshazzar that punishment would be swift for the evil he had committed.

Hosea 4:11 - Intoxicating wine takes away intelligence.

Hosea 7:5 - God reproves princes for drinking.

Joel 1:5 - Drunkards awake to see God's judgment.

Joel 3:3 - The enemy is judged for selling girls for wine.

Amos 2:8 - Unrighteous acts of Israel included the drinking of wine which had been taken for the payment of fines.

Amos 2:12 - Israel is condemned for forcing Nazarites to drink wine.

Micah 2:11 - Israelites are eager to follow false teachers who prophesy plenty of intoxicating drinks.

Nahum 1:10 - The drunkards of Nineveh will be destroyed by God.

Habakkuk 2:5 - A man is betrayed by wine.

Habakkuk 2:15 - Woe to him that gives his neighbor drink to lower his inhibitions.

Habakkuk 2:16 - Drinking leads to shame.

Matthew 24:48-51 - A drinking servant is unprepared for his Lord's return.

Luke 1:15 - John the Baptist drank neither grape juice nor wine.

Luke 12:45 - Christ warned against drunkenness.

Luke 21:34 - Drunkenness will cause a person not to be ready for the Lord's return.

Romans 13:13 - Do not walk in drunkenness or immorality.

Romans 14:21 - Do not do anything that will hurt your testimony as a believer.

1 Corinthians 5:10-11 - If a Christian brother is a drinker, do not associate with him.

1 Corinthians 6:10 - Drunkards will not inherit the kingdom of God

1 Corinthians 15:34 - Be sober-minded and stop sinning.

Galatians 5:21 - Acts of the sinful nature, such as drunkenness, will prohibit a person from inheriting the kingdom of God.

Ephesians 5:18 - In contrast to being drunk with wine, the believer is to be filled with the Spirit.

1 Thessalonians 5:6-8 - Christians are to be alert and self-controlled, belonging to the day. Drunkards belong to the night and darkness.

1 Timothy 3:2-3 - Bishops (elders) are to be temperate, sober, and not near any wine.

1 Timothy 3:8 - Deacons are to be worthy of respect and not drinkers.

1 Timothy 3:11 - Deacons' wives are to be temperate and sober.

Titus 1:7-8 - An overseer is to be disciplined.

Titus 2:2-3 - The older men and older women of the church are to be temperate and not addicted to wine.

1 Peter 4:3-4 - The past life of drunkenness and carousing has no place in the Christian's life.

ARGUMENTS USED FOR SOCIAL DRINKING

The use of alcoholic beverages has been popular for so long, few people stop to consider whether the Bible actually supports its use or not. Let us look at each example given above to see if it really supports moderate or social drinking.

"Jesus turned water into wine."

"On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Now both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding. And when they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to Him, 'They have no wine.' Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come.' His mother said to the servants, 'Whatever He says to you, do it.' Now there were set there six waterpots of stone, according to the manner of purification of the Jews, containing twenty or thirty gallons apiece. Jesus said to them, 'Fill the waterpots with water.' And they filled them up to the brim. And He said to them, 'Draw some out now, and take it to the master of the feast.' And they took it. When the master of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom. And he said to him, 'Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have well drunk, then the inferior. You have kept the good wine until now!' This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him" (John 2:1-11).

The Greek word being used for the word "wine" is OINOS, a generic word that applies to any beverage derived from grapes whether alcoholic or not. To understand whether alcohol was involved or not, we must examine the context.

A wedding feast was in progress and part way through the celebration, the wine that was purchased had run out. Weddings were big things in ancient days. A wedding feast lasted about a week and to run out of provisions before the end would have been an embarrassment to the new couple and their families. Mary asked Jesus to handle the problem. Jesus had six waterpots filled. These held twenty to thirty gallons a piece, which means when the water was changed to wine, Jesus had made between 120 and 180 gallons of wine. If this wine was alcoholic, then there was more than sufficient quantities available to get the guests well drunk -- especially when you consider that everyone had drunk the original supplies. Yet we know that the Bible condemns drunkenness, such as in Romans 13:13 or 1 Corinthians 6:9-10. Since Jesus did not sin, we know He would not have been the cause of other men's sins (Romans 1:32).

Some point out that the governor of the feast tasted Jesus' wine and declared it to be good -- better than the wine served earlier. The problem with the argument is that one must assume that the higher the alcoholic content of the wine, the better it tastes. Such is definitely not the case. In fact, in a society that lacked refrigerators in every home, fresh juice was prized over juice that had become vinegary or alcoholic from

storage. The governor's declaration does not prove the wine contained alcohol.

Another argument is that the governor mentioned that everyone was already drunk. The Greek word METHUO is used much like the English word "drunk." It literally means "filled to the full." It can be used to refer to a person who has had enough to drink to satisfy them; or if it is referring to an alcoholic beverage, it can refer to a person who has had too much to drink. If the guests at this wedding party were drunk with alcohol, then the governor of the feast had failed in his duties. You see the Jews considered drunkenness such a sin, they had people assigned the task of making sure it didn't happen. This is one of the reasons he was offered the first taste of the new wine brought in. If he thought it might cause drunkenness, he would have ordered it to be watered down. The governor's presence at this feast and his praise of Jesus's wine without an order to water it down is strong indication that the wine was not alcoholic.

Finally, this feast is taking place in Israel where the Old Testament laws were enforced. The Old Testament forbade the use of alcoholic beverages (see Old Testament Beverages for more details). Hence, we must conclude that Jesus did not serve alcoholic beverages.

The result is that the wedding feast does not prove that alcoholic beverages were in use. Instead, there are strong hints that non-alcoholic beverages were available and used.

***"The disciples were accused of being drunk,
so, alcohol must have been in use."***

"When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven. And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language. Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, "Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs -- we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God." So they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "Whatever could this mean?" Others mocking said, "They are full of new wine." But Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them, "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and heed my words. For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day" (Acts 2:1-15).

The charge is that the apostles were full of new wine. The Greek word is GLUEKOS, which literally means "sweet wine." It is a word that refers to unfermented juice. If you recall that the charge came from those mocking the disciples, it makes perfectly good sense. Luke records that there were people present from fifteen different regions of the world and as the apostles spoke, they were all hearing them speak in their native language. But even if I knew one of the languages, there were fourteen others being spoken that I could not comprehend. It would have sounded to those running to the scene as chaos. People couldn't understand what was going on. Others taunted and said, "Oh, they're just drunk on grape juice!" In other words, they are so unable to handle their liquor that grape juice makes them drunk. Peter adroitly uses this as an opening to his sermon. He notes that since it is only nine o'clock in the morning, it is too early for people to be drinking. Yes, even in those days, people who were looking to get drunk generally did it at night (1Thessalonians 5:7).

Once again, this verse does not prove alcoholic beverages were in use. In fact, the crowd was charging the apostles with getting drunk on grape juice. The charge was deliberately facetious because those making the charge were mocking the disciples.

"Older women were only told not to be given to much wine."

"But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine: that the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience; the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things-- that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed" (Titus 2:1-5).

The Greek phrase under consideration is ME OINO POLLO DEDOULOMENAS, which literally means not enslaved to much wine. In contrast they were to train the young women to be, among other things, discreet. The word translated "admonish" in the New King James Version, is from the Greek word SOPHRONIZOSIN that means "to train in self-control." The word "discreet" comes from the related Greek work SOPHRONAS, which means "self-controlled." The root word SOPHRON literally means "safe mind." It refers to someone who is intellectually sound of mind or rational. The Jewish philosopher Philo defined the opposite of SOPHROSUNE, namely APHROSUNE, as a person who "inflamed by wine drowns the whole life in ceaseless and unending drunkenness." Paul is making the same point: older women are not to be drunkards enslaved by the overuse of wine but to teach younger women to live as they live -- sober.

In two passages, 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 2:2, the word "sober" (SOPHRON) is joined in a list with the word "temperate" (NEPHALEOUS). As the commentator Adam Clarke explains, "He must be vigilant, NEPHALEOS, from NE, not, and PINO, to drink. Watchful; for as one who drinks is apt to sleep, so he who abstains from it is more likely to keep awake, and attend to his work and charge." Though temperate today refers to

moderation, it wasn't all that long ago that temperate meant abstinence, as in the women's temperance movement which sought the banning of alcohol. Albert Barnes, another commentator says, "This word (NEPHALIOS) occurs only here [1 Timothy 3:2] and in verse 11; Titus 2:2. It means, properly, sober, temperate, abstinent, especially in respect to wine; then, sober-minded, watchful, circumspect." Hence, elders and older men were charge with both being sober and not to drink. Now are you prepared to say that older men are not to drink, but older woman may drink so long as it is not in excess?

A very similar phrase is found in 1 Timothy 3:3 and Titus 1:7 where men seeking to be elders are told to be "not addicted to wine." Actually, the literal translation of the phrase me PARONINOS is "not near to wine." Of this phrase, the commentators Lee and Burn say, "The ancient PAROINOS was a man accustomed to attend drinking parties, and, as a consequence, to become intimately associated with strong drink." Albert Barnes said, "The Greek word (PAROINOS) occurs in the New Testament only here [1 Timothy 3:3] and in Titus 1:7. It means, properly, by wine; that is, spoken of what takes place by or over wine, as revelry, drinking-songs, etc. Then it denotes, as it does here, one who sits by wine; that is, who is in the habit of drinking it ... It means that one who is in the habit of drinking wine, or who is accustomed to sit with those who indulge in it, should not be admitted to the ministry. The way in which the apostle mentions the subject here would lead us fairly to suppose that he did not mean to commend its use in any sense; that he regarded it as dangerous and that he would wish the ministers of religion to avoid it altogether."

To tell a group of elderly ladies not to be enslaved by the overuse of wine is not necessarily an implication that moderate use in social settings is allowed. Other words within the same context show that Paul has in mind that people should not be using alcohol casually. Could wine (OINOS) be used? Most certainly! In its non-alcoholic form, it makes a pleasant drink. In its vinegar form, it is used in cooking. In its alcoholic form it can be used as medicine. None of these proper uses constitute an overuse of OINOS. That is why you don't find a direct forbiddance of OINOS. Its use had to be limited.

"Paul told Timothy to drink a little wine for his stomach's sake."

"No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities" (1 Timothy 5:23).

Paul is not instructing Timothy to use OINOS (wine) casually at dinner. Timothy had a stomach ailment and other problems for which Paul recommended that he use a little wine to treat the symptoms. Especially notice what is implied here. Timothy normally drank water exclusively. He was not in the habit of using any grape beverage at all. Paul had to encourage him to ease up on his total abstinence so as to use a little wine for its medicinal properties.

Wine was used in the New Testament days for medical purposes. For example, in the parable of the good Samaritan, "So he went to him and bandaged his wounds,

pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him" (Luke 10:34). However, medical uses do not imply acceptance of casual use. Valium can be used to relax injured muscles, but valium can be abused when casually taken. I knew a man dying of cancer who needed a mild pain killer. He was instructed by his doctor to drink a glass of sherry before bed time so he might sleep in more comfort. This is a proper use of alcoholic beverages.

Hence, once again we fail to find support for social drinking or moderate drinking. Instead we find that at least one Christian strongly avoided all use of wine and had to be encouraged to take some when he needed it for his medical condition.

<https://www.lavistachurchofchrist.org/cms/what-is-wrong-with-drinking-so-long-as-it-is-done-in-moderation/>

THE ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

The church is a kingdom over which Christ rules as king (1 Timothy 6:15; John 18:37; John 19:19). Christians are citizens in this kingdom (Colossians 1:13; Hebrews 12:28; Revelation 1:9). The world is the territory of this kingdom (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8). The new birth is the way we enter this kingdom (John 3:5; Acts 2:38, 42; Romans 6:3-4).

One Head, One King—Christ

The church is the body of Christ and Christ is its only head (Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:4). He has all authority (Matthew 28:18; Colossians 1:18). He has never given this authority to anyone else. Because Christ is the head, we take our instructions from Him. Because He is king, we must obey Him (Ephesians 5:24).

The church has no earthly headquarters. The headquarters of Christ's church is in Heaven. Each congregation of the Lord's body is independent and self-ruling. There is no pope, council, conference, or group of people controlling all the congregations of the Lord's body.

Elders

Elders are to be appointed in every church (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). In the New Testament, elders are also called presbyters (1 Timothy 4:14); bishops (Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1-2); overseers (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2); pastors (Ephesians 4:11-12); and shepherds (1 Peter 5:1-4). The word "pastor" is simply another word for "shepherd." Preachers are never called pastors in the New Testament. The elders of the local congregation are the pastors (shepherds) of each local church (1 Peter 5:1-4).

Qualifications for elders are listed in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-13. In addition to being a faithful Christian, an elder must be a man with a wife and faithful children. He cannot be a new member and be qualified. Also, there must be more than one elder serving in the local congregation. The Bible says "elders" (plural) (Acts 14:23; 20:17-18, 28). These elders are to guide, guard, feed, and rule the flock of God (1 Peter 5:1-4; Acts 20:28; 1 Timothy 5:17; Hebrews 13:17).

Deacons

Deacons are to be appointed in every church (Philippians 1:1). Their qualifications are listed in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. The work of deacons would include what was done as recorded in Acts 6:1-6. Again, deacons can only be men. Women are not qualified to be deacons because they cannot be a husband of one wife (1 Timothy 3:12).

Preachers

Preachers have the responsibility to preach the word (2 Timothy 4:1-5). As with elders and deacons, preachers are males (1 Timothy 2:8-15). They are evangelists, ministers of the Word of God (2 Timothy 4:5). In the New Testament, preachers are never called by titles such as "Pastor," "Reverend," "Doctor," or "Father" (Matthew 23:8-12).

Members

Anyone who has obeyed the Gospel is a member of the Lord's church (Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:27; Ephesians 1:3). Members of the church must obey the elders of the church (Hebrews 13:17). They are to teach the lost (Acts 8:4; 2 Timothy 2:24-25), and practice pure religion (James 1:27).

The leadership of the Lord's church is made up of qualified men. If a church is not willing to have this kind of organization, it is not the church that Jesus built. If a church has only one elder it is not the church Jesus built. If a church has women elders, women deacons, or women preachers, it is not the church Jesus built.

MIRACLES HAVE CEASED

The first century church was endowed with numerous spiritual gifts. Paul listed nine of these gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10. "For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues." These miraculous gifts were bestowed by the laying on of the apostles' hands (Acts 8:14-17). These gifts provided instruction, confirmation, protection and stability to the first century church. In its infancy, the church of Christ did not have the completed revelation of the New Testament. It would take some sixty-five years for it to be fully revealed. Spiritual gifts were given, therefore, to provide what was needed until God's Word would be fully revealed.

The miraculous gifts of the first century church were not to be a permanent part of the Lord's church. There was going to come a day when the miraculous manifestations of the Spirit would cease. There are several passages of scripture that support this assertion. We will look at three texts:

1. In Acts chapter 8, an evangelist named Philip went into Samaria to preach the gospel of Christ. Philip's efforts were rewarded. "But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women" (Acts 8:12). Philip could work miracles (Acts 8:6, 13), but he did not have the ability to pass miracles on to others. When the apostles heard of the redemption of the Samaritans, they sent two of their number to Samaria. These two men, Peter and John, laid hands on the new converts so they could receive the miraculous powers of the Holy Spirit. "Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit: (for as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit" (Acts 8:14-17). **Note: it was only the apostles who had the power to pass on miraculous gifts.** When the last apostle died, therefore, the ability to pass on miraculous gifts also ended. John was the last apostle to die. He passed from this life near the close of the first century. The ability to pass on spiritual gifts, therefore, ended at his death. A few people may have lived into the second century who had the ability to perform miracles, but once they died the age of miraculous gifts came to a close.

2. A second passage that reveals the end of spiritual gifts is Ephesians 4:7-16. In verse seven, Paul acknowledges that the Ephesians had received spiritual gifts. "But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ." This ability had been predicted by the Old Testament prophets (Ephesians 4:8-10). These abilities were scattered among many offices within the church (Ephesians 4:11) and served very important purposes: "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12). After discussing the above things, Paul declared how long these spiritual gifts would last. "Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13). The word "till" sets forth a time limit on miraculous gifts. These gifts would continue until something came to pass, "Till we all come in the unity of the faith." Some believe that Paul is teaching that there would come a time when all religious faiths who acknowledge that Jesus is the Christ will be united. However, Paul did not say: "Till we all come to the unity of faith." He said: "Till we all come to the unity of the faith." "The faith" is the system of faith which produces faith in man (Romans 1:17; 10:17). It is the completed revelation of the New Testament. We see this use of "the faith" in many places in the New Testament (Acts 6:7; Jude 3). Thus, spiritual gifts were to continue until the New Testament, the faith, was revealed in its entirety. This Word would be able to protect the church from the deceivers who abounded in the first century. No more would the church be "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lay in wait to deceive" (Ephesians 4:14). Instead, they could speak the truth in love and grow up as a strong body to accomplish the work of God (Ephesians 4:15-16).
3. The final passage we will discuss takes us back to 1 Corinthians. Three chapters are devoted to miraculous gifts in this epistle. The church at Corinth was divided over these gifts. Some were trying to exalt one gift above another. In chapter 12, Paul taught that all gifts came from the same Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:4). Paul also taught that all gifts were needed in order for the church to work as a harmonious body (1 Corinthians 12:12-27). In chapter 13, Paul elaborated upon what he calls "a more excellent way," the way of love. Instead of quarreling over gifts, the Corinthians should be showing love one to another. Why was love so important? It would be what would continue when miracles had ceased. "Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away" (1

Corinthians 13:8). If these words did not apply directly to the Corinthians, then Paul's argumentation was futile. The Corinthians were going to see miracles come to an end. Their love for each other would need to endure. In verses 9 and 10, the apostle told the church when the gifts would cease. "For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away." There is no disagreement that the phrase, "that which is in part," refers to spiritual gifts. Spiritual gifts would last until "that which is perfect is come." Here's where the controversy begins. What is "that which is perfect"? "Perfect" means "full, complete or entire." When the full, complete, written revelation of the New Testament was come, then miraculous gifts would be done away. In James 1:25, God's Word is referred to as "the perfect law of liberty." It took until the close of the first century to reveal this covenant to man in its perfection. When it came in its fullness, the miraculous, that which was in part, was done away.

There are many who do not believe miracles have ceased. These individuals believe they have witnessed miracles. Some believe they themselves have performed miracles. Such, however, is not the case. Trickery, deceit, and false claims are not miracles. A true miracle is undeniable. When the horrible lesions of leprosy are instantly replaced by skin as soft and fresh as a little child's (2 Kings 5:14), no one can honestly deny that a miracle has occurred. If you know someone who from birth has been lame, lying down in public places and is suddenly able to walk and leap (Acts 3:2-8), you cannot honestly deny that a miracle has occurred. However, I can easily and honestly deny that anything miraculous has happened when I see modern day events that some claim to be miracles. In fact, most people will have no trouble dismissing them as fake. That is not the case with the miracles we read of in God's word. Even the men who wanted Jesus dead, believed His miracles were genuine (John 11:47-53), not because they wanted to believe, but because His miracles were undeniable.

Miracles came to an end at the beginning of the second century. They served their purposes and were taken away. We have the written Word of God in its fullness. Paul said that it is all sufficient for our needs (2 Timothy 3:16-17). We need to study it, apply it, and live by it until we die. It alone will judge us in the last day (John 12:48).

http://www.oceansidechurchofchrist.net/Articles/2008/2008-10-12_Miracles_Have_Ceased.html