

The Chapel Ministry



CLEARCREEK
CHAPEL

1 Thessalonians

Russ Kennedy

*S*avoring the *S*upremacy of *G*od
*S*tudying the *W*ord of *G*od
*S*haping the *P*eople of *G*od
*S*preaching the *G*ospel of *G*od

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Revision # 13 as of October 10, 1996
Doc: C:\DOCS\STUDY\SUNDAY~2\1 Thessalonians.Doc

Introduction

The time is around AD 51. The place is the city of Corinth. The scene is shows an older man, somewhat bent and stooped, sitting on a bench in the city park with a younger man. They are in animated discussion, often punctuated by periods of prayer. There seems to real happiness as if a reunion and real concern as if danger. And there is. For this scene is that of the Apostle Paul receiving the report from the church at Thessalonica.

That church was founded by Paul in this Macedonian city on his second missionary journey. Paul's discussion of the Christ in the Jewish synagogue and the conversion of God-fearing Gentiles raised the jealousy of the Jews. They drug Jason, who was Paul and Silas' host, before the city magistrates accusing him of harboring traitors. Not content with having run Paul and Silas out of Thessalonica, these Jews also caused an uproar in Berea forcing Paul to go to Athens. It is not clear whether Paul stayed in Thessalonica for 3 weeks or for longer. We do know that in the time he was there, he taught the church what seems to us to be quite a lot of doctrine.

After Silas and Timothy caught up with Paul in Athens, he sent Timothy back to Thessalonica and then received his report while staying in Corinth. From that report, Paul wrote the Book of First Thessalonians with its emphasis on *the Parousia*, coming of the Lord.

This was truly a very unusual church. They were a church whose characteristics and marks we should carefully note.

A Commended Church

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Introduction

We have a friend who is a pilot of F4 Phantom jets configured for reconnaissance. He has received several medals of commendation for special and unusual service. One was awarded when, in riding in the back seat giving another pilot a check ride, the pilot was killed when a large bird came through the wind screen and hit the pilot full in the face. Ray was able to gain control of the aircraft, and under incredible conditions, return to base, flying from the back seat with few flight instruments, and land the fighter. It was an incredible feat of courage, ability and resourcefulness. He has further been commended with medals for action which cannot even be discussed.

So, I want you to think of this passage as a medal of commendation which God through Paul is awarding the church at Thessalonica. This is a chapter of commendation. Paul writes to say that there are things about them that brought him great joy. In writing these paragraphs, the apostle identifies the qualities in a church which please God and cause that church to be effective *in ways that conform to God's plan and purpose*.

Salutation

In the days of the writing of the Scripture, letters were written following something of a standard form. A salutation identifying the author and the recipients would be followed by a section in which blessings, commendations and connections would be pronounced. Then would come the body of the letter consisting of "matters" which prompted the letter. This would be followed by an ethical section with its exhortations. The letter usually closed with greetings from friends.

The salutation identifies our author as Paul accompanied and assisted by Silas (Silvanus is the Latin form of his name) and Timothy. The recipients are the church located geographically in Thessalonica and spiritually in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The paragraphs in chapter one are the commendation and connection portion of this letter. Paul commends them by expressing his confidence in their salvation and by examining the character of their sanctification.

The Confidence in their Salvation

(v.2-5)

The letter opens as do most of them with an emphasis on prayer. The confidence he has in their conversion motivates Paul to pray for them.

- **Prayer is important in ministry.** Let us not miss this. Thanksgiving and petitioning for others is an effective ministry on behalf of others. The power of ministry never rises higher than the prayers for and in that ministry.
- **Prayer was needed by the church.** Too often, in the midst of our skills and our talents and our programs, we do not value prayer. We think that what we are doing is the essence of ministry and prayer is useful but not significant priority. We must make prayer the visible engine of all our ministry.

Expression of that Confidence

(v.3-4)

Due to the Fruit of their Salvation

(v.3)

The faith, love, hope triad occurs so often in Paul's writings. It is the heartbeat of truly saved people. These concepts are fleshed out in the lives of the church.

- Work of faith - how what you believe is being put to work. Can you be commended by specific things you are doing because of what you believe and would not do if your belief was different?
- Labor of love - how your love is being expressed in laborious toil and sacrificial deeds. Can you be commended for hard labor which cost you much on behalf of those you love?
- Steadfastness of hope - how your hope, that which is in Christ who is in heaven, is causing you to endure now. Could you be singled out for simply keeping on going because you are focused on Christ in heaven?

How our hearts ought to be encouraged as they resonate with resounding "yes" to this. Paul's confidence is expressed not only in his remembering and reflecting on the fruit of their salvation, but knowing the root of that salvation.

Due to the Root of their Salvation

(v.4)

He knew with great confidence that they had been chosen by God; they were part of God's elect. This sentence causes me to reflect on the following:

- It is possible to know if you are one of the elect. Reformed thinkers have not always agreed on this. Paul makes it manifestly clear

that he is not discussing a theory of election, but the fact of God's electing *of them*. The grammar in this paragraph encourages us to say that if we can remember and reflect on these qualities then we can also know this fact.

- Election is an expression of God's love. It is a doctrine which should not cause fear, but cultivate love to God. They were beloved of God because He had chosen them. That God has chosen us is an amazing manifestation that He loves us.
 - Election is personal. The detractors of this doctrine will try to say that election is not personal; that is to say, that God does not choose individuals. They say that God elected Israel as a nation. Others will say that God choose those who would become part of the corporate Body of Christ. Paul says, "I know God choose *you*."
- How could Paul have this confidence? If election is God showing His love in choosing people, how can I really know, like Paul knew of them, that I am one of the elect? The rest of this paragraph and even further, the rest of this chapter answers that.

The Grounds of that Confidence

(v.5)

Here is how Paul knew. See the connective?

The Impact of the Message

The preaching of the gospel in their midst were not merely things that were said, but were attended or accompanied by:

- Power - In the whole of this book, the power of the gospel, is in converted people and transformed lives.
- Holy Spirit - Think about this. The gospel came with the Holy Spirit. The gospel became the channel by which the Spirit brought them to spiritual life out of their spiritual deadness.
- Full (deep) conviction - The gospel gripped them, convicting them of their sin and sinfulness, bring deep repentance and genuine conversion.

The Character of the Messengers

The connection here is somewhat difficult. Paul may be referring back by saying that he knew they were chosen just as they well knew what kind of people they proved to be. He may also be pointing forward to why the believers modeled their lives after him.

What ever the connection is supposed to be, it is very clear that Paul is grounding their confidence in the message in the character and conduct of the messengers. The text literally says, "You know of what sort we had become among you for your sake." Though the gospel

came in power attended by the Holy Spirit convicting people, God's men came giving themselves up for the new believers, which became more evident the longer they were with them.

How we need ministers of the gospel, missionaries and Christian leaders whose lives are lived in such a way as to ever increase their converts confidence in the their ministry.

- ↳ In a sense, the character of the messengers was imparted to the new believers.

Character of their Sanctification

(v.6-10)

The church is to be commended because of the characteristics of its sanctification.

A Discipling People

(v.6-7)

The essence of discipleship: modeling after others in pursuit of becoming a model for others.

Following Models

(v.6)

They eagerly embraced the Word with the joy and delight of the Holy Spirit even though it was coming to them in the context of the pressure of affliction and suffering. This caused them to look to models to imitate. They found them in Paul and in the Lord.

Discipleship involves both the communication of truth and the illustrating of lifestyle. I have carefully selected mentors whose lives and ministries I have emulated as it seems true to the Word and true to Christ. We need to do this as individuals as well as a church.

- Discipleship** We follow mentors as they follow Christ. We eagerly embrace and welcome and receive the Word. We accept the shaping power of affliction and suffering. And we give our affections to the control of the Holy Spirit so that He might awaken them with joy and delight.

Becoming Examples

(v.7)

They became examples to other believers. The word here refers to a mark made by a blow, an impression, a stamp made by a die. The impression on them by the process of verse 7 formed them into living examples. This is the goal of discipleship—transforming beginning believers through discipleship so that they make disciples of others.



Their discipleship involved an eagerness to receive the Word, a willingness to emulate mentors, being shaped by the powerful blows of circumstances, suffering and pressure while delighting in the sanctifying work of the Spirit. In the end, they became sharply defined imprints and examples for other believers.

An Evangelizing People

(v.8)

Paul commends their evangelism for the clarity of its message and scope of its impact. Their evangelism involved “sounding forth” so that every one heard about their faith. They told their story. And it was heard all over the place.

Notice that Paul does not commend them for the size of the response. It does not matter how many “decisions” were made or how many came down the aisle or how many were baptized. Paul is not Bible notching. Paul does not commend them for the supposed evangelism of just living it before the lost.

They were evangelistic because they heralded the Word, they told their story, their testimony. Evangelism is essentially telling the story of the Christ and His Cross within the context of a life honoring to the Lord. They had done it so effectively that Paul (probably speaking in hyperbole) does not have to say anything!

A Maturing People

(v.9-10)

Now watch this carefully. When their evangelism had gone full circle and came back around to Paul, their understanding of truth had grown and matured significantly. There is a growing clarity in their ability to express what their conversion and continuing in Christ meant. Watch this by a comparison of verse 3 with verses 9-10.

Verse 3	Verses 9-10
work of faith	turned to God from idols
labor of love	serve a living and true God
steadfastness of hope	to wait for His Son from heaven

These are not strange categories for us.

- There are idols of our heart that we must turn from by turning to God. These idols are lies we believe which cause us to treasure anything more than we value God.
- We need a fresh sense of toiling hard at serving God for the love of it. Do you understand what we mean when we say that we, for the love of God, must be doing sacrificial deeds of love for one another? “All that matters is faith working by love”, Paul wrote the Galatians.
- Are we a people marked by our expectant waiting of Christ from heaven? His resurrection and ascension into heaven assures us that He will return again.

Verse 10 brings us to the first of many references to the Lord’s return. Many of us were brought up in churches where only one view of

prophecy, one eschatological schema was taught and tolerated. Many of you hold very strongly to a particular view. It is not my purpose, nor the purpose of Paul in Thessalonians, to lay out some schematic of events which will end the debate too often dividing the differing views. When in the interest of defending our schema, we lose the holiness and expectancy that the *Parousia* is to produce, we have greatly erred. But if we have no eschatology which energizes our holiness and focuses our expectancy on Christ coming from heaven, then we equally err.

So then, is the final phrase of this paragraph assuring us that we will not go through the whole period commonly, but incorrectly, called the tribulation? Will we be delivered from 7 years of wrath? Or is this verse assuring us that we will be delivered from the shortened period of wrath poured out on an unbelieving world when Jesus comes? Or is this verse assuring us that we will never experience the wrath of God in hell?

Notice something with me. The Greek preposition *ek* occurs three times in this portion. It means to come from out of the midst of. So, is Jesus coming from out of heaven? Yes. Was Jesus raised up from out of the dead? Yes. So we will be delivered from out of the midst of wrath. Frankly, this verse simply assures us that when the wrath of God falls, the saints will be delivered from out of its midst. In other passages we are reminded to consider Noah and Job.

I assure you loved ones that Jesus is coming. When He comes He will come in glory for those who believe and wrath upon those who do not. And a great will be the glory for the saints for we will be delivered from the wrath on the sinners.

And where will you be on that fateful day?

Marks of a Commendable Ministry

1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

Introduction

The great composer, Mussogorsky, attended an art exhibition. There on display were paintings by both promising and established artists. As he wandered from painting to painting, several stirred him. He began to think, “What would this painting sound like in music?” He went home and composed what we now know as that great symphonic piece called simply *Pictures at an Exhibition*. Each piece represents one the paintings and evokes the images of that painting in glorious music.

These paragraphs do the same for ministry. Using three images, Paul captures in three word pictures, the essence of a Biblical ministry.

The church was born through faithful preaching.

The church was nurtured through faithful pastoring.

A Faithful Steward

(v.1-6)

The first mark of a Biblical ministry is *faithfulness*. This is a word we must constantly stress today. In day when success is man’s measure of a minister, we must remind ourselves that God measures the a man’s or woman’s faithfulness.

Boldness in Opposition

(v.1-2[3])

He had been opposed before coming to Thessalonica. Yet he continued to preach with boldness and confidence.

But he faced opposition there. Paul uses a word that would evoke an athletic contest. It provides an interesting perspective on preaching does it not? Notice the characteristics of opposition faced by Biblical ministry. This opposition wrongly charges of:

- Error in doctrine. The word can refer to perversion (in the sense of something turned from its normal use), speculation, improper reasoning or simply untruth.
- Wrong motives. How often the minister of the Word has his motives wrongly judged.
- Deceit or attempting to trick the congregation. The idea here is of baiting a trap. The minister may be wrongly accused through his Biblical arguing of simply entrapping people by logic and reason.

- Trying to please people with flattery. Ministers, in trying to be gentle in their care for people, may be accused of replacing communication with manipulation.
- Using ministry as a pretext for greed. In our day of the popular health and wealth gospel, this attack is leveled sometimes at all ministers based on the obvious evidence of a few.

But sadly, many ministers stand rightly to these charges. There are certainly elders, particularly vocational elders, who preach error. There are those who preach the truth from wrong motives. There are others whose positions may not be Biblical, but do use specious argument to prove a fraudulent position. How many ministers, in this day of self-centered, man-focused, felt needs ministries, are prone to a form if not to actual flattery—to the speaking what one wants to hear and what one already thinks of oneself to gain affirmation and acceptance. Those who have given up much in terms of the world's wealth to minister the gospel so often suffer because of the brazen greed and flaunted wealth of some so-called ministers of the cross.

Integrity in Preaching

(v.3-5)

We must note the centrality of the gospel in Biblical ministry.

- Speak the gospel with boldness (v.2)
- Approved to receive the gospel as a trust (stewardship) (v.4)
- Impart the gospel with sacrifice (v.8)
- Proclaim (announce with authority) the gospel (v.9)

Since the gospel message is central, then integrity is demanded in the manner and method of our ministry.

They preached with earnestness in their appeal—there was a sense of urgency and confidence, because they were being honest and even-handed with the text and the truth. Verses 3 and 4 portray that contrast. In spite of what they were being accused of doing (v.3), they were preaching as ones who had been approved by God and had been given something valuable to guard and share. They spoke with confidence and courage because they were not adjusting the message for the audience to please them, but in the fear of the Lord, preaching the Word in the presence of the God who examines not only what they say, but why they say it.

Paul points out that the congregation was witness to the externals while God was a witness to the internals. This is the standard we must all use when gauging the integrity of the minister.

Humility in Office

(v.6)

Paul came to them as an apostle. This gave him both rights and authority, particularly, once they were converted and were being disciplined. Your elders come as pastors and preachers with authority. But it is never an authority that is personal nor absolute. It is relational to the Word and defined by the Word.

There is a deep sense of ministerial humility that is a needed corrective in two areas of abuse.

- Praise - how easy it is to transform the preaching of the cross into opportunity for self-promotion and praise. The true minister is not looking for the praise or glory that men give, but that which God gives.
- Power - how titles and pomp and prestige and power have soiled men's souls in the ministry. The true minister is one who, having authority, does not assert it on his own behalf.

So a faithful ministry is not man-pleasing, wealth building nor self-seeking. It is marked by boldness, integrity and humility.

- ↳ Verse 7 opens by making the connection. "We did not operate from a position of power, but one of care and nurture."

A Caring Mother

(v.7-9)

The second mark of a Biblical ministry is *gentleness*. This opens a whole view of Paul's ministry we do not often associate with Paul. Yet it is common for him to view his ministry this way.

Tender in Care

(v.7)

The illustration builds a model for ministry. All the images here are meant to evoke a sense of tenderness and nurture. A Biblical ministry must have its nurturing, encouraging side. As we will see, this is not all that a ministry must be, but it is necessary. The tender nurturing care is with its infants and children. In fact, there may even be an allusion to the simple or mentally handicapped. Because infants and babes in Christ are fragile, then we need to nurture them in tender care.

Loving in Sacrifice

(v.8)

The focus is on how relationships motivate to sacrifice. It brings great pleasure and delight to one who loves his congregation to not only to share the gospel but to sacrifice his life. In fact, this becomes the measure of that love and tender care. This is the acid test: does this

minister who says he loves us actually impart to us the gospel and is he pouring out his life for us.

Continual in Labor

(v.9)

How did they know that Paul was this to them? He had come and labored as a tent-maker so as not to be a financial burden to them. He labored all the time for his daily bread and their spiritual good. He sacrificed his right to be supported while investing every waking moment as a single person for the proclamation of the gospel.

This standard we may hold in principle, but not to all in practice. Many (if not most) elders will be married with the qualifying responsibilities that go with it. But it does mean that ministry may be measured by the effort that goes into it. Too many vocational elders have carved out a nice living for themselves. May God preserve us from the rot of laziness that infects too much of the ministry. And may God deliver us from the misguided frenetic activity that too often passes for Biblical ministry.

May we continually labor in loving sacrifice to tenderly nurture and care for the spiritual infants and children in our congregations.

- ↳ But he goes on to paint one more illustration—one that relates more to those who have reached some maturity in growth.

A Concerned Father

(v.10-12)

The last mark of a Biblical ministry is *holiness*. The elders of the church must have a life marked by the grace of holiness.

Holy in Behavior

(v.10)

The conduct of the ministers must be:

- Holy - Men whose devotion to and delight in God perfumes their life and behavior with purity and holiness.
- Right(eous) - The implication is that of being innocent. He may stand accused, but he has been found innocent by God.
- Without fault - The word refers to one being blameless. We understand this word today. The ministers of the gospel may well be involved in the crashes and messes of life, but they will be without fault as to their cause.

These words are very close in meaning. The cadence of their repetition is meant set the elders to marching to the tune of holiness. These words are adverbs to describe their behavior and conduct towards believers.

Personal in Ministry

(v.11)

This verse actually turns on how fathers, because it is their own children they are dealing with, are very personal in their correction, instruction and encouragement. You very well know that there is a big difference in how you treat your own children in this matter. It makes a big difference to me as a pastor that you are the children I am responsible for.

Again we have a repetition of three things attempting to convey a ministry which is engaged with believers to powerfully urge them on. We have turned these verbs of action into adjectives of feeling. The Bible consistently sees encouragement, not in modern terms of how I feel, but as an action to stimulate one's will. Do you sense the urgency of these words?

So, what is so important to a Biblical ministry that urgency characterizes its exhortation and encouragement?

Worthy in Purpose

(v.12)

A Biblical ministry is pressing upon people the necessity to live lives worthy of the God who has divinely summoned them to share in His Kingdom and Glory. Here is an elevating motive for godly living. Are we living worthy of God? Is every facet of our lives worthy of the kingdom and glory of God?

Why is it that we are to live worthy of a God who has called to His *own* kingdom and glory?

- Kingdom - As the king He has the right to determine what conduct and behavior is worthy of Him. It is a KINGDOM into which we have been brought and born. And it is God's OWN kingdom.
- Glory - Here is the standard of that King and kingdom. We are to live lives that are worthy of magnifying the worth and value of God.

I know that this may just sound like lofty words. It is possible to hear this with inner affirmation that never becomes holy living. So, I must urge you to reflect on yourself and your station in life. We know what it means to measure up to something. We all try to measure up to standards at work, to expectations at home. It is a mark of our sinfulness that we can well know what it means to measure up the glory of God in the Kingdom of God and simply go on living as we please.

Conclusion

- How we need faithfulness in ministry today. We need elders who, in spite of opposition and false accusation, will preach the Word boldly and with authority. We need ministry which is not simply

sucking up to Christians, which handles the Word even-handily and has a deep concern for personal holiness in the light of the Kingdom and glory of God.

- Biblical ministry must flow out of a deep love and affection for the congregation which is measured by the commitment to impart the Word and sacrifice one's life. Personality may differ. So it is wrong to measure the love of the elder for the church based on some static personality type. In the long run, the only way you know if someone truly loves you is in submission or sacrifice. Will they live to serve you and will they die for you.
- One warning that we must heed from the images of this passage. If we becoming doting mothers and pampering fathers in ministry we will rear spoiled, self-centered and disobedient children in the faith.
- Ministry will treat people in different stages of Christian maturity differently. Babes and children in Christ will be nurtured and cared for with tenderness and long patience. But Christians who ought to be and are growing in maturity, will be exhorted and encouraged with increasing urgency to live as they ought to live. This is so obvious to us in the physical realm it is astonishing that we miss it in the spiritual. It is right for us to tenderly care for and nurture and be very patient with our tiny babies. But we had better be telling our teens and adults to *get on with it*.
- Are you living a life worthy of God? What if God were to publicly display exactly what you are thinking now? Would that embarrass you just on human terms? Do you measure up to God's standard?
- Does it even matter to you? Loved ones, if it really, in your heart of hearts, does not matter enough to you *to make a change*, then I fear for the state of your soul.

The Marks of an Enduring Church

1 Thessalonians 2:13-3:13

Introduction

Open with the illustration of Dr. Albert Mohler completely reversing the liberalism at Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville. Title of his message, *Don't Do Something, Just Stand There*.

There are two problems in approaching this text.

- We may trivialize what they were going through by relating it to the banalities of the “suffering” of much of the church today.
- In the rush to make this passage relevant, we may not be gripped by the need to be taught, believe and begin to assert truths *for an experience which we have not yet had*.

It is my desire to avoid both.

Analytical Outline

- **Situation** 2:13-16
They were experiencing severe persecution comparable to that experienced by the church in Jerusalem.
- **Support** 2:17-20
They were assured of Paul's desire and attempts to see them because of his devotion to them.
- **Solution** 3:1-5
They were informed as to why Timothy had come to them and what he hoped to accomplish while there.
- **Standing** 3:6-10
They were acknowledged as having stood firm in the midst of it all as Timothy had reported to Paul.
- **Supplication** 3:11-13
They were prayed for that they might have a maturing faith, an abounding love and a growing holiness.

Perspectives for Understanding Affliction

This church had great spiritual growth and tremendous spiritual challenges. The difficulties they faced from the outside were threatening to weaken them on the inside. Now the specifics of how they come to us may (in fact, usually are) different. But the underlying characteristics and causes are the same.

Characteristics

How does Paul characterize the difficulties that the church at Thessalonica faced?

Affliction**(1:6;3:3)**

The word means *pressure from circumstances*. This is the destined lot of true believers. No one is exempt from the pressure and stress of affliction in the midst of difficult circumstances. Therefore we are to exult in them (Romans 5:3), endure them (Hebrews 10:33) and not lose heart when others go through them (Ephesians 3:13). We are commended as servants in the midst of them (2 Corinthians 6:4).

Suffer(ing)**(2:14)**

This is the same word as is used to describe the sufferings of the Lord. It may point to doing without or suffering so as to benefit another. Paul used it to describe the sufferings of the Galatian Christians at the hands of the Judiazers. This suffering is that particularly related to the cross and the meaning of the cross.

Persecuted**(2:15)**

The word means *driven out and rejected*. The root of the word means *to pursue, to be hunted down*. It always is that which comes at the hands of our fellow man. This is the suffering that was predicted for us by Christ, is the mark of the blessed in the kingdom (Matthew 5:10) and the proper response is to pray for those by whose hand this comes (Matthew 5:44).

Contrary**(2:15)**

This word refers to *winds that blow against us and hinder our progress*. We will always have that which is opposed to us. Jesus most often exhibited His greatest power when the winds and the seas were against them. Paul uses this word to describe his casting of his vote to bring martyrdom to Stephen. The more we are trying to make headway, the more we may find ourselves opposed.

Hindered**(2:18)**

This word means *a road so broken up that it hinders our progress*. The Galatian Christians had been running the spiritual race well, but someone had hindered them (Galations 5:7). Peter says that husbands do not treat their wives as joint-heirs of God's grace will have their prayers hindered (1 Peter 3:7). We are to watch lest what happens to us keeps us from reaching the God-given goals we have set for ourselves.

↳ It is not too much different for us today. We as Christians feel the pressure and stress of circumstances. We should be experiencing suffering as a result of sacrifice for others. We may well be opposed to the point that we are being pursued and hunted down and driven out.

We find that often the way to finish what we are trying to accomplish is being broken up and impeded. The question then is, “By whom?”

Causes

These things are not the blind operation of “chance”. Chance cannot cause anything to happen—it is merely the mathematical probability that an event may happen. Events have causes behind them. Paul points to several specific causes behind the pressures and problems that they faced.

The Hostility of People

(2:13-16)

The ministry of Paul and the church had come under the attack of the religious Jews. The very people who had the Word of God and the expectation of the Kingdom of God were the ones who attempted to keep the gospel from the Gentiles. They had missed the broader hope of both the Old and New Testament that all the people groups would know the Lord. As a result, the wrath of God would rest on them all the way out to the end.

We may face the hostility of unbelievers. Particularly when our evangelism confronts them with sin and judgment will this opposition come. But even worse is when we face the hostility of people who claim to believe the Bible and are religious, but are not converted. Sometimes, the hostility of our own family will be the hardest to bear.

The Malice of Satan

(2:17-18;3:5)

We see the malice of Satan at work as he kept Paul from returning to see them (2:17-18) and as he tempted (or tested) them to overthrow their faith.

In much the same way, we face the malice and opposition of Satan today. He will oppose and hinder and thwart our attempts at ministry and may even test the caliber of our faith. The Bible clearly teaches us that the greater God uses us by His grace for ministry, the more powerfully will Satan oppose us. It is those who are at ease in Zion who have little experience of the wiles and works of the enemy of our souls.

The Providence of God

(3:9-11)

But we must never forget that always the hand of God carefully sifts what comes to us. Whether it is the opposition of people or the malice of Satan, God never allows us to be tempted or tested beyond our ability to endure. Prayer then is the most effective resource to understand and align ourselves with the will of God. The doctrine of God’s providence is the most powerful antidote to the poison of depression and despair. It is the strongest binoculars to give us the long view so

necessary to chart a right course through the thickets of our present problems. Souls will shrivel in the desert of affliction if not shaded nor nourished from this Divine cordial.

- So how do we handle this kind of pressure and problem? What Divine resources are available to strengthen us to endure?

Provision for Handling Affliction

We can observe how the church of that day endured pressure and persecution. Our use of the same tools and resources will equip us to be an enduring church and people.

Word of God Accepted

(2:13)

The primary resource we have is the Scripture. It is not only the source of our information, it is the very conduit of the strengthening grace of God. For it to perform its work in us, we must receive it, not as merely good advice on human terms, but as having the authority of the very Word of God. Beloved, I am convinced that many, if not most, of the weak response by Christians to problems today are the direct product of our not reading, studying, memorizing and meditating on the Bible.

Do we have an appreciation, an appetite, a desire for the Word?

- More than food (John 23:12)? It is bread (Matthew 4:4), milk and meat (Hebrews 5:11-14) and even honey (Psalm 119:103).
- More than money (Psalm 119)? It is more than all riches (Psalm 119:14), thousands of gold and silver (Psalm 119:72), than fine gold (Psalm 119:127) and great treasure (Psalm 119:162).
- More than sleep (Psalm 119:148)?

Your ability to handle affliction in a God-honoring way will rise no higher than the level of your intake and engrafting of the Word.

Effective Models Imitated

(2:14)

The church benefited from the model of other churches and individuals who had weathered the same storm. The word here points to a knowledge of the church in Judea and a self-conscious choice to follow the example they had set. Paul is able to commend this modeling because *both are implementing Biblical principles*.

We should look to models as well. I would strongly commend the reading of Christian biography for this reason. It is my conviction that we need models who are not so terribly infected with modernity and therapy. We also can identify models from third-world churches who

have thought through these issues and developed Biblical strategies to deal with them.

Coming of Christ Anticipated (2:19-20)

I want to suggest that this is not only a Divine resource, but is a Spirit given outcome of affliction. Note how Paul expresses his appreciation for and relation with, these people in the light of the *Parousia*. The coming and appearing and glory of Christ does not diminish our loving relationships with others, it rather will enhance them.

Helpful Ministry Received (3:1-2,6-7)

As I read the Scripture, I am constantly impressed by the character of that helpful ministry exhibited by Paul and Timothy. Note in passing some particular aspects that are especially helpful to those in distress.

- Strong attachment emotionally - note particularly 2:17. Paul describes his absence from them in words normally reserved for death and bereavement. Are there people with whom you worship (besides your family) from whom separation leaves the emptiness and void of death?
- Deep appreciation and commitment to people - 2:20 so clearly expresses, as do other verse, Paul's amazing sense of commitment to people. Are there people in our church fellowship who are a crown to you, particularly in the light of Jesus' coming?
- Full affirmation of others in ministry - Paul sent Timothy who was a brother and fellow worker in the Gospel. He had full confidence that Timothy would strengthen and encourage them (3:2). Are there people who we have great confidence in their labor together with us in ministry?

Isn't this the kind of ministry we need? When we are in deep waters, how we need people to strengthen and encourage us by the Word who truly care for us and are committed to us.

Difficult Affliction Expected (3:3-4)

Let us be very clear about this: true Christians experience affliction. It ought not to surprise us. We should be ready for it. We should be preparing our responses to it before it comes. We should not be disturbed or shaken, *because we have been destined for affliction by the providence of our loving Father.*

For us in the West who know little about true persecution and affliction, to whom a hangnail is a spiritual crises, we try to make these words relevant to the low level of our spiritual living.

Firm Standing Valued

(3:8)

Standing firm in the midst of the storms of life is one of the marks of true believers. Now this is not referring to our sense of independence, nor of self-dependence nor of stoic unemotionalism. It is standing firm “in the Lord.” Notice the premium Paul puts on this. The (NASB) says, “Now we really live, if you stand firm.”

Standing firm is a matter of choosing by faith to accept God’s evaluation of my circumstances. Beyond that, it is seeing how God is actually working in my circumstances to bring about glory to His Name and being thankful in it.

Prevailing Prayer Offered

(3:10)

Here is the engine that drives it all. None of the above is possible spiritually if we are not praying and if others are not praying for us. Prayer is one of the most effective means of grace to receive God’s strength and to bring our faith to maturity.

↳ In fact, let’s look at that prevailing prayer in a bit more detail.

Prayer for Growing in Affliction

(3:10-13)

Notice that Paul never prays that they be delivered from their trouble, be spared of more distress, or be relieved in their affliction. Paul’s focus is not on the pressure being brought on the Christians but on the faith and love that is growing up in the Christians.

Its Sustaining Petitions

(v.11-12)

I am constantly amazed at what Paul prays for in the Bible. It is so important to learn that these are things we are to pray for as well.

For a Directing Providence

(v.11)

Paul simply asks God to straighten out the road to them. He is not only asking for guidance, but for assistance. He is offering up his own desires, nourished in the Word of God, and submitting them to the will of God.

For an Abounding Love

(v.12)

Why would Paul pray this for the church there?

➤ There is a growing temptation over time for a church as a whole and her people as individuals to leave their first love. What begins in a real passion of love of Christ often stagnates into simply enduring through.

- There is the very real problem of persecution and pressure and affliction causing us to become self-directed, self-centered and self-pitying. It is one of the marvels of the cross that Jesus sees his mother, her friends and John and addresses them.
- There is the gripping hand of fear in affliction. And fear is cast out by a maturing (perfect) love. Love for God which commits itself to sacrificial deeds of love for others *in the very midst of affliction, persecution and pressure* is that for which we ought to pray.
- There is the bitter acid of hatred, especially for those who are the cause of our persecution and affliction. We must learn to become like our heavenly Father and love our enemies.

Its Sanctifying Purpose

(v.13)

The sanctifying purpose is expressed in terms of *stability* and *holiness*. That holiness begins first as a matter of the heart and then becomes a matter of conduct emerges even from Paul's prayer. This is a holiness that will appear blameless even in the brightness of the coming of Christ.

Conclusion

What kind of people become a joy and crown in the midst of persecution and affliction?

- People who *pray*. Are we a praying people?
- People who *study*. Are we in the Word?
- People who *love*. Are we a people who are known for loving one another?
- People who *serve and are served*. Are we ministering to one another?
- People who *have mentors*. Have you identified models of Biblical and godly living?
- People who *are looking for Jesus to return*. Do you have an expectant hope and waiting for Christ?

Loved ones, we *really* live, if you stand firm.

Notes

Excelling in Pleasing God

1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

Introduction

Illustrate what it means to excel. Now many Christians think that they have become *good* at the Christian life. But ...

These two paragraphs are related to one another by the phrase *excel more* in (v.1) and (v.10). These two phrases introduce the spheres in which the believers were to excel.

Their Responsibilities in Purity

(v.1-8)

Every generation of believers must deal with the problem of immorality. Though we tend to view our own generation as being uniquely wicked, immorality has been a constant and corrupting influence from on the world on the church. Paul had to address the problem in almost every epistle he wrote.

If the people of God want to excel in pleasing God, then they must excel in this area as well.

The Revelation of Christian Purity

(v.1-3a)

These instructions are coming with all the authority of the Word of God. These are not options which we can adopt or reject as it suits us. Why is this so?

- These are the *instructions* they had received before (v.1).
- These are the *commandments of the Lord* he had given before (v.2)
- These are the *will of God* in sanctification (v.3)

So they had been instructed by the commandments of the Lord so that they knew what the will of God is. This was not simply Paul writing, but is God directing.

The Requirements of Christian Purity

(v.3b-6)

What God demands is given in three areas. Each of these begins with the word *that* to point us to specific requirements. Now this paragraph is not without its exegetical difficulties and debates.

Abstain from Immorality

(v.3b)

The Scripture is clear: abstain from immorality. The word here not only means not to do it, but to distance yourself from it.

- To teens and singles - You are particularly open to temptation to immorality. All immorality is simply sin. You must not do it. Even in Christian schools we are prone to give all the worldly reasons for committing sexual sins: the potential for STD's and AIDS, the emotional effects, long-term affects on marriage. I want to give you the only reason that really matters: *GOD SAID DON'T*.
- To spouses - Do all you can to protect your spouse from temptation and to provide for their needs in this area. A husband or wife who is withholding themselves may be sinning against God and making their spouse more susceptible to temptation. Husbands and wives—be totally satisfied with each other.

Maintain Your Purity

(v.4-5)

Now this is the sentence which causes us to pause and do some laborious work with the text. The problem centers around two words: *ktasqai* (to acquire or possess) and *skeuò*" (vessel). Two views are commonly held and are represented by differing translations.

Which is it?

It seems we can settle the word vessel by an appeal to other Scripture. In 1 Peter 3:7, the word refers to a wife being a weaker vessel and in 2 Corinthians 4:7, it refers to our bodies being earthly containers for heavenly treasure. In both instances, it is the fragility which is in view. And yet, it was common in Paul's day for rabbis and scribes to refer to wives as *vessels*. The word for acquire or obtain (learn to control (NIV)) is usually used to mean to acquire or obtain with two exceptions where it does mean to possess.

You can hear the text this way: "Each of you acquire your own wife in a fitting way and do not cross the bounds to take what is your Christian brother's (wife or daughter)." Then again, it can say, "Each of you know how to possess your own body in a fitting way and do not dispossess your Christian brother of what is his."

Neither translation violates other portions of Scripture. And both translations are supported by specific passages which argue in them for each of the views.

- Each of you must know how *to acquire* your own wife (vessel) in sanctification and honor, not in the passion of lust like the heathen who do not know God.
- Each of you must know how *to possess* your own body (vessel) in sanctification and honor, not in being controlled by passionate lust like the heathen who do not know God.

In the face of this ambiguity, let us then make application as though both were true.

- When single Christians are surrounded by immorality, they must identify strategies in their relationships which allow them to acquire spouses without sex being the primary driving motivation. There are huge implications here for dating. There ought to be a stark contrast between how Christian teens and singles develop relationships and how the lost do. While unbelievers focus on and stress the physical, the believer knows that other spheres of the relationship must be primary.
- All believers need to *know how to possess their bodies* in sanctification and honor. The key here is on *knowing how*. Do you know what tend to stir up sexual desire in you and to avoid those things except, for those who are married, with your spouse? Do you know your body's cycles (men have them as well)? Are you simply being driven by your lustful desires?

Notice though how the ambiguity may be merged It is a simple New Testament reality that the gift of celibacy is rare. Therefore, people

ought to marry in the Lord, acquiring a spouse in a God-honoring, self-controlling way which does not focus on the sexual aspects, but on the relational aspects. Even Christian marriage does not put sex at its center, but rather submission and sacrifice.

↳ The next sentence carries this idea into a whole new realm for most.
↓

Respect Your Brother

(v.6a)

Here is a concept that we have little understood. An expanded translation would sound like this: “Do not disregard and cross over the bounds and thus defraud your brother in this matter of immorality by sinning with his wife or daughter.” Now why would he say this? Why would he couch this in terms that sound like a contract or an agreement?

Because we are a community covenanted together, to have sex outside of marriage with anyone who is not your spouse and whose family is in church is to transgress the covenant and to steal by fraud and deceit what is not your own. This is why the church must rise up and discipline all such sin. God has forbidden it. It is a violation of our covenant community. We are first, brothers and sisters, then we are husbands and wives. This concept is sustained by Ephesians and 1 Peter.

The Reasons for Christian Purity

(v.6b-8)

Paul stresses the importance of these commands through three warnings.

The Prosecution by God

(v.6b)

God will not allow sins in this area to go unnoticed and uncorrected. Be assured that those around you may not know and may never know. But God will prosecute in the court of His providence.

The Purpose of Sanctification

(v.7)

The purpose of grace in sanctification is not license. God has summoned and separated us to Himself and away from sin. Salvation has sanctification as its immediate project and glorification as its chief end.

The Problem with Rejection

(v.8)

To carry on and say that this is just man’s perspective and man’s word is to reject God who gives us the Spirit to sanctify us. When we reject the commands and warnings of the Word of God, we are rejecting the God of the Word.

The Resource for Christian Purity (v.8b)

The Holy Spirit has been given to us in order to bring about our sanctification. He is to teach us, to convict us and to correct us through the Scripture. He is the power of God's grace energizing our consciences, our minds and our wills to excel in pleasing God.

- Paul now turns to their loving harmony and honesty together as a covenant community.

Their Responsibilities in Propriety (v.9-12)

It seems, according to 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15, that there was a group in the church who were not involved in productive labor, were getting involved in everyone's business and were living off the benevolence of the church. It has been generally speculated that they were using the soon coming of Christ as an excuse to abandon their daily responsibilities. Paul now speaks gently and carefully to the church as whole, while aiming at that group.

Commendation of our Loving Practice (v.9-10)

True believers are taught by God to love one another. And loving one another is not primarily one of feeling but of action. They were commended for how they *practiced* their love.

Is this true of us?

- Do we expect to find a church filled with feelings or deeds of love? A believer who claims to feelings of love who has not the deeds of love is fooling himself and others.
- Do we seek to put our love into practice through sacrificial deeds? For example: have you taken someone *who is not in your circle of friends or on your financial class* to dinner or lunch? Do you know someone who needs help with groceries, or car or house or children and you can help them? Do you know someone who is alone and needs just simple companionship? Do you ever approach a deacon seeking to help in a ministry area?

We must constantly seek to flesh out our love in practical efforts of ministry.

Corrections in our Loving Practice (v.11)

Here is the intensely practical side of the gospel. The Bible encourages a loving concern for one another expressed in practical care and the deals with those who take advantage of the loving deeds of others.

Admonition to the Fanatics***Lead a quiet life.***

Here is a word to those whose lives, because of an over balanced commitment to a particular aspect of theology or practice, become frenetic rounds of activity. This was being addressed to many who were taking the coming the Lord too seriously in the wrong way. This infects certain church groups today, but thankfully is not too evident among us. However, the warning stands true to any *cause*, even right ones. Honor, desire and make it your ambition to lead a life marked by a steady calm.

Admonition to the Busybodies***Attend to your own business.***

The word is used in 1 Peter 4:15 to refer to “a troublesome meddler.” Paul characterizes some widows as “gossips and busybodies, talking about things not proper to mention.” (1 Timothy 5:13 (NASB)). This applies to those who simply run around (in our case, usually via the phone) getting involved in everyone’s business and usually end up carrying each other’s offenses.

Admonition to the Lazy***Work with your hands.***

No believer who is capable of working should be living off the benefice of the church (and certainly, charity, whether private or public through welfare.) If you can work, then make it your ambition to work, even if it means laboring in a menial job, which is implied in this text.

This may be addressed to one group of people whose fanaticism led them to stop working and start living off the church so that they could get involved in everybody’s business. But it also has equal force to anyone who is sinning by leading a life marked by frenetic activity in a cause or who is meddling or who is lazy. How can I say it is sin? Because God through Paul in the Bible *commanded them*.

↳ What is the outcome?
↓

Consequences from our Loving Practice**(v.12)**

Paul expresses these as both the purpose for the admonition and the expected outcome.

The Propriety of our Witness

Our conduct prepares the way for our witness. When our lifestyle reflects the truths we profess, then we are exhibiting what it means to be a Christian. The unbelieving world cannot tell us what is right and wrong for us; but they well know when we are doing what *we* say is wrong.

The Provision of our Work

Literally, the phrase means “to have need of nothing.” The point here is that the normal means for God’s provision for us is through the labor of our hands.



When we lead lives that are marked by a steady calm as we give careful attention to ourselves and work hard with our hands, then our witness is powerful and we will have our needs met.

Conclusion

- There are three distinctives of an excelling church:
 - ◆ **Their Holiness** (v.1-8)
They are a people who deal with the issues of sexual purity
 - ◆ **Their Harmony** (v.9-10)
They are a people who know how to put their love into practice.
 - ◆ **Their Honesty** (v.11-12)
They are a people who learn the value of working hard to provide for themselves and others.
 - ◆ **Their Hope** (v.13-18)
They are a people whose expectation of the Lord’s return encourages them even in the midst of personal loss and grief.
- Now, it is not enough to just begin doing or practicing these things. The Thessalonians were too. What is desired is that we excel in them. Are we?

The Marks of an Expectant Church

1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11

Introduction

When is Jesus coming? I don't know. No one knows. But I do know this, He is coming. Not everyone knows this! Illustrate with Aechompong's response upon hearing, for the first time, of the coming of Jesus again.

The coming of the Lord in 1 Thessalonians: salvation (1:9-10), service (2:19-20), stability (3:11-13) and sorrow (4:13-18).

The *Parousia* and Those Who Have Died (4:13-18)

Since the Lord's coming, then what about those who have died? To us this might seem like a question a Christian would never ask. But imagine if we did not have this text. This paragraph is the clearest teaching on what will actually happen when Christ comes.

What They Did Not Know (v.13)

The Problem of Ignorance

We must value being informed Christians about truth. There is absolutely no virtue in spiritual ignorance. And there is great danger in it.

The Perplexity of the Saints

For these saints, their ignorance of the details surrounding the return of Christ left them grieving like the world. The unbeliever has no hope beyond eternity. We grieve, upon the passing of Christians, in the glorious hope of seeing them once again.

The Details of His Coming (v.14-17)

Basis - The Resurrection of Christ (v.14)

The return of Christ is constantly connected with His resurrection and ascension. The resurrection is the beginning of the eschatological reality of the Kingdom. The force of the sentence is simply this, "You believe that Christ was raised, then there will be a return and resurrection for those who have died in Christ."

Description - The Return of Christ (v.15-17)

When Christ returns:

- He will descend from heaven (Acts 1:9-11)
- He will be accompanied by a shout, the voice of the archangel and the trumpet.
- The dead in Christ will be raised first. And those who are alive will be caught up so that together we will meet Christ in the air.
- This reunion with Christ and the church will be eternally unbroken.

These are the facts of this passage. To draw any implication of a schema or timeline *is to impose on the text* what is not there.

What We Must Do (v.18)

“Comfort one another with these words.” Notice how Paul uses these doctrinal truths. This leads me to the following observations.

- Our primary need in emotional distress? Truth. Doctrine is what meets our needs, feeds our souls, renews our minds, builds up our faith, comforts us in sorrow, encourages us in discouragement.
- Our responsibility is to use the truth with one another. We are not just there to listen, not just there to “feel with you”. We are to be for one another with *truth*.

It is *these words* which encourage us.

The *Parousia* and Those Who Are Living (5:1-11)

Since the Lord is coming, then how are we to live?

What They Knew (v.1-2)

When it came to what was to be revealed about schema, they well knew. That knowledge is available in the Old Testament and in the teaching of Christ. This phrase “times and epochs” is used to refer to the redemptive history matrix of God’s outworking His redemption in personal and in covenant terms. The “Day of the Lord” is the day (or possibly, the period of time) which includes all the events of the Second Coming. He did not need to write to them to clarify this further.

Jesus has taught us that His coming would be like that of a thief in the night. The lesson is that we are not to be caught unawares.

The Difference It Makes (v.3-8)

That there will be both believers and unbelievers alive at the return of Christ makes a huge difference.

- **Unbelievers** - They will think that they are secure and safe. No one is out there. Everything is OK. They can sleep. All is well. At that moment, the wrath of God falls on them as He comes and there will be no escape. The central part of the Book of Revelation describes the horrendous judgments which make up these simple words.
- **Believers** - We not in the darkness. We are neither in their ignorance nor in their sinful condition. We know that He is coming. The timeline of history has an endpoint. Since this is so, then we ought to be living differently.

That Jesus is coming and coming soon means that we had better get serious about our Christian lives. As soldiers of Christ, we need to be self-controlled. We ought to be equipping ourselves. See, here is the picture of a waiting warrior: his helmet of salvation gives him hope and his faith and love protect his heart.

The Reason It's True

(v.9-10)

The believer is not destined to experience the wrath of God. Our salvation rescues us from His wrath. That salvation means that whether we have died or are alive at Jesus' return, we will live together with Him.

The wrath referred to here is the wrath to come from which we are delivered (1:10), which will be their experience forever (2:16), that will be poured out on unbelievers (5:3) and to which we are not destined (5:9).

Why is there hope at Christ's coming? Why are we to be serious and self-controlled until Christ's coming? Because the Coming of Christ brings wrath on the lost; but, it brings glory to the saints.

What We Must Do

(v.11)

Two major responsibilities emerge from this truth.

- Encouragement - We must lift up one another's spirits and affections so that we can go one until the day of the Lord comes with all its attendant glory.
- Edify - These truths must be used to build up spiritual strength and stamina.

I am appalled that the truths of the Lord's Coming become mere data for us to plug into the proper slot on our diagrams. Rather, it must become a living and quickening truth whose reality causes us to go hard after God with all our minds, all our hearts and all our wills knowing that the pursuit is going to end in a soul enrapturing consummation.

Conclusion

- I want to announce to you, in such a way that it will ring like a clear bell in your consciousness. Jesus is coming again. What a day that will be!
- In the light of this, Christians grieve differently. Christians live differently.
- Use truth in the mind to guide the affections in the heart. Informing our minds of spiritual realities will shape our affections (emotions, for the moderns) to be conformed by the Word and pleasing unto God.
- Do not sleep in your sins. Just when you think that you are safe and secure and maybe even saved, the awful torrent of God's wrath will sweep over the world, over sinners dooming and damning them to their just torment. So flee to the safety of the cross. Do it today. Do not harden your heart. Do not satisfy yourself with false assurances. Seek God. Plead His mercy while you may. They day is well coming, when you will face the Judge of all the Universe. And there will be no escape.

The Marks of a Spiritual Church

1 Thessalonians 5:12-28

Introduction

Paul's favorite phrase to refer to believers together in the church is *brethren*. It is of singular importance that the church sees itself as a family—a community of people related together with mutual care, concern and support. So, this is addressed to the *brethren* (v.12, 14).

Here are some of the qualifying categories for a spiritual church. A spiritual church is marked by Biblical leadership, fellowship and worship.

Biblical Leadership

(v.12-13)

Writing as an elder (and speaking as an elder) we address the church in such a way as to call forth from you the very response required. Respect, submission and esteem cannot be demanded. Even though they are required, they spoken of as being requested. And the elders who are to be appreciated and esteemed are marked by certain characteristics.

Characteristics of Leadership

This is addressed *primarily* to elders and then generally to those whose ministry is characterized by these categories.

In Their Labor

The word here is used of someone who works hard. It was generally used of laborers in the quarries and fields. The picture is of someone who is working hard at ministry. It sets a standard, not only for the elders who must be diligent in their work, but for everyone in the church who ministers.

The prevailing view that church ministry ought to be easy is simply wrong. There are high standards, difficult demands and hard work. It requires endurance. Our philosophy of volunteerism has eroded away at the Biblical use of gifts. Every person in the church has at least one gift *that they are either using or wasting*. Do you know where you are being spiritually enabled to serve this body of believers? Have you committed yourself to a lifetime of hard labor (without present and visible pay or reward) to exercise that gift on behalf of others for Christ?

In Their Governance

The word here is used of those who have the oversight or are in charge over. The old word used to be translated *rule*. Today, with the abuses of ruling elders, we prefer the word *governance*. The (NASB) consistently uses this word to refer to the elders of the church in their governing role, whether it is in the home to be qualified for eldership, or in the church where they are exercising the oversight of the church.

The key texts are Romans 12:8, “he who *leads*, with diligence”; 1 Timothy 3:4-5, “One who *manages* his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity 5 (but if a man does not know how to *manage* his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?)” and 1 Timothy 5:17, “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.” The governance of the church in the Bible is committed to the elders, not to the deacons. The elders are to oversee the church by shepherding as men mature in the Word.

In Their Instruction

This is borne out by the word which is used here. It is from the Greek word *noutheo* which means “to confront with truth so as to bring about change” thus it is usually rendered *to admonish*.

In Acts 20:31 Paul warns and reminds the elders of the church at Ephesus, “Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.” He also told the church at Rome in Romans 15:14, “...concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able also to admonish one another.” Paul wrote the Corinthians, “...not to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children.” (1 Corinthians 4:14). Admonition is a part of worship in music, “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (Colossians 3:16) and in preaching, “And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ” (Colossians 1:28). Instructing in holiness is even what we do with those who are under the discipline of the church as in 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15, “And if anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that man and do not associate with him, so that he may be put to shame. 15 And *yet* do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.”

So elders are to confront with truth so as to bring about change, constantly, with tears, in the worship of the church through its singing and preaching involving everyone in it so as to present believers before

God without blame even when we are dealing with someone who is refusing to bow to the apostolic authority of the Scripture themselves.

- What a picture Paul gives of elders and of the church as a whole. Both are working hard in ministry under the governance of the elders who, along with the many, are confronting people with truth needed to produce change.

So how are we to respond to people like this? Why does Paul follow with the next paragraph?

- Because this is not the common picture of the church. Three misconceptions regarding the church are dealt with here. Ministry requires hard work. Elders are to govern the church. And we must be confronting one another with the Scripture or we will not be blameless.
- Because too often we respond wrongly to this kind of ministry. We do not want the commitment this ministry requires. We do not want to obey our elders. And we do not like to be confronted in such a way that we are pressed to change.

Responsibilities to Leadership

Here is how we are to respond to this kind of leadership.

- **Know them.** The word here means that we are to have an instinctive knowledge which leads to appreciation. He chooses not to use the word which means to know by experience. Too often, what we know by experience of elders are their failures and weaknesses. Paul is pointing us toward an appreciation of our godly elders whose ministry is characterized by labor, governance and admonition.
- **Esteem them.** Here is an interesting word which heaps superlative upon superlative. It means to honor and respect, to hold them in high esteem. This esteem comes from the motivation of love and is prompted, not because of their office, but because of their work. An elder may not be the cuddly lovable person we all like to have as pastors, but he is to be respected and held in high esteem in love because of his work in ministry.

Mutual Goals

This phrase is addressed to the brethren which takes in elders and congregation. So then, what does *living in peace* look like?

- It means that the elders and congregation may not declare war on one another. In both instances, there must not develop an “us against them” mentality.

- It means that petty differences in perspectives, styles and personalities are to be overlooked in favor of character, conduct and ministry. Peace and unity are to be maintained in the midst of diversity, not at its expense.
- It means that loving sacrifice is demanded of the elder and loving submission of the congregation. We do not like to think in these terms. But we, in our submission to Christ who sacrificed for us model that submission and sacrifice in our homes and in the church.
- It means that the gracious oil of the Holy Spirit must be applied to all our points of friction.

What does living at peace look like? It looks like loved, respected and esteemed elders moving among the congregation with hard work, diligent governance and loving confrontation with truth.

- Now, Paul turns to the congregation and frames a second series of exhortations to the church as a whole.

Biblical Fellowship

(v.14-15)

In their relationships to one another, Paul uses a much stronger word, *to exhort or urge*. It is an imperative that both the elders and the congregation deal with people and with problems as the Holy Spirit outlines for us.

Dealing with People

(v.14)

The fruit of the Spirit is one of the keys to relating to one another as Christians (Galatians 5:22-23). We find these same fruit alluded to in this next paragraph. The fruit mentioned here include love (5:13), joy (5:14), peace (5:13) and patience (5:14). Out of these gifts we must deal with these categories of people God's way.

The Undisciplined

The word here was used to describe those who were marching in an army and were out of step. It came to refer to people who were careless and undisciplined in the way they lived. These people may not even be involved in sin. But, since we are family, everyone needs to stay in step and be disciplined in their lives. We are not therefore seeking for uniformity, but creativity within the vision, purpose and mission of the church.

So what is required is nouthetic confrontation—the undisciplined members of the family of God are confronted with truth by the elders and others so as to bring about change. Much more can be done on a one to one level than we do. Too often, this is left wholly to the elders

who use the pulpit as the place to do it. Why don't we begin then to lovingly confront one another with truth for each other's good and holiness?

The Fainthearted

To translate this Greek word with *timid* really misleads the English reader. What Paul has in mind are people who are literally *small souled*, or fainthearted. These are the people for whom life with its pressures and problems is just too much. They are prone to discouragement and depression. They often are the quitters.

What is needed for them is encouragement. We told, rather than shouting at them from a distance, to come near and to speak gently and tenderly with words to uphold them in times of distress. Now this is what we really want to receive and sometimes find more difficult to give. This strikes the balance with the previous phrase.

The Weak

The New Testament nearly always uses the word *weak* to refer to Christians who trying to live by all sorts of rules and standards. Their efforts are doomed to frustration and failure. What we must then do is to help them by holding on to them. We must help them out of the maze of their rules into the maturity of liberty and Biblical obedience.

All Brethren

No family can peacefully coexist for long without patience. We must, as we deal not only with the undisciplined, the fainthearted, the weak, but also with *everyone*, do so in patience. We must wait with endurance and long-suffering until God by His grace effects change in people's lives.

Are we patient with one another? Do we demand instant change, instant maturity, instant affirmation? Are you willing to wait for God to use the means of grace to change people? Are you young people patient with the older ones? Are you Senior Saints patient with those who have a lot of maturing to do?

Dealing with Problems

(v.15)

Siblings often have real problems with the constant getting back at one another and the blindness to what is good for the other. This is too often too true of brothers and sisters in Christ as well.

No Retribution

(Romans 12:71-21)

➤ Christians must not be getting even with one another. Now this injunction is not only for church life, but for home life. The peace and harmony of the church and the home are utterly wrecked when

people keep settling scores. If you are keeping accounts of when you are wronged in the church or your home (or anywhere else) in order to get even, you do not love as 1 Corinthians 13 tells you to love. This particularly applies to brothers and sisters at home and to teens with one another. If you react to being wronged by doing something back, no matter how petty, then you are sinning against God and the community of the church.

- Christians must stop one another from getting even. Notice the language here. “Make sure nobody pays back...” Again, it begins with elders, but is also the responsibility of the church as a whole. It is part of our ministry with one another as reconcilers. What glory it is when one member of the body, in great love to God and their brother or sister in the community of the church, intervenes and stops those who are trying to pay back wrong with wrong, instead of with love.

Seek the Best

(Philippians 2:2-5)

This is what makes Christians unique. This is the greatest expression of Christian love. We, when wronged, still seek the best for others for we have disciplined ourselves to see that other person as more important and are deeply concerned to look after their interests.

We have way too much of doing Christian things—serving, sacrificing, obeying—for what it gets us or for how it makes us feel. Illustrate with the Minnith-Meyer program.

Are we looking out for the best of others? We have no trouble looking out for our own concerns. But have we so learned the cross and the sacrifice of Christ that we express His love in sacrificing our very selves for the interests of others, *even when it gets absolutely nothing for ourselves?*

Biblical Worship

(v.16-22)

We tend to think of worship as a formal and set time, whether publicly or privately, where we focus our attention on God with the intent to learn more about Him and honor Him. These verses refer first to this. but they also have in view the whole of a Christian’s life as it is meant to be conducted in an attitude of reverence and worship of God.

Attitude in Prayer

(v.16-18)

Key marks of our prayer and praise: rejoicing and thanksgiving. How much of our praying simply degenerates into griping and complaining to God? The point here is on the unending process of our rejoicing, prayer and thanksgiving. It is *always, without ceasing and in everything*. In other words, our joy, our prayer and our thanksgiving is not to be driven by our changing circumstances. It is the river of God’s pleasure cutting Grand Canyons through the mountains of our impossible situations.

But is this our spiritual reality? Not usually. We rejoice when we feel good, we pray when we are in trouble and we give thanks for the good stuff. All of this speaks of the poverty of our spirits and the low level of our thirst for God.

Approach in Preaching

(v.19-20)

What was prophetic ministry in the New Testament is now preaching ministry. In some measure, it even has the same function—to *mediate God's Word*. Until the canon was complete, God gave inspired revelation to New Testament prophets who mediated the Word of God directly. Now, we have the apostolic and prophetic deposit in the Scripture. Preaching today then mediates the Word of God indirectly.

But the exhortations in relation to the Word of God, whether in prophecy or in preaching do not change.

- **Quench not the Spirit** - We are not to put out the Spirit's fire. Now Charismatics today misuse this to condemn those of us who expose their error and heresies for what they are. The problem is, they have missed the point entirely. We are not to quench the Spirit *in relation to sound preaching of the Word*. This is not some slogan which condones any and all excesses in the name of the Spirit. Rather it warns us that we are to hear the Word as it is preached and to listen to the convicting and correcting ministry of the Spirit.
- **Despise not the Word.** - In our day, preaching is often treated as blasé, old-fashioned and unnecessary. Not so. To so despise preaching as a means of grace is a direct violation of this brief command. Frankly, the opposite of what is here forbidden is to be encouraged. We ought to be fostering a love and appreciation for the preaching of the Word of God.
- **Examine everything carefully.** - The first application of this and the next command has to do with prophets and preachers (not prophecies and preaching.) In being careful not to quench the Spirit and not to despise the mediating of the Word, we also are to carefully give heed as *to who are true ministers of the gospel*. If a prophet was found to be false, he or she was to be exposed and condemned as such because of the great danger to the welfare of God's people. All of us well know the horrendous damage a pretender to the ministry can cause.
- **Cling to the good.** - So we cling to the good. Those who meet the qualifications of good ministers of the Scriptures are to be upheld and listened to. That is why, I am not ashamed to call names from this pulpit of people you ought to be reading and listening to.

Accountability in Practice

(v.21-22)

- **Test everything.** - Now let's consider these verses in their broader context. We ought to be carefully examining everything that comes to us as "good ideas." We must be evaluating the Biblicalness of everything which is attempting to influence and affect Christians and churches. We must do it privately and publicly. And we are being swamped with every conceivable movement known to man. We have Christian therapy, Promise Keepers, TBN, Christian coalition, holy laughter, etc and etc all claiming to be ready to take us to the next level of spirituality. We had better be carefully weighing everything.
- **Stay away from every form in which evil presents itself.** - Paul's warning here has more to do with the shifting chameleon faces that evil world views adopt over time and in varying cultures. In the light of our need to weigh everything and to cling to the good, we need to be very aware of the carefully disguised heresies which come to us clothed in the most modern and attractive dress. And we who preach to these things are sometimes treated like the little boy who finally said that the emperor has no clothes.

Conclusion

The conclusion to this book in verses 23-24 is so fitting.

- **Petition** - Paul prays for the holiness of the Christians in all their being in all their spheres of life until Jesus comes. It is the God of peace who commands peace among His people who is working out our sanctification on such practical terms that we will be blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus.
- **Promise** - This petition emerges from a promise grounded in the *character* and *covenant* of God. God is faithful and He is committed to bringing this about. The petition may loom large as very difficult, the promise of God in the character of God presses us onward to be blameless in all our conduct at the *Parousia* of Christ.

May God so work in us by the Word and the Spirit that our church fellowship will be characterized as a spiritual church.