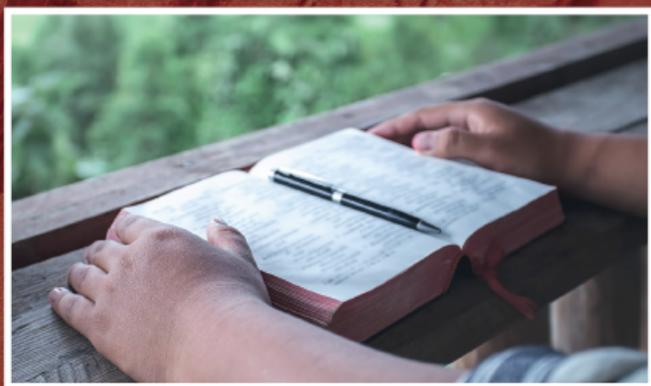
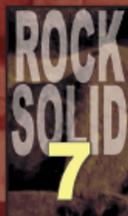


# THE FIRST LETTER TO THE THESSALONIANS



An Explanation of This Letter  
Especially for You

Ger de Koning





# **The First Letter to the Thessalonians**



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Especially for You

Rock Solid #7 (Part I)

Ger de Koning

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## Abbreviations of the Names of the Books of the Bible

### **Old Testament**

Gen – Genesis

Exo – Exodus

Lev – Leviticus

Num – Numbers

Deu – Deuteronomy

Jos – Joshua

Jdg – Judges

Rth – Ruth

1Sam – First Samuel

2Sam – Second Samuel

1Kgs – First Kings

2Kgs – Second Kings

1Chr – First Chronicles

2Chr – Second Chronicles

Ezra – Ezra

Neh – Nehemiah

Est – Esther

Job – Job

Psa – Psalms

Pro – Proverbs

Ecc – Ecclesiastes

Song – Song of Songs

Isa – Isaiah

Jer – Jeremiah

Lam – Lamentations

Eze – Ezekiel

Dan – Daniel

Hos – Hosea

Joel – Joel

Amos – Amos

Oba – Obadiah

Jona – Jonah

Mic – Micah  
Nah – Nahum  
Hab – Habakkuk  
Zep – Zephaniah  
Hag – Haggai  
Zec – Zechariah  
Mal – Malachi

**New Testament**

Mt – Gospel of Matthew  
Mk – Gospel of Mark  
Lk – Gospel of Luke  
Jn – Gospel of John  
Acts – Acts of the Apostles  
Rom – Letter to the Romans  
1Cor – First Letter to the Corinthians  
2Cor – Second Letter to the Corinthians  
Gal – Letter to the Galatians  
Eph – Letter to the Ephesians  
Phil – Letter to the Philippians  
Col – Letter to the Colossians  
1Thes – First Letter to the Thessalonians  
2Thes – Second Letter to the Thessalonians  
1Tim – First Letter to Timothy  
2Tim – Second Letter to Timothy  
Tit – Letter to Titus  
Phlm – Letter to Philemon  
Heb – Letter to the Hebrews  
Jam – Letter of James  
1Pet – First Letter of Peter  
2Pet – Second Letter of Peter  
1Jn – First Letter of John  
2Jn – Second Letter of John  
3Jn – Third Letter of John  
Jude – Letter of Jude  
Rev – Revelation

## Explanation of general format

PERSONAL PRONOUNS are capitalized when pertaining to Deity.

BRACKETS [ ] are used in this commentary in the Bible text to indicate words which are not found in the original Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek but implied by it.

SHARP BRACKETS < > are used in this commentary in the Bible text to indicate words possibly not in the original writings.

When ASTERISKS \* are used in New Testament quotations, it is to mark verbs that are historical presents in the Greek which have been translated with an English past tense in order to conform to modern usage. The translators recognized that in some contexts the present tense seems more unexpected and unjustified to the English reader than a past tense would have been. But Greek authors frequently used the present tense for the sake of heightened vividness, thereby transporting their readers in imagination to the actual scene at the time of occurrence. However, the translators felt that it would be wise to change these historical presents to English past tenses.

ALL CAPS in the New Testament quotations are used in the text to indicate Old Testament quotations or obvious references to Old Testament texts.

# The First Letter to the Thessalonians

## **Introduction**

When the apostle Paul, during his second missionary journey, comes to Thessalonica (Acts 17:1) and preaches there, a church comes into existence. However, not only a church starts, but also persecution. Opposition from satan is often proof that a real work of God is happening. There is no doubt that God was working in the Thessalonians. They witnessed to the Lord Jesus. You can then be certain that satan will come into action. You will hardly experience any opposition from satan if you do not live the life of a Christian.

The brethren advise Paul to flee (Acts 17:10). He has been there for a very short period, only three sabbaths. He managed to preach the gospel and to teach the new converts in, at the most, four weeks. From his first letter to them it appears that he, despite his short stay, had been able to pass on much of the truth of God.

After Paul has fled from Thessalonica he comes to Berea. Persecution also arises there because also there Jews from Thessalonica stir up the crowds against him. Paul also left this city at the advice of the brethren (Acts 17:14). You see that Paul was not trying to play the hero and he also did not consider the advice of the brethren below his dignity, but accepts them.

He goes to Athens while his companions Silas and Timothy stay in Berea. In Athens Timothy must have joined Paul again because from there he sends Timothy to Thessalonica (1Thes 3:1-2). He himself leaves Athens and comes to Corinth (Acts 18:1), where Silas and Timothy join him again (Acts 18:5). Besides, Timothy had news about the Thessalonians (1Thes 3:6).

To Paul it is a great comfort when he hears the good news about them from Timothy for which he give thanks to God. Servants are not made of stone; they do have feelings. Paul is refreshed by the news. Timothy's report also makes it clear that certain issues need to be addressed. Paul doesn't want to wait for another opportunity to visit them. No, he writes this letter immediately after he has heard the good news. Therefore we

have, just like the Christians through the ages, a document of invaluable value at our disposal.

You may consider Paul's letters to the different churches to be means by which the apostle watched over his work. Each letter has its own character, which is in agreement with the state of the church he writes to. God has used this to record what would be necessary for the church as a whole through the ages.

The two letters that Paul wrote to the Thessalonians belong to the first letters he wrote. The first letter to them was written as an addition to what he had already orally passed on to them. In that way he provided in what was lacking in their knowledge. His second letter was necessary because false teachings arose concerning the coming of Christ. When they would open themselves up to these false teachings they would seriously undermine their faith and that would lead to disgraceful practices. Therefore his second letter is corrective in character. He exposes the false teachings to prevent them from suffering shipwreck concerning their faith.

The central theme in both letters is the return of Christ, though not only as a formal doctrine. Christ's return is connected to all spiritual and natural relationships in which we find ourselves. It is expressed in all circumstances in the life of the Christian.

Each of the five chapters of the first letter ends with a reference to that coming, though every time from a different aspect:

1. In chapter 1 the expectation of that coming is also the goal of our conversion (1Thes 1:10).
2. The end of chapter 2 refers to the coming of Christ as the event in which the believers will see the fruits of their work (1Thes 2:19).
3. Chapter 3 concludes with His coming in connection with the holiness which will then be seen in all its real value (1Thes 3:13).
4. In the last part of chapter 4 the coming of Christ is presented as comfort for believers who had to bury loved ones (1Thes 4:13-18).
5. In the conclusion of chapter 5 the coming of Christ is connected to the unexpected judgment that the world will meet – as the first part of that

chapter describes – and the sanctifying effect that it should have on the believer (1Thes 5:23).

We now go back briefly to the first acquaintance of Paul with the Thessalonians. In Luke's account of it in Acts 17:1-10 he describes vividly what that was like. He also mentions details regarding Paul's preaching and how it was received.

According to his custom Paul first goes to a synagogue because he wants to preach the gospel to his 'brethren after the flesh' first. He converses with them starting from familiar Scriptures. On that basis he explains and shows that Jesus is the Christ, Who had to suffer and rise again from the dead. Some of them are convinced. Also among the Gentiles people come to faith. But that does not please satan. He succeeds by inciting Jews and wicked men to cause an uproar.

A procession starts to the house of Jason, who apparently had provided accommodation to Paul and Silas. When the crowd doesn't find them there, Jason has to pay the price. Jason and some other brethren are dragged to the city council. A twofold charge was brought: the people Jason has given accommodation to, cause turmoil in the whole world, and they preach another King than the emperor, Jesus (Acts 17:6-7).

As has often happened in the history of professing Christianity, also here the charge is in fact a compliment to the Christians who are not ashamed of the gospel. A clear testimony concerning the Lord Jesus causes turmoil. People do not like to be confronted with their sinfulness, even if this is done to have them confess that they may be saved.

Also the preaching of Christ Who is glorified in heaven, is an offense and an annoyance. You only have to tell the people around you that you have submitted your life to the authority of the Lord Jesus. Tell that the power is not in the hands of the world leaders, but that all power in heaven and on earth has been given by God into the hands of Him Who is despised and murdered by the world. Tell, like the Thessalonians, that you have converted and that you want to live for Him and under his commandments. That's what the world responds to.

The Thessalonians have, imitating what the Lord Jesus did before Pilate, witnessed the good confession (1Tim 6:13). The Lord Jesus witnessed be-

fore Pilate that His kingdom was now not of this world (Jn 18:36). His kingdom is still to come. He will establish it at His return. And that is what the Thessalonians confessed. The true hope of everyone who confesses Jesus as Lord – and thereby confesses to be a subject of that Lord – is focused on the return of Christ to establish His kingdom.

All these things are not only for the advanced believers. The Thessalonians were newly converted. With them you see the youthful freshness of a living faith that in all circumstances counts on God. It is something that makes one jealous. Their example is embarrassing and encouraging at the same time.

# 1 Thessalonians 1

## **1Thes 1:1-2 | Greeting, Blessing and Giving Thanks**

*1 Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace. 2 We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention [of you] in our prayers;*

V1.This letter does not come from Paul alone. Silvanus and Timothy are co-senders. This is quite understandable, for they have laid the foundation of the church in Thessalonica together with him. Don't you think that the Thessalonians, while reading these three names, felt great thankfulness rise in their hearts? These were the men who brought them the gospel by which they got to know the Lord Jesus. The enormous change that it has brought about is presented in this letter in an appealing and therefore catching way.

Paul must have been grateful for the support of these two men. Silvanus – that is how Paul calls him in his letters; in Acts Luke calls him Silas – was a faithful brother who accompanied Paul during his second missionary journey. He came from the church at Jerusalem, where he was a leader and a prophet (Acts 15:22,27,32). Paul finds in the young Timothy a companion to whom he was very attached (Phil 2:20-22). Here you see how older believers beautifully go together with a young, dedicated believer. There was no generation gap between them.

Notice that Paul introduces himself only by his name. That is remarkable, considering that in many other letters he presents himself as an apostle. In this letter he does not. This is because he writes this letter to a newly started church. In chapter 2 you will see how he compares himself with a mother and a father. That attitude is much more appropriate for someone who addresses babies in faith, than the formal approach of an apostle.

There is something else remarkable in the greeting. The word “church” means ‘the called-out ones’. In their case the point is that they were called out from the pagan idolatry. Those who form the church of the living God have indeed been ‘called out’ from the world, but surely not to live in a

vacuum. Therefore the church in Thessalonica is addressed as “in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”. That is unique. This way of addressing appears only one more time in the second letter to the same church. This also fits with the ‘target audience’. The senders want to let this young church feel that they are a companionship of believers that is safe in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ.

This means a great encouragement. What a privilege to be allowed to call God your Father! That is because they have been born of God and possess the Son as their life. If they become fully aware of this, it may be of great comfort to them amid all the oppression in which they find themselves. Additionally they all have the same relation to the Lord Jesus. He is mentioned here with His full name. He is the humiliated Man Jesus, but He is also the Anointed (that is the meaning of the name Christ) of God Whom God made both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36).

It does not say ‘in God the Father and *in* the Lord Jesus’. The word ‘in’ is written here only once. Therefore God the Father and the Lord Jesus are closely connected together. Being ‘in’ God can never be without the Lord Jesus. It points to a certain sphere of life in which we are as in a certain room. It also indicates an intimate relationship. That relationship can only be experienced and sustained by the Holy Spirit Who is also regularly referred to in this letter (1Thes 1:5,6; 4:8; 5:19).

This is no question of false mysticism as if there would be a kind of entering into the Godhead. Being ‘in’ is not the result of human effort. It is a Divine gift. They did not become a (local) church by an official permission of people from another church, but simply because God had called them out of the world to be one.

In order to give substance to that it is a blessing to know that you, together with your brothers and sisters of the local church, are in Divine Persons. The Thessalonians – and we too – can be sure that they have been received and hidden in an atmosphere of Divine love, care and power. I think that this is beautifully reflected in Isaiah 40 (Isa 40:11).

The writers close the salutation with the blessing “grace to you and peace”. It is the wish that the Thessalonians will experience grace and peace in their lives. It is a great grace to be assured that you have been saved from

hell and that you are a child of God. But here it is about noticing the grace of God in your daily life; that that grace is enough for you in all circumstances, also in the very tough ones (2Cor 12:9). If that is the case, you will have peace in your heart, even in the hardships you have to endure and which you sometimes do not understand.

It is about the actual awareness of standing in the full grace of God (Rom 5:2), with peace as its fruit. Then you can say to yourself: 'In whatever way God leads me, I will have peace in it.'

V2. It must have been also an encouragement for the Thessalonians to hear that Paul and his companions always give thanks for all of them. That means that they regularly go to God in prayer and give Him thanks for what He has worked in the Thessalonians. Giving thanks is: giving glory and honor to God. It is a lofty form of answering to God. It is an appreciation of the blessings that have been given to us and the appreciation of Him Who blesses. When Paul gives thanks for them, he regards them as a gift of God. How do you regard your fellow believers?

Thankfulness is a mind of the believer. It is not an inferior activity. In Luke 17, only one of the ten cleansed lepers returns to give thanks to the Lord Jesus (Lk 17:15). The Lord says about him that he gave glory to God. Ungratefulness is one of the characteristics of the last days (2Tim 3:1-2). Giving thanks puts you in the right position before God to be able to pray. Otherwise prayer becomes the visit to the complaints office and can even be misused to accuse fellow believers before God.

Despite many worries, Paul could always give thanks for them. He is not selective at this point, but he gives thanks for all of them. He is also not vague but he mentions concrete points for which he can give thanks. Here he gives thanks for the way they practiced their faith. In chapter 2 he even gives thanks without ceasing that they received the Word of God (1Thes 2:13). In chapter 3 it is as if he is searching for words to tell God about the joy they brought him by what he saw with them and heard of them (1Thes 3:9). There is always something for which he can give thanks. He does so always, without ceasing.

Giving thanks and prayer belong together (Eph 1:16; Phil 1:3-4). After thanksgiving comes praying. Giving thanks together and praying together

creates a strong bond between those who pray together as well as between those who pray and those who are being prayed for. Its power is often underestimated, which is why prayer meetings are so poorly attended. Therefore the result is that not much is being achieved concerning God's work in a needy world and in churches that fall prey to the world.

When you read this from Paul and his companions, it may seem that they did not travel that much since they were always on their knees (1Thes 3:10). Isn't it true that we are more in action than on our knees? That can change, but you must be willing to make the effort, that is: it requires willingness from your side. You can start practicing by saying good things of your fellow brothers and sisters to the Lord. After that you can tell Him about what you find hard about them. It will make your prayer life richer and the Lord will use it to glorify His Name.

Now read Thessalonians 1:1-2 again.

Reflection: What shows the loving way in which the senders approach these young believers?

### 1Thes 1:3-4 | Faith, Love, Hope and Chosen

*3 constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father, 4 knowing, brethren beloved by God, [His] choice of you;*

V3. When Paul gives thanks and prays for the Thessalonians, he is constantly reminded of the way in which they work out their lives as Christians. Their conduct shows that they are no opportunists, but Christians in the true sense of the word: those who belong to Christ.

The three major principles that give Christendom its true content are to be seen at full strength among the Thessalonians. It is the results of a true conversion. Not counterfeited, not pretended, but pure. Hence you notice so much freshness in their spiritual condition. It really is something to be jealous of. And that's not a wrong jealousy.

Let's have a closer look at the three things that are typical for Christendom, and consequently also for you and me. You find them in verse 3. They are "faith", "love" and "hope". These are the sources, the motives of Christendom in the world. They are not to be found in any other religion. These three things form our character as Christians.

Only, you cannot see faith, love and hope. However, they can be made visible. And that is what the Thessalonians do. Therefore you read here about "your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness [or: perseverance] of hope". Faith is shown by works, love is shown by efforts made and hope is shown by perseverance. "Work" and "labor" and "perseverance" have to do with the outside, with what is visible; faith, love and hope have to do with the inside, which is not visible.

Work and labor look similar, but each of these words really has a different meaning. Work is related to 'faith'. Faith focuses on what is not seen. A work of faith is a work that comes from what is not seen. Faith characterizes the spiritual condition that leads to that work. This work you see for instance in all the examples presented in Hebrews 11 and in the two examples in James 2 (Heb 11:1-40; Jam 2:21-25).

'Labor' is work, but with the characteristic that it is intensive work. There is great effort attached to it, even to the edge of exhaustion. For labor 'love'

is needed, because only love is willing to make great effort and great sacrifices. 'Labor of love' is not a matter of feeling. It is a strain, an effort and care for others. Love gives itself. The Thessalonians showed that they possessed Divine love, which is a giving love.

'To persevere' is to carry on even under the greatest trials and sufferings. An unbeliever can persevere by giving himself a pep talk or by seeing the necessity of something. That has nothing to do with biblical hope. Biblical hope is also not to be found in stoically saying: 'You can only hope for the best.' Biblical hope is always a well-founded hope, a certainty because it is based on God's Word and focused on a Divine Person.

For the Thessalonians, the motive of the perseverance lay in the hope that the Lord Jesus will return. That may also be the case for you and me. Just to be clear: hope is called hope because it has not yet been fulfilled, not because it is not certain.

Therefore 'hope' brings forth 'perseverance' as its fruit. What is inward brings forth fruit. In that way faith produces work and love produces labor. The one cannot exist without the other. Without the inner motives there will be no fruit. But the other way around is possible. Then there is activity, but it does not come from what God has worked. But then it is not good.

You see that in Revelation 2 (Rev 2:2). The Lord Jesus in His judgment of the church in Ephesus speaks to them only of "your deeds" (or: works), "and your toil" (or: labor), "and perseverance". Concerning 'faith, love and hope' He says nothing. He Who knows the deepest motives of every man, notes that the Ephesians only cared about the appearance, the observable activities. The Christian motivation was lacking. They had left their first love. Therefore it had no value to the Lord and He appeals to them to repent and to do their first works (Rev 2:5).

The three sources that form our character as Christians are not isolated. They need an object on which they focus. Therefore immediately the Son and the Father are mentioned again after that. Perseverance in hope only makes sense if the Lord Jesus is the object of that hope. Your heart rests in Him and expects Him. In Him is the source of all blessing for your soul.

From Him you receive strength and in Him you will find what nourishes the spiritual life.

It says also “in the presence of our God and Father”. That places your work, your labor and your perseverance in the presence of God. Why is that important? Because then the exercise of your conscience takes place. If you live consciously in the presence of God, you think about what you want to do or say. You wonder whether in your plans the three different characteristics of your life as a Christian may become visible.

If you get anxious of the thought that God sees you always and everywhere, you may ask yourself why that happens. Do you still want to do something of which you know that it would grieve Him? And if you sincerely do not want to grieve Him, but you are still afraid of him, remember that God is your Father.

That Paul is referring here to these two Persons of the Godhead, is meant as a support for arranging your life as a Christian. He does point to the Lord Jesus to give you confidence that He is coming soon so that you can be calm in the circumstances. He does point to God our Father in order that you are preserved with a good conscience in the light.

Both are of great importance for lasting peace in your heart and the growth of your faith life. You could say that the two blessings are representing the two sides of the Christian life: living by faith in the Lord Jesus and being able to give account to God for everything you do.

V4. Paul can list all those wonderful things of the Thessalonians in his giving thanks to God and in his prayers (verse 2) because he knows they have been “chosen”. Should he have had insight into the records of God and seen their names listed there? No, of course not. Nevertheless he knows that they have been chosen. How is that possible? Because he sees their way of life.

The word “knowing” indicates that this knowledge is not the result of revelation or intuition, but of observation, of seeing and hearing. Even of your having been chosen there is no other evidence than your life as a Christian. Whoever has been chosen, is showing in his life the life of Christ, and will strive for having a blameless conscience both before God and before men (Acts 24:16).

The three major principles of Christendom, faith, hope and love, that are active among the Thessalonians, give proof of their having been chosen. Faith, love and hope are the result of God's choice of them. Having been chosen itself can be called a 'family secret'. It has been God's purpose to adopt certain people, chosen by Him, to make them to become His children and to include them in His family circle. That you and I may belong there is pure grace. Only if you belong to the family, you can see that.

Therefore the sinner has nothing to do with this family secret. To him the call is to repent. It is important not to mix these two – the grace of God and the responsibility of the sinner– to let the distinction exist.

The lives of the Thessalonians are overflowing with what they have found in Christ. It is therefore no wonder that Paul could say that they were "brethren beloved by God". God must have looked with special feelings of love at them, because in their lives so much was visible of His Son. Don't you also long for Him to look at you like that with such feelings?

Now read 1 Thessalonians 1:3-4 again.

Reflection: What did Paul and his companions see with the Thessalonians for which they could give thanks and pray?

## 1Thes 1:5-8 | Followers and Examples

*5 for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. 6 You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, 7 so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. 8 For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything.*

V5. You have seen in the previous section that with the Thessalonians the evidence of the new life was manifested impressively. To Paul it was unmistakable that people who live in such a way, are children of God. It provided him the clear evidence that they have been chosen. Paul will now justify that determination. That's why he starts with the word "for", i.e. now comes an explanation on the previous statement.

What the Thessalonians revealed in their lives of faith was not due to a training where they learned how you could live as a Christian. No, the gospel had come to them, not with mushy talks like it is often preached today. In such a preaching you hear nothing about repentance and confession of sins before God. 'That only drives people away', is what they say. The purpose of that kind of preaching is to adopt a Christian pattern of behavior which gives you added value and enables you to become successful, better than the people around you. Words are then a big box of tricks out of which you can present what people like to hear. But that is not what Paul has taught them.

He of course has used words to preach the gospel. Yet he did not do it as if it were a friendly offering that could be accepted or refused at will. Convinced as he was of the seriousness of the preaching, he preached powerfully. The power of his preaching has nothing to do with his vocal tone, producing a considerable amount of decibels. The power has also nothing to do with works of power which he might have done. That is absolutely not the case here. No, he preached in the consciousness of God's power, the power of the Holy Spirit. Only through Him hearts can be convicted. It goes even beyond that. The Holy Spirit could work through them so fully

that Paul and his companions preached “with full conviction” without a shadow of doubt.

And notice that he does not say ‘how we have preached among you’, but “what kind of men we proved to be among you”. He also points to his life that they had seen when he was with them. His life and teachings form a whole. His life supported his preaching. What he preached to others, he practiced himself. In all that, he did not seek his own interests, but the interests of the Thessalonians – he did it for their sake.

V6 The effect of a preaching so full of assurance and brought by people who are fully of it themselves, is great. They had “received the word” and that “in much tribulation”. In the parable of the sower the Lord Jesus tells about someone “who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy”. The Lord explains that such ‘seed’ has no root and that with the very first opposition this ‘believer’ quits (Mt 13:20-21). That was quite different with the Thessalonians. The effect on them was not ambiguous. You did not need to wonder whether they were truly converted.

There are some remarkable effects that are noticeable. First, they have become “imitators” of the preachers and of the Lord. Newly converted people first see the preacher and through him they see the Lord Who is being preached. In Acts 3 you see an illustration of that. There Peter says, with John, to the lame: “Look at us” (Acts 3:4). Then the healed lame man entered the temple with them (Acts 3:8). And some verses further it says that “he was clinging to Peter and John” (Acts 3:11).

In order for you to know how to live as a Christian you must orientate yourself. You need someone as an example. It is the same as with learning in physical growth. A child learns to walk and talk by imitating. A good model or example is therefore of great importance. Do you also have good examples? Go after them, whether in your environment or in biographies of people who consistently have followed the Lord Jesus.

If there is a healthy spiritual growth, the preacher will more and more disappear out of the picture whereas the Lord gets more and more attention. The preacher will never point to himself, unless he can refer directly to the Lord Jesus Himself (1Cor 11:1). The preacher will never want to bind

people to himself and want to make them dependent on him. The preacher is just a man who can also go wrong.

The Thessalonians know what they are getting into. They have received the Word while great pressure was exerted on them. I am afraid that many Christians in our part of the world are unaware of this and therefore so little get to a life of full dedication to Christ. Instead of succumbing to the pressure and picking up their old life, the Thessalonians had experienced the “joy of the Holy Spirit”. You see here that outward oppression and inner joy go together. These things cannot be explained well. It is something you have to experience. Have you ever experienced that joy?

V7. They therefore became an example themselves for all other believers in a wide surrounding area, after they had received the Word and became followers. Besides, the word “example” is written in the singular. This seems to indicate that the Thessalonians were not so much individual examples, but that they were an example as church. If you looked at them, if you looked at their whole church life, regarding their conduct and confession, their way of dealing with each other and their attitude toward the world, then you could have seen what being a Christian really meant.

Being an example for other believers implies that other believers have yet to learn new things or to unlearn unwanted things. But Paul did not have to write about that to the other believers. What the Thessalonians were reflecting, said enough.

I must admit that I am jealous of that. Wouldn't it be wonderful if the local church to which you and I belong had such an appearance? I think we can recognize ourselves more in “all the believers in Macedonia” to whom the Thessalonians were held as an example than in the church of the Thessalonians. Let the example be a spur for you and me to live our lives as Christians just like the Thessalonians did.

V8. The word “for” at the beginning of verse 8 shows in what way they had become examples. The Thessalonians did not withdraw themselves in isolation to enjoy only for themselves what they had received. After they were convicted by the power of “the word of the Lord”, they trumpeted the same Word forth. That is the meaning of “sounded forth”.

The Word of the Lord – and not their own opinion about it – has done its work in their lives. There is an expression that it is applied to people who speak about the gospel but do not live accordingly in practice: your actions speak so loudly that I cannot hear what you say. With the Thessalonians it was different. Their actions spoke so loudly that everyone could hear the gospel of the Lord.

I would like to conclude this section with a word about “the word”. This is already the third time that we hear about ‘the word’. In verse 5 it is about the word of the gospel, i.e. the content. In verse 6 it is the Word that has been received, which caused their lives to be changed and made resistant to any pressure. Here, in verse 8, it is “the word of the Lord”. That puts the emphasis on the origin. Because of the addition ‘of the Lord’ ‘the Word’ also points to the authority of Him Who is its source (Acts 15:36). You will also encounter other additions, for example: the Word of God (2Cor 2:17; 4:2), the Word of His grace (Acts 14:3; 20:32), the Word of life (Phil 2:16) and the Word of faith (Rom 10:8).

We live in a time of words. Words bring revolutions in countries and histories. We have been granted the privilege to possess a Word that is more powerful than any human word. It is a Word that works powerfully. It is a Word of life. Therefore: Read the Word and live accordingly!

Now read Thessalonians 1:5-8 again.

Reflection: Can it be said of you that you have become a follower of Paul and of the Lord?

## 1Thes 1:9-10 | Turned to God, Serve and Wait

*9 For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, 10 and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, [that is] Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.*

V9. This verse starts, like verse 8, with the word “for”. Then the explanation follows of the fact that Paul and his companions did not have to say anything to others of the faith of the Thessalonians. The whole area knows all about it. If you observe such Christendom, it need not be emphasized by words. Good wine needs no wreath, so to speak. Paul could refer to it and did not need to say anything else.

What has happened to the Thessalonians can be seen by everyone. They have no pious talk about their faith in God, but they show in their lives that they have been radically changed direction. Instead of focusing on idols and putting their trust in them, they now believe in God and put their trust in Him.

It must have made him very happy to be able to write in this way to and about these young believers. He does not need to tell others about them. It is already known. Those others know exactly how the gospel that Paul has preached has found entry with the Thessalonians.

That entry also has got a way out. In their lives it is evident that a radical reversal has occurred. Everyone has noticed how much these people have changed. They are dealing with people who have given up idolatry and now are worshiping the only living and true God. They no longer live as slaves to their lusts and greed, which is idolatry (Col 3:5)

The word ‘idol’ means ‘a thing of nothing’. In a speech at Lystra Paul says to his audience that they should repent of the ‘vain things’ – which are their idols – to the living God (Acts 14:15). Once you are converted, you know that an idol means nothing (1Cor 8:4). But only when you are converted you become aware – for before that time you were blind to see that – that honor given to an idol was in fact given to demons (1Cor 10:19-20). John concludes his first letter with a warning concerning idols. In the context of his letter it becomes clear what an idol is: an idol is everything that takes the place of the Lord Jesus as the true God and the eternal life (1Jn 5:20-21).

The Thessalonians have abandoned idolatry. But it is not sufficient to do away with something. Something else has to be put in its place. That 'something else' must be God, otherwise you go from bad to worse. Turning does not stand in itself. Turning has a purpose and that is to serve the living and true God. Therefore the conclusion is not only turning from, but also turning to.

But what exactly is 'turning' or 'convert'? It's not just a change of mind about certain things. It is also not a change in your behavior. Conversion is that you honestly say to God that you have sinned. That is called: confessing your sins. You also acknowledge that what is within you, in your heart, is not right. You will have to mention your sins by name and ask forgiveness to God and also to him or her to whom you, for example, have lied. You agree therefore with conviction that you are indeed not to be trusted. You realize that you deserve the punishment of God because of those sins. You realize that it would be righteous if God threw you into hell for your sins.

Therefore conversion is not a superficial matter, but a profound work. It is not about your feelings, but rather about your conscience. That has to come into the light of God. You could say that conversion is: going to God, in order to condemn yourself before Him. It also implies that you confess before Him that you have not been obedient to Him up to that moment and that due to that, your life was thoroughly wrong. You will also show repentance for having lived such a life.

Repentance is inextricably connected to conversion. It has got nothing to do with a superficial expression of regret. True repentance happens inwardly, an inward change takes place. You have been totally changed in your thinking about yourself and about God. You may have done very well in your own eyes in the past. That has been ended with your conversion: with a repentant heart you condemn yourself.

In the past you had your own thoughts about God. With repentance that has been ended: with repentance you acknowledge Him in His full righteousness. Whoever repents does not live his life anymore with his back turned on God, but on the contrary, he has turned himself to God. This is what happened to the Thessalonians.

The proofs of a real conversion are for example that you love the Lord Jesus, that you desire to know Him better, that you have the need to pray and to read in the Bible and that you want to talk about Him with others who do not know Him yet. The love for the Lord Jesus is seen in the obedience to His Word.

Of the Thessalonians it is said that the proof of their conversion is that they served God. The word that is used here for 'serve', means to serve as a slave. That implies the unconditional fulfillment of all obligations that go with the life of a Christian. It means: doing everything that God says, any time that it is required. The control over everything that you are and have and over every minute of your life, is with God.

At your conversion you delivered yourself to Him and with much delight, for God is absolutely different from the idols. Those are dead idols (Psa 135:15-18), while God is the "living" God. He is also the "true" God. Everything He says is true, while the demons making use of idols are deceitful. Think about greed. Advertising cunningly caters to that. The intention is to fool you that a life without the advertised product is just pitiful. This is how they stimulate your desire for it. Your greed must be fulfilled. Once you've purchased the desired product, you often notice that you've been deceived.

God alone gives in a way that does not disappoint. He wants to give you everything you need to serve Him. He is also truthful in everything that He has said. You can fully count on Him. In an appealing comparison, Jeremiah contrasts God and the idols (Jer 10:1-16).

V10. You have therefore totally abandoned your past, you have turned your back on the idols. In the present you enjoy the privilege to serve the living and true God. Besides that, there is the future. That also looks wonderful. Instead of fear for the future and the wrath to come on the world, you are looking forward to the coming of the Son of God.

Serving God and waiting for His Son is the twofold purpose of conversion. They belong together inextricably. When you lose sight of the coming of the Son of God, it has disastrous consequences for the testimony of the Christians. The Lord Jesus speaks about it in a parable (Mt 24:48-49). He says that whoever forgets His coming or puts it in the far future, will start

with beating his fellow servants and with eating and drinking with the drunkards. You see that they on the one hand start to beat the ones whom they should go together with and on the other hand they go together with those they had to remain separated from. Whosoever does not wait for Him daily, will start to live for himself.

Isn't it great to look forward to the coming of the Lord? It is all about Him Who entered death for your sake and Who was raised by God. That is the very reason why you have received a living hope: the prospect of a new heaven and a new earth (1Pet 1:3; 2Pet 3:13). After His resurrection He was received up into heaven (Mk 16:19; Heb 9:24). There He occupies the place of the highest authority (1Pet 3:22). From there He will surely return to claim His right to the earth (Psa 2:8).

He will do that as "Jesus", as He is called here. This is the Name that refers to His life in humiliation on earth. That Name will be terror for the world. That Name is full of love and glory for you and me. It is Him Whom we are waiting for from heaven (Phil 3:20) to take us up to be with Him. That is the guarantee that we will be rescued before God's wrath will strike the earth (Rev 3:10). What a great prospect!

Now read 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 again.

Reflection: What have you turned from and how do you serve God? How does the thought of the coming of the Son of God affect you?

## 1 Thessalonians 2

### **1Thes 2:1-6 | The Way the Gospel Got Entrance**

*1 For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain, 2 but after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition. 3 For our exhortation does not [come] from error or impurity or by way of deceit; 4 but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts. 5 For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness— 6 nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority.*

V1. With the words “for you yourselves know” Paul reminds the Thessalonians of what they saw when he and his companions appeared in the city. You may probably remember that also in chapter 1 something is said about the entrance that Paul and his companions found with the Thessalonians (1Thes 1:9). Other people in that place testified of that entrance. Here Paul is testifying of it himself. He reminds them that the entrance was not without result.

It is also hidden in the way he addresses them. He calls them “brethren”, a title which he earlier could not use, because then they did not know the Lord Jesus. In this beautiful title you can sense the warm relationship that Paul has with them and which arose when the gospel found entrance with them.

V2. They were informed about what Paul had to face in the city of Philippi (Acts 16:19-24). He, as it were, showed them his bloody back when he came to preach the gospel to them. The torture and slander that he had to endure at Philippi had not extinguished his burning desire to preach the gospel (cf. Acts 4:29; Eph 6:19-20). The entrance that they had was that of wounded laborers. Paul did not encourage them to endure tribulations

without him having the courage himself to endure it. He was speaking from experience.

His courage to move on was not from himself. It was not a matter of taking a deep breath and keep on going. He had "boldness in our God". That is not a natural courage or enthusiasm, but Divine capability. 'Boldness' is expressed in 'saying everything you want to', 'speaking fearlessly'. If this way of speaking does not happen "in our God", it is no more than an impertinent and audacious way of using words.

The expression 'in our God' means that you are aware of your personal relationship with God, that He surrounds you behind and before. It keeps you from doing your own will and makes you feel safe and supported and also dependent. And how necessary is that, for preaching the gospel always goes hand in hand with a lot of struggles. There is a mighty adversary who does everything in his power to prevent the gospel to be preached.

Speaking about the gospel, like Paul says here, is quite different from making the gospel discussable. The gospel is not one of the many and nice themes that are interesting to once debate about. The gospel is unique according to its origin and content. People who really believe in it, cannot keep it for themselves, but would rather speak about it (2Cor 4:13). But just because its content originates from God and Christ, everyone who speaks about it will not want to use words that would harm its uniqueness.

V3. That may cause inward struggles in situations where the preacher runs the risk to adjust the gospel according to the world, in order to make it more acceptable. It may also be necessary that the battle is fought outwardly. Everyone who in his faithfulness to the gospel wants to talk about the words of the Scripture – for that alone is the power that leads people to conversion – will sense the increase of the pressure from outside not to preach the gospel in such a radical way.

Paul was proclaiming an uncompromising gospel. He was in no way to be deluded by anything or anyone around him. His motives were crystal clear, without any impurity. He has never sought any advantage for his own sake. The gospel was not a way for him to make a living. It has caused him more slander and persecution than honor and prosperity. He

summarizes extensively all the things that he is not to be blamed for. These negative things are actually found in all kinds of sects. Money, or the honor of people, plays an important role there.

The exhortation, the call for repentance, was not made by him “from error”. He did not deceive them and lead them to an errant way. The source of his preaching was the pure, unadulterated Word of God. He also shook off the blame of “impurity”, as if he were seeking to fulfill his lusts, of himself. Nor did his preaching have anything to do with “deceit”, as if he had presented them with a bait by which he ensnared them.

V4. How did Paul and his companions escape those dangers? How do we escape them? It is only by doing these things in fellowship with God. Paul always speaks about God. He brings everything in connection with Him and therefore he could say that he and his companions “have been approved by God”. When they went out together, all three of them had made the necessary experiences in the service of the Lord. Whatever the difference in age, education and experience, they were no novices. These were the men whom God had entrusted the gospel with. He gave it to them as, as it were, a precious gift to deal with faithfully (cf. Mt 25:21; 1Cor 4:2).

Paul is well aware of the fact that it goes together with a great responsibility. That is embedded in the words “so we speak”. How could he dare to deal with something that God had entrusted him with, otherwise than it was fitting to Him by Whom it was given? Any kind of pleasing people was absolutely out of the question here. Who would ever dare to adjust the gospel according to the taste of the world? No, when God is so before your attention, you think only of Him and want to speak only what He has said. Then you are aware that God is examining your heart, which indicates that you always want to have that fellowship with God. The examining of the heart is continually needed, so that wrong motives may not creep in and take their place.

V5. Neither did Paul use “flattering speech” to win them for the gospel. He says it strongly: he has “never” made use of that. They know that, for they have observed it themselves. He who lives in the presence of God, like

Paul and his companions do, knows that flattering speech is condemnable in God's sight. Elihu was fully aware of that (Job 32:21-22).

Flattering speech does not bring people into the light of God, but brings them further away from God. Flattering speech pleases man in his selfishness and pride and makes him insensitive to the need because of his sins. Whoever uses flattering speech, only does that to get something done by others for his own advantage. It is winning the other person in order to use him for his own goal. With flattering speech God is fully put aside and it is all about man.

With regard to flattering speech, Paul refers to the testimony of the Thessalonians; regarding the covetousness he refers to God as Witness. God alone can judge the motives of the heart. A "pretext for greed" implies that the true motive is covered. Covetousness is the motive, but it is presented in a deceiving robe. The love for material things, especially money, makes a person to be inventive in using methods which hides this love in the sight of others, while the desired thing is being sought for. We ourselves have to work, in order to provide for our needs. Do we have to bother other people and ask them money (begging letters) or even allude to it (manipulating)?

V6. Another great danger for everyone who wants to serve the Lord is the seeking of the "glory from men". Paul neither did that. How easily he could have impressed them by his dignity as an apostle. He was after all a person of great spiritual class. How much honor would that have delivered him if he had presented himself like that. But he was not seeking to establish his own importance. He did not want to put before them any particular obligations they would have toward him.

He was always seeking the spiritual well-being of the Thessalonians and that is still the most important thing to him. He had not been among them as a claimant, but as a mother. In the next section we will go further into that.

Now read 1 Thessalonians 2:1-6 again.

Reflection: Which characteristics do Paul and his companions have and which do they not have? What can you apply to yourself?

## 1Thes 2:7-12 | Paul's Conduct Among Them

*7 But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing [mother] tenderly cares for her own children. 8 Having so fond an affection 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 very dear to us. 9 For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, [how] working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. 10 You are witnesses, and [so is] God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers; 11 just as you know how we [were] exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father [would] his own children, 12 so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.*

It is nice to see how each chapter of the letter seems to describe a phase in the growth of the believer from being a baby until his adulthood:

1. In chapter 1 the child has been born.
2. In chapter 2 he is nurtured and raised in the faith.
3. In chapter 3 you see the child standing in faith.
4. In chapter 4 he receives instructions for walking in faith.
5. In chapter 5 there is maturity and the young believer goes to work.

V7. Here we find ourselves in the stage that the child has been born and has to be nourished. It is clear that with a baby you don't think of exerting authority over him. With a baby only motherly care is fitting. The tenderness with which the great apostle goes to work is impressive. He was just as "a nursing [mother]", a nurse.

That's what God was for His people in the wilderness, where He had cared for them and nursed them as a nurturer (Acts 13:18). Also with the Lord Jesus we find those feelings when He speaks about His love for Jerusalem and compares it with that of a hen that spreads her wings over her chicks as a shelter to protect them (Mt 23:37).

Paul had the same motherly feelings for his spiritual children. He reminds them that he was "gentle" or mild, tender, when he was among them. By the way, this character should adorn every servant of the Lord (2Tim 2:24). You also see this gentleness with the Lord Jesus in Isaiah 40 (Isa 40:11).

With a real mother the interest of the child is the most important thing. Her love for the child causes her to act selflessly; she sacrifices herself for that. You see that with the Lord Jesus. He has always sought for the benefit of the other person. Therefore He did not come to be served, but to serve. Paul was His follower in this.

V8. He loved them in such a way that he even wanted to share his own life with them. The meaning of that here is not that he was willing to give his life for the sake of the gospel – although that was surely the case – but that he was fully committed with his whole life to the message that he was bringing. He was willing to live for them, serve them with his life. His whole life – all that he possessed and all of his time – was inextricably connected to the gospel. He not only brought a message, but he also brought himself with it, though in a way that Christ is seen and not he himself.

V9. The only way the gospel can have the effect desired and wrought by God, is if the preacher effaces himself. Parents make great efforts to give their children the right nourishment and education. Thereby their example is of great meaning. The Thessalonians have seen that Paul and his companions were no spongers who wanted to take advantage of their converts. On the contrary.

They gave themselves no rest and they did not even allow themselves a normal sleep, in order to provide for themselves. Paul wanted to avoid at any cost that he would give the impression for using his ministry for any financial profit in any way (cf. 1Cor 9:1-18). He came to Thessalonica to give and to share, not to be a burden or to enrich himself. The gospel of God is not a matter that imposes burdens, but it liberates from the power of sin and takes away the burden of sins.

V10. Paul refers to his behavior among them. Again he mentions God as a Witness of his behavior. But not only God – they themselves have seen with their own eyes how he had behaved himself toward them. Did they see other things than God saw with him? They could not deny what they had observed, no matter how the enemy tried to damage the ministry or motives of the apostle and to bring him into disrepute in the eyes of the Thessalonians.

In the first place they had seen how “devoutly” he had behaved himself. Everything he did was in harmony with God. They also saw that in his dealings with people he had always been “uprightly”. He had never been detrimental to anyone. They finally could not otherwise than testify that he had been “blamelessly”. They could not blame him for anything.

He addresses them as “you believers”. It is important to him that they judge his behavior as believers and therefore not according to worldly measures.

V11. Paul first used the picture of the mother who nurses her child. That proves the tenderness of love of the preacher. Now he uses the picture of the father who deals with his children. In that way he complements the picture of the mother. The use of these parental relationships you find only in the letters of Paul.

With a father we see more the serious aspects of that same love that the mother has (cf. 1Cor 4:14-21; 2Cor 6:13; Gal 4:19). Paul was a good father to his children. He not only addressed them as a whole, but he had also personal attention for each of them. This is important to every servant of the Lord who proclaims the Word. It is easier to say things from the pulpit than in a personal conversation. After-care is important for the individual.

Paul exhorts, encourages and implores the Thessalonians from the father-child relationship. Exhortation is sometimes mistakenly related to the raised finger in the sense of: ‘Watch out, otherwise ...!’ But an exhortation is a call for a person, who is running the risk to deviate or already has, to come back to the company of believers.

Fathers also encourage their children. They encourage them not to despair in times of hardships, but to persevere.

It is about “his own children”. Fathers are often away from home. They sometimes are also occupied with the problems of other people. The danger is that they forget their own children. But their own family is the very first labor field that is given by the Lord. If that is losing out, it will certainly negatively affect the work that is being done for Him.

Paul not only exhorts and encourages them, but he also implores them or testifies to them. In that way he brings exhortation and encouragement

very close. He does not exhort and encourage from a distance as something that would only apply to them and that it is not something he has any part in. To implore or to testify indicates that he proclaims the truth to them with conviction.

Imploring or testifying has to do with a teaching that has proven its value in the practice of life. Each father must teach his children with conviction in the truth of God. A father ought not to say: 'I cannot do that.' He has to charge, to declare, the truth meaning to bind the truth severely to the heart of the child. This teaching will of course only have an impact when the children see in the life of the father that he practices that himself.

V12. The goal that Paul wants to achieve, is that they would "walk in a manner worthy of God". 'Worthy' means that it is fitting and in agreement with the holiness and features of God in Whom they have put their trust (cf. Rom 16:2; Eph 4:1; Phil 1:27; Col 1:10; 3Jn 1:6). It is important that your walk and behavior as a Christian is in accordance with your confession.

I will give an illustration. In the army of Alexander the Great there was a soldier who misbehaved himself. He was brought to Alexander the Great. Alexander asked him for his name. The soldier answered: 'My name is Alexander.' Then Alexander the Great responded: 'Either you change your behavior, or you change your name.'

Consider your high calling. You were first called through the gospel. Now you hear that it has led you to such a high calling, namely God's own kingdom and glory (cf. Rom 8:28; Phil 3:14; 2Tim 1:9; Heb 3:1). Here it is written in such a way that God is continually calling out to you: 'Your way leads to My own kingdom and glory.'

Wouldn't it mark your everyday life if you become aware of that? Seek to live such a life. Fix your eye on that. This is how you draw the future to yourself and in that way that great future will determine and radiate your way.

Now read 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12 again.

Reflection: Which features of God's motherly and fatherly features do you see in this portion with Paul?

### 1Thes 2:13-20 | Persecution and Desire

*13 For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted [it] not [as] the word of men, but [for] what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe. 14 For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they [did] from the Jews, 15 who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men, 16 hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved; with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to the utmost. 17 But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short while—in person, not in spirit—were all the more eager with great desire to see your face. 18 For we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, more than once—and [yet] Satan hindered us. 19 For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? 20 For you are our glory and joy.*

V13. After Paul reminded them of his labor, he makes sure that he addresses them on the ground of the word that they had received by his preaching. He puts himself aside and thanks God that they have “received the word of God ... not [as] the word of men, but [for] what it really is, the word of God”. Therefore their faith was based on God’s Word, although it came to them by the ministry of a human.

Why do you believe that the Bible is God’s Word? You cannot believe it because others say so. You can only believe it if you have experienced its power. When the Word of God came to you, you acknowledged its truth because it gave you the right picture of yourself as a sinner. You also have seen through the Word Who God is in His holiness and righteousness and that He therefore has to condemn sin. But in that Word you also saw that God seeks your salvation and has provided for that by the gift of His Son Jesus Christ.

The person who has brought the gospel to you (it may have been your parents or a total stranger or someone in between), gives thanks to God that you have received it. He could only preach the Word. When you accepted it, you did not do it because of the person that brought you the Word. If

that would be the case, then a person is standing between you and God. No, you are a child of God only because of a personal encounter with God through His Word. The other person was just a messenger.

The Word by which you are saved, is the same Word that is still at work within you. That means, if you are still living from the Word, if you read it daily and receive it as God's Word, it gives you power to live as a Christian. It is a living Word. Therefore it performs its work in everyone who opens up himself for it. It is the only energy (as it is actually written) by which life can grow and fruit can be borne for God.

V14. If you live as a Christian, if you are a follower of the Lord Jesus, it will bring you adversity. Persecution is the consequence of believing. If this happens to you, you may consider that this happens to numerous fellow Christians that come out for the Lord Jesus. That may be an encouragement for you (1Pet 5:9). Here it regards the suffering of the whole church.

In order to encourage them Paul first addresses them again with "brethren", the word that emphasizes his bond with them in a special way. Then he encourages them by pointing them at "the churches of God which are in Judea". What the Thessalonians had to suffer, due to their countrymen, the believers in Judea had to suffer, due to theirs, from the Jews. Through this suffering the Thessalonians became, without searching for it themselves, followers of the churches of God in Judea.

V15. The opposition of the Jews went far and has remained unabated. How great their hatred was appears clearly from the murdering of the Lord Jesus. The Lord came in kindness and grace to reveal God's love. But they saw Him as a threat to their position as God's chosen people, a position in which they boasted. Especially the leaders of the people turned against Him. The Lord Jesus suffered the same fate as God's prophets did for His sake (Mk 12:1-9). Also the apostles experienced the hatred of the Jews. They were persecuted from town to town and had to flee whenever that happened.

The opposition remained in full force (Acts 7:51-52). And while the Jews were raging in such a way, they also thought to be pleasing God in that way (Jn 16:2). How a person can be mistaken when he only seeks his own interest! He cannot please God in this way and instead of seeking the good

for people, he is against all people. To make efforts to stop people from hearing the gospel, in order for them to become truly happy, means to be against them. With all diligence they were trying to prevent the people to hear the gospel of their salvation.

V16. They had rejected Christ and the gospel. Now they were rejecting those who, for the sake of the glorified Lord, were preaching the gospel to the nations. In that way they fill up the measure of their sins. As long as that had not happened yet, God is patient with His wrath (Gen 15:16; Dan 8:23; Mt 23:32). But now there is no chance of conversion of these Jews anymore. In full intensity the judgment has been poured out over them. The land has been destroyed and the inhabitants have been scattered among the nations. In the end, the end time, there will still be a time of unprecedented distress (Jer 30:7), also called "a great tribulation" (Mt 24:21). God will then judge the unbelieving Jews for their sins.

V17. After this elaboration about the Jews, Paul speaks again about his love for the believers in Thessalonica. That has not been cooled down by his absence, but on the contrary has increased. The Jews could indeed rob the Thessalonians from the company and ministry of Paul, but they could in no way rob the Thessalonians out of the heart and thoughts of Paul. He speaks out a great desire for them and that he has made every effort to come to them.

V18. He has tried twice, but in both situations satan blocked his way. Could it possibly be the case that his desire was not okay? Or did he not consult the Lord about it and was it because he wanted to do it on his own? Or was it something else that was not right with him? No, nothing of that all. His desires were good desires. It is also a good thing trying to meet those desires. Then a hindrance follows, not from the Spirit, but from satan. Paul is clear about that. Nevertheless he does not continue at the cost of everything else, but draws the conclusion that the way has been closed for him. He sees the solution by sending Timothy (1Thes 3:2).

Of course satan has no power to stop God's work or His worker if God does not allow it. God determines the limit of the adversary (Job 1:12; 2:6). On another occasion Paul speaks about "a messenger of Satan to torment me" (2Cor 12:7). There he learns that the grace of the Lord is sufficient

for him (2Cor 12:9). Paul knows better than anyone that all things work together for good to those who love God (Rom 8:28), even the hindrances by satan.

V19. That satan hindered him to meet his beloved children in faith, did not make him sad. He looked beyond the disappointment to the coming of Christ. There he and the Thessalonians would be united and they would together rejoice in all things that the grace and power of the Holy Spirit had worked in them. Then all suffering and hardship will be over.

The coming of the Lord Jesus does not only bring outcome from all suffering, but He will also come with the reward for the work that has been done for His sake (Rev 22:12). Paul always had that strong awareness and it only increased because of this hindrance. In that way he bent the disappointment of that moment into a joyful view.

The bond that satan was trying to break by hindering the pleasure of it, was enjoyed more intensely in the light of the reunion at the coming of Christ. Then there will be full joy. Then he would see the Thessalonians there as a reward for his labor (cf. Phil 4:1), a reward in which he is extremely delighted.

It is certainly true that everything we do for the Lord, is worked by Him. Yet He will reward it as if we have done it. What a Lord we have! Therefore we will cast every crown that we may possibly have earned (1Cor 9:25; 2Tim 4:8; 1Pet 5:4; Jam 1:12; Rev 2:10), before His feet as a tribute to Him (Rev 4:10).

V20. When Paul has talked about the coming unity with the Thessalonians, he concludes this chapter by saying to them what they have already meant to him now. What soon will be enjoyed in its fullness from face to face, he is now already experiencing in his spirit. They are already now all his glory and joy.

Now read 1 Thessalonians 2:13-20 again.

Reflection: How do you deal with hindrances that you encounter in your life with the Lord?

# 1 Thessalonians 3

## **1Thes 3:1-6 | Paul's Concern**

*1 Therefore when we could endure [it] no longer, we thought it best to be left behind at Athens alone, 2 and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith, 3 so that no one would be disturbed by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this. 4 For indeed when we were with you, we [kept] telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction; and so it came to pass, as you know. 5 For this reason, when I could endure [it] no longer, I also sent to find out about your faith, for fear that the tempter might have tempted you, and our labor would be in vain. 6 But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always think kindly of us, longing to see us just as we also long to see you,*

V1. Paul has just expressed, at the end of the previous chapter, his great desire to his beloved Thessalonians (1Thes 2:17-18). They are a source of deep joy for him. He very much wanted to be with them to see how they were doing. It was a great encouragement for him to know that he would meet them at the coming of the Lord Jesus. Nevertheless, he also had an undiminished desire to know how they were doing spiritually.

That desire became so strong that he necessarily wanted to know how they were doing. He couldn't longer endure it to be without any information about their situation. At that moment he was in Athens (see Introduction). Timothy was also there with him, with whom he enjoyed a special bond of fellowship in the work of the Lord.

V2. Paul abandoned everything that he found valuable for himself. His desire to get information about the situation of the Thessalonians was so great that he sent Timothy to them. He indeed speaks in the 'we'-form, but he, Paul was in charge (cf. verse 5). By using the word 'we' he shows that it was not a decision he made on his own, being dragged by his emotions. He acted in agreement with others.

You see that Paul also had feelings. He felt a strong bond with the Thessalonians. There is nothing wrong with such feelings. On the contrary, they are all included. Connectedness with believers should be experienced, though feelings should not determine the action. That is up to the Lord. Therefore He also gives you fellow believers.

The value that Timothy had for him, is underlined by speaking about him as “our brother and God’s fellow worker”. The Thessalonians received him as a brother who was related with both Paul and them. They also received him as someone who worked together with Paul for God. The territory of their labor, the sphere wherein they worked, was “the gospel of Christ” (2Cor 10:14). He who works wholeheartedly in the gospel of Christ, will therefore be able to take proper care of those who have accepted this gospel.

The job description of Timothy was clear: to strengthen and encourage the Thessalonians in their faith. The believers were going through difficulties. You could think that comfort would be more appropriate. Yet this is not necessarily always the case. These believers were under pressure. They experienced hostility and were persecuted. In such a case strengthening of the faith is especially needed.

When the pressure on you because of your faith gets so great that you are in danger of succumbing, you need strengthening to stand firm. Peter received such an order from the Lord like Timothy receives from Paul here, an order which he had fulfilled by writing his first letter (Lk 22:32; 1Pet 5:12). James has such a message for his readers (Jam 5:8).

They also needed encouragement to persevere. When pressure is continuously being exerted on you, it may discourage you. Then you need encouragement.

V3. The important thing is that your faith, which means here your confidence of faith, does not get to waver. This danger threatens everyone who wants to live for the Lord. In tribulation it appears if there is mention of a true conversion. Whoever started to believe because it makes a person happy, will not only waver, but will surely fall away (Mk 4:16-17).

With his attacks the enemy is seeking to damage your faith, your confidence in God. When you’re going through difficulties because you believe, he will always whisper in your ear that that ‘nice God’ of yours has finally

caused you to end up in troubles. And you were so sure that He is the solution for all your troubles.

Don't let yourself be deceived! Tribulation is included in the salvation (Acts 14:22) and is foretold by the Lord (Jn 16:33) as something we have been destined for, as something that is simply fully included. Therefore do not consider it strange if this happens to you (1Pet 4:12). Whoever believes in God, which means whoever really trusts in Him in the everyday life, will be persecuted (2Tim 3:12).

If it is good, you know that too. At least I hope that you have not started to believe in the Lord Jesus and God because of success stories, but that you have seen yourself in God's light after a powerful preaching. A sound preaching does not promise him who believes a life without adversary and worries. No, on the contrary, you will surely be rejected and hated, just like they have rejected and hated the Master (Jn 15:20).

V4. One more time Paul reminds the Thessalonians of what had occurred to himself and his companions (1Thes 2:2). Because he could well imagine what tribulation means, his whole heart and his full compassion goes out to these young believers in Thessalonica who were suffering so much.

V5. Why was Paul so concerned? Did he himself not trust God that He would take care of those believers? No, Paul had no lack of confidence in God, but he was aware of the power of the adversary and also of the way in which God operates to resist the adversary. God has given us to one another so that through each other we may be supporting one another. Not that thereby we are only dependent on one another. In everything the Lord orders us to do, we are dependent on Him. But in this way He wants to teach us how to share in His feelings and to practice His care. If we act like that, He becomes visible in our lives.

Timothy is his messenger and the interpreter of Paul's emotions. Like no other, Timothy was able to judge how the Thessalonians were doing. He could supply Paul with reliable information about them. Paul wanted to know how they were doing in faith. He wanted to know whether their confidence of faith was increasing by the tribulation or whether it was decreasing because the tempter had gained foothold. The tempter is no one else than satan (Mt 4:3). Satan will approach every believer, just like he approached the Lord Jesus. When children of God are going through

suffering and tribulation, he tries to persuade them to say 'goodbye' to God (cf. Job 2:9).

The apostle was not worried about an attack on their faith, but he was worried about a successful attack. If the latter case would become reality, his labor would be in vain. That does not mean that they would perish, but that they should not show themselves forth as being Christians. The fire of their testimony would then be extinguished and in their behavior they would adjust themselves again to the world. That was a thought he could not bear. Therefore he needed to have an indication of the condition of their faith. What you see here with Paul, is a beautiful example of aftercare.

V6. What a relief it is for Paul when he hears from Timothy that his beloved children in faith are doing well. It was a joyful message to him. It cheered him up. A big burden was lifted from his shoulder. It's a good thing to notice how much good news can help a person to recover spiritually. We may use it as an example. Let us not withhold from one another the good news there is to report. It is so encouraging to share with one another what the Lord has worked in a church. In that way God is being glorified (Acts 21:19-20a).

Timothy had seen that their confidence of faith had not diminished. It had withstood in the tribulation. Their faith was the power that enabled them to deal with the tribulation. Out of their tribulation they looked up to heaven in faith upon Him of Whom they trusted that He would help them in the tribulation. And they have not been disappointed. Through the tribulation they learnt to know Him better.

Their love for one another was also shown through the tribulation. It drove them to one another. God uses tribulations to strengthen the bond of love. That's what Timothy had noticed. Satan also tries to drive a wedge between the preachers and the believers. But he did not succeed. The Thessalonians looked back with gratitude on the men who brought them the gospel. They even desired to see them again, a desire of which Paul could say that it was mutual. You can 'remember' Paul with gratitude by reading his inspired letters and act accordingly. And how do you remember your brothers and sisters whom you do not see daily?

Now read 1 Thessalonians 3:1-6 again.

Reflection: What lessons can you learn about aftercare here?

### 1Thes 3:7-13 | Love and Holiness

*7 for this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction we were comforted about you through your faith; 8 for now we [really] live, if you stand firm in the Lord. 9 For what thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account, 10 as we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face, and may complete what is lacking in your faith? 11 Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you; 12 and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also [do] for you; 13 so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.*

V7. The news with which Timothy came to Paul about the faith of the Thessalonians was a great comfort. Their faith did not only withstand, but it had also increased (2Thes 1:3). He needed comfort, because he himself was in need and tribulation. His need may be caused by the lack of material things. It may also be an inward need, because he was spiritually weighed down, also because he was worrying about the Thessalonians. Also the physical tribulations that he had suffered came to his mind.

V8. How great could the need be for a person to have some spiritual refreshment. And then this news about their faith! What a relief. It was like life flowed back in him. Now he had heard that they were standing firm in the Lord, he totally revived (cf. Gen 45:26-27).

You see that Paul let himself to be comforted. You could also let yourself be comforted like that by the faith of another person. That the faith of the other person still lacks some things, does not have to be a hindrance, as you also see it here. He who does not let himself to be comforted is in danger of becoming embittered. That may undermine the faith life.

V9. Like sorrow is related to death, so is gratitude related to life. Paul was full of gratitude for what he had heard about their faith, but he was not thanking the Thessalonians for their steadfastness. His gratitude went out to God. God had made sure that they remained steadfast through all the attacks of the enemy. In that way he was filled with joy. It was a joy that he experienced "before our God", which is the presence of God, before God's

face, in fellowship with Him. You experience real heart-felt joy when God comforts you. That is a joy that brings you back to the Cause of your joy.

The joy of Paul was so great that he asks himself what he could render to God for that. He does not answer that question. His question actually means that there is simply no gift that is great enough to show God how intensely grateful he is to Him. That says a lot of Paul's gratitude, doesn't it (cf. Psa 116:12)? Doesn't that apply to everything that you have received from God? Are you also intensely grateful for that? And aren't you looking for what you can give Him for that in return?

V10. After this awesome comforting news about their faith, you may think that Paul could leave this subject of care so that he can focus on other churches. But you do not read that here. It only increased his desire for them. He continued to pray that he may visit them. "Night and day" he kept "praying most earnestly" for that.

He had exceedingly endeavored to come to them (1Thes 2:17). Now he was praying "most earnestly" that that may finally happen. With 'most earnestly' you should think of such a great amount that it overflows the borders in such a way that it cannot be stopped. His heart was overflowing when he spoke to God about his desire to visit the Thessalonians.

His desire was not prompted by selfishness. The important thing for him was their spiritual well-being (cf. Rom 1:11). When he was with them, he was forced to depart earlier. Therefore he could not teach them everything that was needed for their faith. 'Faith' here is the truth of faith, the content of what they believe (Jude 1:3), that is 'the apostles' teaching' (Acts 2:42). Now he wants very much to finish his work with them.

He does not do that by himself. He trusts God for answering his prayer, at His time and through His way. It took five more years before his prayer was answered. We may assume that Paul, when he was in Macedonia later, also visited the believers in Thessalonica (Acts 20:1,3). God made the letter that he wrote in the meantime, to be included in His Word, so that what is lacking in your and my faith can also be provided.

V11. In this verse God the Father and the Lord Jesus are on one line. They are seen here in their unity. Here you have a wonderful proof that the Lord Jesus is God. They are on the same level and are acting fully in agreement

with one another. The will of the Father is never in contrast to the will of the Son; the same applies in reverse. Here it regards the paving of Paul's way to the Thessalonians.

The same goes for you and me. You are allowed to put your way in the hands of Divine Persons. They have the means to pave your way and take away all hindrances. The Father Himself loves you (Jn 16:27) and the Father Himself is the almighty God. The Lord Jesus wants to use you in His service and will surely pave the way for it. The Lord Jesus is associated with the Father as the Director of the ways of people and especially of His servants. That may give you rest in the way that you should go.

V12. Therefore it could take quite a while before Paul was with them. Up to that moment of reunion he has a wish for the Thessalonians. He wishes that the Lord will let them increase "in love" (verse 12) and that as a result of that they would be "without blame in holiness" at the coming of the Lord Jesus (verse 13). These are the two features of the Being of God, for God is light (1Jn 1:5) and God is love (1Jn 4:8,16).

Paul begins to speak about 'love' and after that about 'holiness'. The order is important. When there is an abundance of love you will develop real holiness. Holiness means separation, but with the goal to be dedicated. Separation without love and dedication to God only leads to the legalism of the Pharisees. Wherever there is true love there will also naturally be separation from everything that is in contrast to that one great love. Holiness is to love what God loves and to hate what God hates.

Paul himself is abounding in his love for them. That has become clear to them. His love for them must have been an exhortation for them to love one another and also all people in the same way. Love is the hallmark of the life of the Christian. This love does not let itself be limited to an exclusive company of people who are nice to you and whom you therefore like. It is the love of God that selflessly reaches out to every person. That love is poured out in your heart by the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5). Due to that you can love every believer and that love can reach out to every human being.

V13. When the love of God has conquered and strengthened your heart, you are able to walk in holiness. John says it as follows in his first letter: "The one who loves his brother abides in the Light" (1Jn 2:10). At the first

glance it does not seem to refer to an exhortation to live in holiness. Paul is after all talking about being without blame in holiness “at the coming of our Lord Jesus”. There is no mention of an increase of holiness anymore, is there? But Paul never speaks of the coming of the Lord without it having to affect our daily life.

Besides, here it is not about the coming of the Lord for the church. That will be dealt with in chapter 4. You can also derive that from the phrase: at the coming of the Lord “with all His saints”. That is His coming to the earth with the church and the Old Testament believers, after He has caught up the church and all Old Testament believers.

Paul points out to the final result of a holiness that should now already characterize us. He who is full of love for the Lord and His own will certainly not allow himself to be related with the uncleanness of the world. Isn't that already your desire to look more and more like what you will soon be in perfection? It ought not to be a big transfer from our life on earth to our life in heaven.

We see a beautiful example in Enoch of this (Gen 5:24). Enoch walked with God. He was growing therein and lived closer and closer to God. It is once presented that at a certain moment he comes so close to heaven that God says: ‘Come in.’ Do you think a totally different world suddenly opened up for Enoch then?

Now read 1 Thessalonians 3:7-13 again.

Reflection: Consider the relation between love and holiness in your life.

# 1 Thessalonians 4

## **1Thes 4:1-3 | Holiness**

*1 Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us [instruction] as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more. 2 For you know what commandments we gave you by [the authority of] the Lord Jesus. 3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification; [that is,] that you abstain from sexual immorality;*

The subjects that Paul deals with in this chapter are connected with three keywords at the end of the previous chapter: holiness, love and the coming. In this chapter Paul speaks about holiness, here called sanctification in verses 1-8, in verses 9-12 about love and in verses 13-18 about the coming of the Lord Jesus.

So, in verses 1-8 it is about sanctification and in particular regarding marriage. Sanctification is in relation with the triune God. In this section you read about the Lord Jesus, about God and about the Holy Spirit. They are the source that lead to a true life of sanctification. Sanctification is not negative, as if it is only about things that you are not to be doing. It is about what is consecrated to God. That is only possible, since sin is in the world, by consecrating it from what is not consecrated to God.

V1. The section begins with “finally”, which indicates that there is something more added to the letter. The main elements of the faith life have been dealt with, but there are still some things that are also useful for their faith life. It regards the dangers that threatened the Thessalonians as a result of their former habits. The people around them were still living in a way that was fully in contradiction to the heavenly and holy joy that he has spoken about.

Like more often, Paul addresses them with “brethren”, in order to emphasize his relationship with them and their relationship with one another. In this way he clearly makes them feel that he is one of them. That creates the right sphere for what he wants to “request and exhort”. In order to make it

easier for them to heed his exhortation, he points to the Lord Jesus. In Him his exhortation finds its origin and in Him they find the strength to take heed of his exhortation.

In the word 'request' confidentiality resonates. He requests something from believers of whom he knows that they are really willing to respond. In the word 'exhort', something of his fatherly authority is expressed. With his requesting and exhorting he continues with what he already told them earlier about their walk and the pleasing of God. They not only heard that, but they also received it.

"To walk" and "please God" belong together. You also read of Enoch that he "walked with God" (Gen 5:24) and in that way "was pleasing to" Him (Heb 11:5). Here you see how strongly 'walk' and 'please God' are related to one another. Hebrew 11:5 is a quotation of Genesis 5:24, but from the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament. What is written in Genesis 5:24 "walked with God" is translated there with "pleasing to God".

The combination 'walk' and 'please God' is all right with the Thessalonians. The words "just as you actually do walk" are an addition that keeps the Thessalonians from discouragements which could have possibly arisen. Paul wants to prevent that they become sad because of his remark, which could make them consider it as if they did not bother about his serious instructions.

Nevertheless they still could possibly increase in their walk with God and pleasing Him and therefore Paul exhorts them. It is dangerous to think that it is all right with you. You want to live with and for the Lord and therefore let yourself be guided by God's Word and God's Spirit. You can honestly admit that you do not know what you will still have to confess as a sin. There is nothing wrong with that. Except that it may possibly cause you a feeling of satisfaction, of contentment. Such a feeling may gradually take hold of you, without your realizing it.

If you compare your life to that of the Lord, it appears that there is a lot more to increase in. You certainly do not want to claim that you are an accomplished believer in dedication and dependence, do you? Have you ever experienced a situation in which you feel completely powerless? I

think you do. It is about spiritual growth, to grow in holiness. As long as you are on earth the process of growing goes on.

This growing process only takes place when you absorb God's Word as your daily food (Mt 4:4) and obey it. You yourself will decrease more and more and the Lord Jesus will increase (Jn 3:30). If you do not feed yourself daily with God's Word, the old habits will again get foothold. That's what Paul is warning for. It is also important for you to take that warning to heart.

V2. Paul reminds them of the commandments he had given them. It was not just a personal wish or a friendly request. In that way he fulfilled the will of the Lord. The Lord Jesus is the authority behind his commandments. He wants the believers to please God in their walk. In order to fulfill that, every relationship that a believer begins in his life, should happen in sanctification and love. Here you find it focused on sanctification in marriage and brotherly love.

V3. When we talk about sanctification, we talk about the will of God. If you bow to God's will, if you acknowledge His will as authority in your life, you will abstain from sexual immorality or fornication. Fornication is a brutal attack on marriage. Fornication – the Greek word is *porneia*, from which the word 'pornography' known to us, is derived – is unlawful sexual intercourse, both before and outside marriage. Fornication in marriage is also called adultery.

In the time of Paul, sexual impureness had such a fixed place in the Greek and Roman life that apparently nobody considered it an awful sin against God and the neighbor. It was part of their ritual religion, like it still is in some parts of the pagan world. Sexual immorality is condemned in many places in the Bible. Whoever does not bother about that, will be judged by God (Heb 13:4).

That it is not considered an awful sin anymore applies also to the Western world, which once was Christian. Whether you're married or not, you live in a society wherein marriage is incredibly being destroyed. It is not on a slippery slope anymore, but it is thrown from the steepness into the abyss. Sexual morality is declining rapidly. There is almost no movie without sexually titillating scenes. Commercials are full of it. And the enormous

waves of filthiness that are being offered via internet have no end, both regarding the quantity and the horrendous content.

In the light of the developments in our country, this word to the Thessalonians becomes increasingly topical to us. Putting this word about the sanctification of marriage high on the agenda of life standards is by no means a superfluous luxury.

The Thessalonians have been freed from this lifestyle, but were surrounded by men who were still living according to the lifestyle. The chance to fall back on an old pattern always remains. In order to prevent that, strong actions are to be taken. It is said that they are to abstain from fornication. That is their responsibility and that goes also for you.

An appeal is made on your self-control. Do you feel the urge rising to read sex books or to go 'online' and search for porn sites? Don't give in to it – fill your mind immediately with something of the Lord Jesus. Quote some texts from God's Word. It doesn't matter which one. Make sure that you have a number of them in store. Remember that you are subjected to the commands that are given here by the Lord Jesus. God wants your sanctification. He wants you for Himself.

In case you've gone too far already and have been entangled in it, search for help. Don't wait too long to do that. Come up with it. Go to someone whom you trust and speak out about it. Confess your sins together with your confidant and make arrangements that help you to get rid of this addiction. Above all things, read God's Word, for the truth will set you free (Jn 8:32).

Now read 1 Thessalonians 4:1-3 again.

Reflection: Look up the following Bible verses and take them into your heart, so that you may use them as a defense for your sanctification: Mt 5:3-9; 1Cor 6:13-20.

## 1Thes 4:4-8 | The Will of God

*4 that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, 5 not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; 6 [and] that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is [the] avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned [you]. 7 For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification. 8 So, he who rejects [this] is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.*

V4. Young believers often ask the question: ‘How could one know the will of God?’ That’s a good question. This question cannot always directly be answered in a particular case. But in the previous verse you have clearly heard about the will of God in a certain aspect of your life. God wants your sanctification with a view to marriage. The concrete application of that will is that you abstain from fornication.

Therefore you need to “know how to possess” your “own vessel in sanctification and honor”. The word ‘vessel’ is also used to indicate a person (Acts 9:15; Rom 9:22,23; 2Tim 2:21) or also your own body (cf. 2Cor 4:7). In this regard it can refer to both your own wife (1Pet 3:7) and your own body. It doesn’t matter as to the power of this Bible word. In both cases the question is whether you deal with it in sanctification and honor.

The contradiction to how the nations that do not know God deal with it, makes clear how God’s children ought to practice it. Those who do not know God, do not know how to possess their ‘own vessel’ in the right way. The result of denying the Creator is the degradation of the creature. Degraded man uses the woman for the satisfaction of his own lusts.

Paganism has lowered the woman to an object of lusts. Christendom shows that the woman is in the same way an heir of God’s promises like the man (1Pet 3:7). That she is the weaker vessel, gives the man the opportunity to deal with her in a way that fully complies with her for being a woman. He will offer her safety and protection.

The phrase “know how to possess” means that you know that you have received your body in order to serve God with it. After all, “in sanctification” means separated for God. And “in honor” means that you value your body as a gift from God in order to use it for His sake. If you value this gift, you

will not use it for things in order to serve your lusts in general and your sexual lusts in particular. If you are married you will consider your wife a gift from God. If you appreciate this gift you will not abuse it to fulfill your (sexual) lusts.

V5. If your own body is meant to be a 'vessel', it is clear that you should not misuse your body to satisfy your lustful passions. I want to mention masturbation in this context. If in masturbation you often sought an expression for your feelings, then there is a great chance that you will abuse marriage for that as a married person. You should not consider marriage to be a solution for sexual desires. To the unmarried or engaged person (which also means: still unmarried person) sexuality should also be kept in the right place. Therefore it is important to learn how to deal rightly with what God has given in sexuality.

V6. This verse goes still further. Here not only the own body or the own wife is misused, but the wife of the brother. Paul draws a sharp line. The sharing of all possessions may characterize true Christendom, but one must keep his hands off his brother's wife. She belongs to him. He who ignores that border and steps across that border, does a great injustice to his brother. This injustice cannot be simply wiped away by a quick confession (Pro 6:32-35), often forced after having been caught in the act.

A form of fornication that occurs more and more is the digital form. The internet is the means that offers this opportunity plentifully. There is a gigantic offer and it increases daily in number. Many millions of porn sites are dormant present there. Just a simple mouse click brings them to life. This 'silent' fornication is committed by a lot of believers. Sometimes it remains to be limited to only once 'out of curiosity'. There are also cases, and those cases increase, where it has adopted addictive forms.

Do not think that it cannot happen to you. Therefore take this serious word that also comes to you, to heart. Do like Job, who says: "I have made a covenant with my eyes" (Job 31:1), which means, be determined not to look at something that defiles you.

The Lord will avenge everything that has to do with fornication. Paul has said that to them when he was with them, just like he had spoken then about tribulations (1Thes 3:4). Here he adds to it that he had "solemnly

warned” them. These particular things need to be emphasized. An exhortation is not enough. This evil is so general and hooks on to our own corruptive nature in such a way that the threat of the vengeance of the Lord needs to be put as a horrifying sight before us. Maybe that will keep us from committing this deed.

I repeat what I said in the previous section: In case it is a fact for you that you have to acknowledge that you have already gone too far, admit it. Do not continue on this path! There is the possibility for you to turn your back on it. Do not let yourself be kept by any whispering voice inside of you from admitting it. Then seek for a person whom you trust and share your need with that person. Let yourself to be helped in order to become free. With the help of the Lord and of others you will succeed. However you have to be willing to, and change your willingness into deeds. If you really trust the Lord, He will make you free to live a sanctified life for Him.

V7. God after all “has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification”. In the previous verses you are called to live a sanctified life. That includes the warning that if you do not do that, you will find the Lord as an Avenger on your way. However, doing God’s will is not only determined by the fear for God’s judgment. A positive motive to live a life in purity is to be found in knowing God’s purpose for all of His children. When He called you through the gospel, He did that with the purpose that you would be holy in your whole conduct, like He is holy (1Pet 1:16).

The gospel that you have accepted is in sharp contrast to the impurity that surrounds you. By God’s will you have been drawn from it (Gal 1:4). You do not belong there anymore and it does no longer belong to you. God has called you “in sanctification”, which means that you live your life in a holy atmosphere from the moment of your conversion.

V8. With the word “so” Paul introduces the summary of the subject with which he has just dealt. You ought not to reject what God says about sexuality and honor and purity and highness of marriage. ‘To reject’ something is to put it aside, making it invalid, refusing it. That warning comes to you as a professing Christian. That means that you are capable of that.

This ‘rejecting’ will actually not directly start with the grossest form. Therefore beware that you abide in these things close to God’s Word. In

conversations with people from your environment who do not care about God's Word, you may get to understand and tolerate relationships that really go against God's Word. Condemn those thoughts. You reject God in that way if you allow something in your thoughts that He condemns. You'd better reject what people say about that in contradiction to God's Word.

You see that Paul goes back to the highest authority. He is a servant that passes on God's institutions. Putting those institutions aside does not mean to put him aside, a human, but God Himself (cf. 1Sam 8:7). To anyone who dismisses sexual sins as unimportant, God and His Word have no meaning. That should not be the case with you.

God has given you "His Holy Spirit" with the emphasis on 'Holy'. Through Him you are able to maintain God's institutions. At your conversion He came to dwell in you (Eph 1:13). In 1 Corinthians 6 you read that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1Cor 6:18-19). There He is mentioned in relation to the same subject that we have before us. The section there concludes with: "For you have been bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body" (1Cor 6:20). When you consider the price that the Lord Jesus was willing to pay for your salvation, you don't want to live other than for Him, do you?

Now read 1 Thessalonians 4:4-8 again.

Reflection: Do you know how to possess your own vessel in sanctification and honor? Are there items in which you can do better? In what way can you do that?

## 1Thes 4:9-12 | Brotherly Love and Works

*9 Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for [anyone] to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; 10 for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more, 11 and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you, 12 so that you will behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need.*

V9. Here the second section of this chapter starts. After love in marriage you now hear about love among brethren. It is love for the family, a love that goes out to all members of the family. This love is aroused in the soul of a believer as soon as he becomes a child of God and in that way gets to belong to the family of God. Members of a family quarrel every now and then, but they love one another that much that they make up with one another as soon as possible. Family members defend one another, they stand up for one another; you can call on one another. That is naturally all engrained.

You do not have to tell people that they should love their brother or sister. To love a family member lies in the character of nature. In the natural life sin is an enormous hindrance to express or experience love. Family members can do much evil to one another. Though, that is at the same time something that goes against nature. A disturbed relationship in a family hurts much more than when it regards another person. They are both uncomfortable situations, but the family bond always makes itself felt.

The brotherly love was all right with the Thessalonians. With them it was clear that they were born of God and that they had the nature of God. The nature of God is love. That was to be seen naturally with them. Paul does not need to write to them about that. Because they have the nature of God, they are “taught by God”. They have opened up themselves for the teaching of God. Their conversion is radical. There is no room for the old anymore. In that way God gets the opportunity to work in them, so that His love for others who have the same nature, can be shown without any hindrance.

That's also how it works for you, right? Brotherly love is one of the two proofs of a real conversion. The first proof is that you loved the world before your conversion and now you hate the world. The second proof is that you hated believers in the past and now you love them. It can happen that you may not get along well with a certain fellow believer. That however doesn't change the fact that you love him or her. You may have difficulties with something that a person says or does. Just also consider the other way around, that they may have difficulties with something you say or do. But the point is that you see the other person as a child loved by God, just as you are loved by Him!

V10. In other churches in Macedonia like Philippi and Berea, they knew the warmth of the love of the Thessalonians. In a hard, cold world you and I need the warmth of the brotherly love, something that we are exhorted to give to one another (1Pet 1:22). We are given to one another for that reason and by allowing one another to feel it, we can make one another happy. To love is not something you do with your mouth, but with deeds (1Jn 3:18). Love cannot remain hidden.

If there is brotherly love and it is being experienced, then problems among believers will not quickly get the chance to disturb the relationships among them. Brotherly love keeps the difficulties at a distance or even eliminates them. Just as the warmth of the sun makes an icicle melt, brotherly love brings a change in cold relationships among believers. Love for the truth, which is important, may however lead to such cold relationships if with the wrong thing also the individual is being rejected. Therefore it is important to practice the truth of brotherly love.

The brotherly love of the Thessalonians was not on a selective basis, it was not limited to their own church and even less to a small group of like-minded people within the church. They loved "all brethren who are in all Macedonia". Sectarianism was strange to them. Nobody escaped from their love. An unbelieving historian who saw the mutual love among the first Christians, wrote the following about that at the end of the second century: 'It is unbelievable to see the fire with which these people of this religion help each other in their needs. They spare nothing. Their first legislator [which is the Lord Jesus] has imprinted on them that they are all brethren.' Would the people around us also testify of us like that?

However much the Thessalonians might have been examples in brotherly love, they apparently can still increase therein. Brotherly love is not a matter of which you can say that you practice it perfectly. You can always become better in practicing it. Paul doesn't say that to discourage them, but to stimulate them and to keep them from self-complacency.

V11. It may also be the case that they were a little bit overzealous in their brotherly love, that it started to look more like meddling. That could be the reason why he in this verse switches from brotherly love to life in society. Taking care for one another includes the danger that we may want to control one another and dictate how the other person should act. We should not spend time on that. Every Christian ought to have a full daily schedule, without becoming restless about the course of affairs of other fellow believers. (Of course this doesn't apply in a case where you clearly observe sinful practices with a fellow believer.)

Paul had given them clear commands on this. It appeared to be necessary to remind them of that. It is also good for you to know that you do the work that the Lord has commanded you to do (Mk 13:34). It occurs often that young believers in their first enthusiasm only want to do Bible study and preach the gospel. I can recognize that, but that is not God's will. He wants you to work with your own hands.

It is a misunderstanding to think that people who fully commit their time to the work of the Lord, are holier or find themselves on a higher spiritual level. This thought is a purely pagan thought. You find such people in India for instance. There must be clear and by other people spiritually assessable reasons to be judged spiritually by others before giving up your job in the society, in order to be fully engaged in spiritual work. Paul shows here that holy people simply work with their hands. He is the example himself here to them (1Thes 2:9).

Some believers in Thessalonica did not work anymore. They might have used pious motives for that, for example that they were looking forward to the coming of the Lord. He could after all come any time, couldn't He? Why would one then be occupied with earthly things? But the result is that they started to get occupied with other people's business. It is spiritually not sound to passively look forward to the coming of the Lord. It is a

good thing to look forward to the coming of the Lord, but at the same time we should do our work, otherwise we will do things that may spiritually harm other people.

V12. You must also consider that those who are “outsiders”, the unbelievers around you, are watching you. They see how you live your life. It would be a downright disgrace for the Name of the Lord Jesus if they would see that you are sitting with your arms folded, doing nothing, and in the meantime only expecting that others will take care that you have no lack of food and drink. That’s totally wrong of course.

Especially in a work environment you have the opportunity to show for Whom you live and to Whom you are looking forward. The Lord Jesus will consider you to be blessed and say: “Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes” (Lk 12:43). In your daily activities you may find a great opportunity to adorn the doctrine of God your Savior in all things (Tit 2:10).

Brotherly love is only to be found within the family of God. All unbelievers find themselves outside of it. You do not need anything from them. I don’t mean that arrogantly, but you will give them a wrong idea about what a Christian is if you would live at the expense of others, the society.

God has determined that you should work for your food. He gave that command already to Adam. He had to work, in order to be able to enjoy the blessing that God had for him (Gen 2:15). After the fall of man, God gave that as a commandment (Gen 3:17).

Now read 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12 again.

Reflection: How are you doing, concerning brotherly love and how do ‘those who are outside’ consider you?

## 1Thes 4:13-18 | The Lord Will Come for Us!

*13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. 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 not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of [the] archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.*

V13. Paul had already told the Thessalonians several things about the coming of the Lord. They had received teachings about the fact that the Lord Jesus will come with all His saints (1Thes 3:13). But how was that going to happen? Then there was the question about those who were already asleep. How was that going to be with those if the Lord came right now? Imagine that they would miss the coming of the Lord!

Paul puts an end to this ignorance. In that way he also makes an end to their despair. They were sad, like there is always sorrow when a loved one dies. But if you have no hope, like the unbelievers, then that sorrow is a desperate, inconsolable sorrow.

V14. The answer leaves room for sorrow, but with a shimmering hope. This hope is the result of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus (1Pet 1:3). That's what Paul is pointing at. Just as He has risen, also all who have died in faith in Him will rise. He will return together with them.

Here you find four important truths of faith:

1. Jesus died and has risen.
2. You ought to believe that, because otherwise you are not a Christian (Rom 10:9).
3. He will return and
4. will then bring all with Him who have fallen asleep in Him – in the following verses the apostle will tell how He will do that.

“Fallen asleep” is a beautiful expression. The believer doesn’t die, but falls asleep, because death has been robbed from its power. Death has become a servant to bring the believer to the Lord Jesus (Lk 23:43), in order to be with Christ (Phil 1:23). After falling asleep the believer comes into an interim situation. That doesn’t mean that he has no awareness of anything in such a way that he finds himself in a so-called soul-sleep. That is in contrast to the verses I just mentioned. Also the history in Luke 16, where the Lord Jesus grants us to have a look inside the hereafter (Lk 16:19-31), makes crystal clear that the doctrine of the falsely called soul-sleep is a false doctrine.

V15. It must have been a great comfort for the Thessalonians to learn that their loved ones will be united again with them by the resurrection. But still the question is left about how the Lord Jesus will return with all His saints. To be able to respond to that question, Paul received a word from the Lord, that is a revelation.

Paul tells about it in what you could call a parenthesis (verses 15-18). It is something that in Old Testament times was a mystery (1Cor 15:51-52). Briefly said, he tells that the Lord Jesus can return with all His saints (including you and I), because He will have caught up all those saints in heaven before that time.

There was not a special word needed from the Lord concerning the coming of the Lord Jesus to the earth. In the Old Testament it has already been said about that (Zec 14:3-5). But there nothing is said about the coming of the Lord to take up the church first. Only the New Testament speaks about that.

You find that in four places:

1. In John 14, where is emphasized that He will come personally (Jn 14:1-3);
2. In 1 Corinthians 15, where the emphasis is that those who are alive will be changed (1Cor 15:51-57).
3. In Philippians 3 that deals with the redemption of the body (Phil 3:20-21).

4. Here (1Thes 4:15-18), where the emphasis lies on the fact that the dead will share in it also and that they will even precede those who are alive, for they will rise first.

It appears that Paul already expected the coming of the Lord in his days. He speaks about “we who are alive”. Still, many ages have already passed and the Lord has not come yet. That is not because He is slack with the fulfillment of His promise “I will come soon”. The reason why He has not come yet is because of His longsuffering, for He does not want that any should perish, but that all will come to repentance (2Pet 3:9).

Nevertheless, that doesn’t mean that it will take another couple of centuries. A lot of signs indicate that the Lord Jesus will soon start again His dealings with His people Israel. Before this could possibly happen it is necessary that the church is caught up. So that event is even closer!

V16. Now the church is seen in a special way in this section. You may imagine that the Lord Jesus takes the church as His bride to Himself. In itself it is true of course. But I see that differently than I read here. Here I read that the Lord will catch up the believers with “a shout”. That doesn’t seem much to me like a way to approach a bride, don’t you think so? Therefore the believers are represented here as an army of warriors that is commanded by the Commander to leave the battlefield in order to enter into the rest.

Isn’t that remarkable to you too that in this section the word “Lord” appears five times? That indicates the relationship between all who belong to the church and their Lord. The Lord Jesus is not Lord of the church, but of each individual believer. And who are the ones that are called by the Lord? All the believers who belong to the church and all believers from the Old Testament.

I think that “the voice of an archangel” especially regards the believers of Israel. In the Bible there is mention of just one archangel, Michael (Jude 1:9). He is specially related to Israel (Dan 10:13,21; 12:1).

And then you hear also “the trumpet of God”. Just like the shout, this is language that is fitting for an army. In the Roman army there used to be three trumpets. The first trumpet meant: ‘Pack all your things’; the sec-

ond meant: 'Line up to march off'; the third and final trumpet: 'Forward march!'

The trumpet of God is the final trumpet. The silence of God is broken. The moment of the entry in heaven of all who are His, has come. The shout, the voice and the trumpet are the supporting sounds for the coming of "the Lord Himself". How wonderful is that: the Lord Himself. He doesn't send his principal angel or a mighty prince, no, He Himself comes.

His first act is to raise the dead in Christ. That's how mighty He is (Phil 3:20-21). He has shown His power by His victory over death by His resurrection from the dead (Rom 1:4). It is as David defeated Goliath. Due to His victory they sang about him to have defeated his ten thousands (1Sam 18:7). He actually defeated only one person, but he who ever defeats such an enemy, defeats the greatest army.

He Who has defeated death, will therefore raise those from the dead, who went into death. Here it is yet limited to the "dead in Christ". All the unbelievers will rise at the end of the millennial kingdom of peace (Rev 20:5) to appear before the great white throne to be judged (Rev 20:11-15).

V17. By His commanding shout (cf. Jn 5:28-29; 11:43) they will appear from all places wherever they may be, wherever the separate body parts may be scattered. The might of His shout merges all parts together and gives them a new appearance. That new appearance will also be received by the living believers. Paul doesn't speak about that very transformation here. He does that in 1 Corinthians 15 (1Cor 15:51-57). You need to have both sections, in order to see what is going to happen when the Lord comes.

Then the resurrected and the living transformed believers will be "caught up" together. This word 'caught up' is connected with the thought of 'suddenly snatching away with force and bring from the one place to the other place'.

And then the great encounter with the Lord will take place "in the air", in the space between heaven and earth. The air is the territory of satan and his demons (Eph 2:2). It will take place in their power territory. The Lord meets us there.

“And so we shall always be with the Lord.” You can be sure that you will never ever be separated from Him anymore. There will never be any situation in which you have to find your way in faith without seeing Him and tested by evil powers. War is over. The rest has now come.

V18. We can comfort and encourage one another by pointing at the soon coming of the Lord, to persevere the struggle until the moment comes that our duty time is up.

Maranatha! – which means: the Lord is coming.

Now read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 again.

Reflection: Do you expect the Lord daily?

## 1 Thessalonians 5

### **1Thes 5:1-4 | The Day of the Lord**

*1 Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. 2 For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. 3 While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape. 4 But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief;*

The believers in Thessalonica now know that the believers who are fallen asleep will also be present when the Lord Jesus will come to earth to reign. They know also that the Lord Jesus will come first Himself, that He will take up all the believers at the same time, that there will be a special encounter in the air and that He will take up all His own to His dwelling place, heaven. From that union in the air on, His own will be with Him forever.

V1. After this is determined, Paul can continue his teaching on the coming of the Lord to the earth. In that respect, there was really no need for him to write them. They had received the teaching on "the times and the epochs" and enough has been written about that in the Old Testament. 'Times and epochs' refer to the earth. The first reference to that is written in Genesis 1 (Gen 1:14), where it clearly appears that it has to do with the earth. The earth is the territory where all prophetic foretelling will be fulfilled.

The church and its rapture is nowhere a subject of prophecy. That is because the church belongs to heaven. With both 'times' and 'epochs' a certain period of time is meant. They also are mentioned together in Acts 1 (Acts 1:7; cf. Dan 2:21; Ecc 3:1). They are synonyms that complement one another. However, there is a remarkable difference.

Concerning 'times' it is about duration of time, about something that happens after a course of time. In Greek, the word *chronos* is used. You recognize the word in our word 'chronometer', a device to measure how long something has taken. You read in Galatians 4 that when "the fullness

of the time" (chronos) had come, God sent forth His Son (Gal 4:4). That means that the Lord Jesus came to earth after the termination of a certain period of time and God had considered it the time to send forth His Son.

Concerning 'epochs' it is not about the duration of time, but about what exactly characterizes a certain period of time, about the character of that time. In Greek, the word *kairos* is used here. There was a time in which man lived without law (Rom 5:13). After a course of time God gave through Moses the law to His people and they lived under the law (Jn 7:19). In "the times of the Gentiles" (Lk 21:24) He allowed the nations to go their own way.

Those different periods of time, that sometimes follow each other and sometimes occur at the same time, have their own characteristic. Each time has made clear who man is and that he fully fails in serving God. All of these different times end up in "the fullness of the times" (the plural form of *kairos*) (Eph 1:10). That is the time of the millennial kingdom which will be characterized by peace because then the Prince of peace will reign. Then "times (plural form of 'kairos') of refreshing" will come (Acts 3:19).

V2. They were not left in uncertainty about the time that the Lord Jesus will come to the earth. They knew "full well" about that. In the same sense Luke uses the word 'careful' or 'accurate' for his investigation into the history of the Lord Jesus (Lk 1:3). Matthew uses it to indicate how urgently Herod wants to know from the wise men about the star they had seen (Mt 2:7). The Holy Spirit uses it to describe how Apollos taught "the things concerning Jesus" and that Priscilla and Aquila explained to Apollos "the way of God more accurately" (Acts 18:25-26). This is how Paul uses it for his teaching to the Thessalonians. Finally the word 'careful' is also used by Paul for the conduct of the believer (Eph 5:15).

Summarized you may say that you ought to examine the Scriptures accurately or carefully, teach the Scriptures accurately and need to be accurate in your obedience to what you have learnt from the Scriptures.

"The day of the Lord" is not only the moment that He comes to judge, but the whole period in which He is in charge in contrast to the time in which man is in charge. That time begins when the church has been caught up. Then He will first pour out His judgments over the earth. An exhaustive

and impressive description you find in Revelation 6-18. Then the Lord Jesus Himself will come, as you read in Revelation 19, with all His saints to the earth to judge the remainders of the evil (Rev 19:11-21). Afterward He will establish His kingdom of peace.

If you are looking forward to His coming for the church, He will not come for you “as a thief in the night”. A thief always comes suddenly, unexpected and undesired. The world does not look forward to Him. The unbelievers absolutely do not want to look forward to Him. You notice it if you tell about Him to be coming to judge the world. Then they start to mock (2Pet 3:3-4).

V3. In their audacity they speak about “peace and safety” (cf. Jer 6:14; 8:10-11; 14:13; Eze 13:10,16). They perform this sham because in their arrogance they trust in their technological achievements and improvement. They think to have everything under control. But behind their tough language – they “are saying”, to encourage themselves – they hide an enormous fear for the future (Lk 21:25-26).

This fear will appear to be not unfounded. However, when people who are being honest about that, are told about the only way for hope, they suddenly prefer to believe that it is altogether not that bad at all. Then they rather scream over their feelings of fear with their imagination of peace that they have made their own. The destruction will suddenly overtake them. They will lose everything what life meant to them. This sudden destruction will come down from heaven, when the Lord Jesus appears to judge all evil, but also earlier all the introductory judgments after the rapture of the church.

There will be no way of escape from this judgment. Verse 3 concludes with a threat regarding that. Nobody will escape from his or her judgment. God knows perfectly and detailed what each person has thought and done. He will deliver the convincing proof of it, so that everyone who falls under His judgment will have to acknowledge the righteousness of it. Every injustice that has been done will be punished righteously. You, and every other believer, may know that Christ bore the judgment over the injustice that has been done. The unrepentant sinners will have to bear the judgment

themselves because they have refused to choose the way that would lead them to salvation.

The comparison with “the labor pains upon a woman with child” indicates that it is about a time of sorrow and pain. That’s what will happen to the unbelievers when the Lord Jesus starts with His judgments. There will be no way of escape for them, just like a pregnant woman does not escape the labor pains. For the sorely afflicted believers at that time the encouraging prospect of new life after sorrows is attached to that (cf. Mic 4:9-10). Faith may know that God is sending these labor pains, so that fruit will appear for Him from the earth.

V4. With this verse a series of sharp contrasts starts, introduced by the words “but you”. They clarify the difference between the believers who will be caught up and the unbelievers who will be left behind on earth. The believers are sons of the light and sons of the day opposite to the night and the darkness; believers are alert and are sober opposite to sleeping and being drunk; the believers are destined for salvation and not for wrath.

In the word “brethren” again the hearty bond of the apostle with the Thessalonians resonates. He desires to reach their heart. After picturing the coming ‘day of the Lord’ to them and the terrors that will accompany this day regarding the unbelievers, he now encourages them.

They are not in darkness in which sphere every kind of light is missing. The light of God had irradiated them and therefore they were informed of His plans. Owing to that they were prepared and that day was not going to overtake them like a thief. Because of the teaching that they have received, first orally and now through this letter, they knew that they would have been taken away from the earth when that day comes.

Now read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-4 again.

Reflection: What can you already tell about God’s act toward the world? Have you already been occupied with exploring this ‘accurately’?

**1Thes 5:5-11 | Be Alert and Sober**

*5 for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; 6 so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober. 7 For those who sleep do their sleeping at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night. 8 But since we are of [the] day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation. 9 For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him. 11 Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.*

V5. The day of the Lord was not going to overtake them. That does not mean that they are ready for the moment when that day comes, but that they would not be on earth anymore when it comes. You also may know that you will not have to go through the great tribulation. This is the conclusion that the Thessalonians (including you) are allowed to draw because they are all, without exception, “sons of light and sons of day”. In the Bible, a person is a son when he or she bears the character of something or when that very thing characterizes him or her. In that way the Bible speaks of “Sons of Thunder” (Mk 3:17) and “Son of Encouragement” (Acts 4:36).

Here Paul speaks about your position as a believer. It is really encouraging when you think about that. Just think about it: for the sake of the gospel you have been drawn from an atmosphere of darkness and brought into God’s marvelous atmosphere of light (1Pet 2:9). You came into God’s light as a sinner. That light convicted you (2Cor 4:6). That brought you to conversion. Now you are walking in the light (1Jn 1:7) and therefore the light is within you yourself. You became a son of light, which means that the light is now visible in your life. A son radiates the features of his Father. Isn’t this relation with the Father an awesome thing? Although you live in the world that lies in the darkness, you yourself are not in the darkness, but you are “light in the Lord” (Eph 5:7-8).

For the world, the day of the Lord means judgment, but for you it means a period of unprecedented peace. That peace is not to be seen yet around you, but it has been given to you already in your heart. You know what is awaiting you, what is going to happen. Night is the counterpart of day,

just as darkness is opposite light. You are not of night. You do not belong to a lifestyle anymore in which there is no room for God. The 'nightlife' is over for you. You can also apply that to all kinds of activities that you were doing secretly. Your whole life is now transparent to everyone. You have nothing to hide anymore, right?

V6. By the transition from "you" to "we" Paul tactfully identifies himself with his readers. What applies to them, also applies to him. He involves himself in the admonition not to sleep, like others do. With "the others" he refers to the unbelievers (cf. 1Thes 4:13). After having determined the position, he now speaks about the practice of the believer. If you are a son of day and of light, you ought to walk accordingly. Believers ought to clearly distinguish themselves from unbelievers by their character and conduct.

The unbelievers "are sleeping". In that way Paul indicates that these people are totally indifferent toward the spiritual realities. The opposite of that is "be alert". That is a condition of spiritual alertness which makes a person not to be caught by surprise at a sudden attack. You find yourself in an alert state. You also ought to be "sober", which means to be free from intoxicating substances that causes one to have a wrong picture of reality. You should not let yourself be deceived by impressive arguments, which may cause you to be enthusiastic for a wrong case. Judge a phenomenon soberly, on the basis of the Bible, and don't let yourself be fooled by deceptions of the enemy.

V7. He who is sleeping is not aware of any approaching disaster. He who is alert, does not only watch for the moves of the enemy, but also looks forward to the coming of the Lord. To sleep and getting drunk belong to the night and are works of the darkness. Sleepers have no idea of the morning star and those who are drunk have no attention for it, as intoxicated and numb as they are. Neither can distinguish the time wherein they live. The world is drunk, intoxicated by influences that come from the bottomless pit, where demons live.

Due to modern communication methods, society is drilled with ideas, influences and lifestyles in an enormously cunning way. People who are glued to their television night after night are stealthily subjected to brainwashing. Just only think about the word 'evolution'. That has entered

into the mind of man with great power. Without repentance it cannot be removed from the mind anymore.

V8. The believer is in great danger of falling prey to this development. Yet you are not delivered to this development. You are able to cope with it. You cannot do that by your own power. In this verse 8 you read which means are at your disposal. First you are pointed again at your position. You are of the "day". Then you are reminded that you have to be "sober". In that way you are spiritually balanced and able to judge the danger rightly.

Then an armor is offered to you. The description of the armor is derived from Isaiah 59, where the Messiah is represented in an armor (Isa 59:17; cf. Rom 13:12; Eph 6:13-18). It regards therefore an armor tested by the Lord Himself.

The Christian is presented as a soldier, not as one in the place of the parade, but in active service. You find yourself in a warfare. Satan will do his utmost to undermine your trust in God's love by targeting your heart with doubt about the love of God regarding the way that He goes with you. Therefore check whether your "breastplate" is still on the right place. If you have put on your breastplate, which is made of "faith and love", the attempts of satan will not be successful.

The breastplate protects your heart, from which the springs of life flow (Pro 4:23). You must decide in your heart not to allow the enemy to change your faith, in other words your trust in God, and His love for you into distrust. When he attacks you, you should quote bible verses, e.g. Hebrews 11:1 (Heb 11:1) and 1 John 4:8,16 (1Jn 4:8,16).

The "helmet" protects your head, your mind. The helmet is made of "the hope of salvation". Satan will try everything to make you think only of here and now, of your job and your holidays, as if everything is okay on earth. His aim is that you do not look forward to the future, to the time that the Lord Jesus comes to bring the full salvation to earth. Just check also if your helmet is still on the right place. Keep showing the enemy that your life is focused on the coming of the Lord Jesus and that you are decided to see all your activities in that light.

You see that your armor consists of three expressions of the Christian life – faith, love and hope – which we also have seen in chapter 1 (1Thes

1:3). There they are the characteristics of everyday life. Here they are the weapons that keep the enemy at a distance if he approaches you with his schemes and attacks.

V9. God's wrath is not destined for you because God has not destined you for His wrath. God's wrath will therefore not strike you. You can be sure about that. Instead you are destined to obtain salvation. It regards a salvation of which you do not partake yet. Are you still not saved yet then? You are saved by grace (Eph 2:8). There is no need for you to be unsure about the possibility of still getting perished. Once a person is a child of God, he will remain to be that forever.

The salvation that Paul is talking about here, deals with another aspect. Here he is talking about the moment that all believers will partake of the full result of the work of the Lord Jesus. In that particular result we will partake when He has caught up the church and comes back together with the church to the earth in order to reign. We then will have glorified bodies in which sin is absent.

V10. In order to make us able to partake of that the Lord Jesus died as our substitute. He freely gave His life willingly, making His death the means for us to obtain these things. Through His death you may know that you live with Him, not only soon, but now already.

The "awake" and "asleep" that is being dealt with in this context is to be understood spiritually and refers only to believers. With 'awake' you can think of the believers who are alive and with 'asleep' of the believers who have fallen asleep. Whatever the case, the "living together with Him" is the part of each believer. Death has in no way influence on it.

V11. With a view to the threatening dangers, the attitude of Cain, who said: "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen 4:9) is not fitting. They had to admonish one another and through the teaching from God's Word build up one another. Nobody was to withdraw himself from that. They need one another. This is one of the expressions of fellowship which today we also need. They did that. Are we doing that too?

Now read 1 Thessalonians 5:5-11 again.

Reflection: Do you recognize certain dangers in your environment? How does your armor fit?

## 1Thes 5:12-14 | Appreciation and Care

*12 But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, 13 and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another. 14 We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone.*

V12. In verse 11 Paul made an appeal to admonish one another. Each has a responsibility toward the other. All believers have an equal task therein, which actually is being carried out differently because each believer differs from the other believer. In order to guide all these differences in the right direction, the Lord has given leaders in the church.

These leaders are not leaders qualified by men. It is nowhere to be found in the Bible that a theological training is necessary for people to be able or to be allowed to be in charge. No, the leaders that are given by the Lord are educated by Himself in His school. That school is the practice of everyday. They will show in their work that they are Christians and be occupied with Bible study in their leisure time. They will lead their family well.

It is asked to appreciate the leaders. That indicates that they are to be recognized. The criteria are simple. In the first place they work “among” (which is in the midst of) the believers (Acts 20:28; 1Pet 5:1). They therefore do not claim a higher place than the other believers. A second characteristic is that they “labor”. Those are hardworking believers, who commit themselves to the church and thereby face a lot of suffering.

Then it appears from their leadership that they do that “in the Lord”. That emphasizes that they absolutely submit themselves to the authority of the Lord. They lead in a way that each believer submits to the Lord and not to them.

The final characteristic mentioned here, is that they “give instructions” to the believers. This implies that they put the mind of the believers right when that has been deviated from the Word. Therefore they will ‘train’ the believers in the Word, so that the Word will richly dwell within them (Col 3:16a). In this way the believers will be able to teach and admonish one another (verse 11; Col 3:16b).

Have you been trained spiritually in order to recognize, acknowledge and appreciate such leaders? If you use other criteria, like education, eloquence or the possession of a certain charisma in your judgment, you will not appreciate the leaders given by the Lord. It is not about your taste, but whether you desire in everything to do the will of the Lord. Then you will eagerly be willing to be helped by such leaders. They are familiar with God's Word and they want to bring your thinking in accordance with it. The recognition of the authority given by the Lord is one of the means to remain on the right course.

V13. If that's also your desire, you will highly esteem them. You will love them because of the work they do. There is not a single word here that could possibly refer to your personal favor. That doesn't matter either. It demands a spiritual attitude to love them, for giving instructions quickly arouses resistance. To love a person who instructs you to put something right that you do not see well or do not do well, is easier to be said than to be done. If your heart is not submitted to the Word of the Lord, you will not be able to fulfill this order.

Then that will also be the end of the "peace with one another". There will be dissension and division. The harmony will disappear. The only way to keep peace with one another (Mk 9:50; 2Cor 13:11) is when you are willing to be the least and take the lowest place. Division, quarrels, putting yourselves above others, envy, the love of taking sides are excellent possibilities to make the peace with one another impossible. Love not only recognizes the work of God in the laborer, but also sees the other person in the presence of God. If you consider the other person in this way, your own will is not active and the peace with one another is maintained. It is at the same time the basis to fulfill the order in the next verse.

V14. If there is peace with one another, then there is the right spiritual climate to take care of those who need it. The admonition or exhortation for that, is as necessary now as it was then. Due to the increasing individualism, also in the faith experience, there is hardly any attention given to this admonition, let alone any action accordingly. I hope it speaks to you.

Three groups are specifically mentioned and as a fourth group there is a word with regard to everyone. It is important that each group gets the

specific care that is necessary for that particular group. Therefore you are not to comfort the unruly and instruct the weak.

The first ones who need attention are “the unruly”. Those are the ones who ‘are out of line’, people who deny their responsibility as Christians. They launch, with some degree of regularity, proposals which do not come forth from the Scripture, but from their own thoughts. Discussions about these proposals don’t make the believers come closer to the Lord and to one another, but on the contrary cause tension and distance. Also their attitude may be unruly, for instance by systematically not working and forsaking the meetings of believers. They respond rebelliously to justified orders.

However, Christians who walk unruly are often active in other things, which may cause them to show a wrong picture of what a Christian is. They must be reprimanded or corrected for this disorderly conduct, so that they may behave themselves normally and orderly again. Then they will be able to bear a good testimony again of Christ after Whom they call themselves.

Then we have “the fainthearted”. Those are Christians who in bad times quickly lose heart. They get discouraged as soon as they are being criticized, they fear persecution, are worried about the future, feel to be failing in following the Lord. You must never abandon them. That could be an extra blow for them, which may cause them to become desperate and to totally give up following the Lord. Encourage them, give them a pep-talk. Tell them that tests serve to strengthen the faith. They need compassion and understanding and good teaching.

For this task you may look upon the Lord Jesus. He has perfectly dealt with the fainthearted. You find that in a striking way in Isaiah 42. You recognize the fainthearted in “the bruised reed” and “the dimly burning wick” which are mentioned there (Isa 42:3).

In the ‘bruised reed’ you can see the broken heart, a heart which is trampled-on by a rough treatment. The danger is that they not only in the world but also in the church are being considered to be of no use. But the Lord is able to make a pipe organ out of this bruised reed or a measuring reed for the new Jerusalem (Rev 21:15).

The 'dimly burning (or: smoking) wick' hardly emits any light and warmth and is neither able to light the other one. Sometimes love burns that weakly in the heart that He alone Who knows all things also knows that there is absolutely still a spark of love present. In that way He could change Peter's heart in seven weeks from an almost extinguished flame into a fire that put three thousand souls on fire on the day of Pentecost.

"The fainthearted" are the powerless ones. Some believers are weak because they do not know the will of God. Others do not have the courage to trust in God. Still others do not have the power to resist against certain needs of the body. There are also those who cannot break out of a certain way of thinking and therefore feel themselves weak in their testimony.

The fainthearted are often weak through wrong teachings from God's Word. They have the idea that they must fulfill certain conditions, in order to feel to be accepted by God. Show them from God's Word that they have been made pleasing in the Beloved (Eph 1:6) and make them feel it. You can make God's love tangible for them by putting your arm around them and by supporting them in their being a Christian.

You finally get the order to be "patient with everyone". This is an appeal to maintain your patience, your self-control with each of the previous groups. That is actually important. By losing your patience, you lose your unruly brother, your fainthearted brother and your weak brother. And that should not happen. In taking care you should go for the full profit, which is that in the life of your brother, in whatever state of mind he is, the Lord Jesus regains the central place.

Now read 1 Thessalonians 5:12-14 again.

Reflection: In which way do you give substance to these verses?

**1Thes 5:15-18 | Rejoice, Pray, Give Thanks**

*15 See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people. 16 Rejoice always; 17 pray without ceasing; 18 in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*

V15. Do you know the temptation to repay the evil that has been done to you, with evil? In that case you are no exception. It is in our blood to respond like that. Therefore it is not for no reason that we must see to it that this does not happen. It means that you should be alert that you would not unexpectedly still do any harm to another, because he or she has done harm to you. It could easily happen in a reflex, an almost automatic response.

If you used to live under the law, people could sympathize with you. It is even written in the law as a regulation that the other has to be repaid with the same coin, although you are not allowed to do it by yourself, but it has to be done by the judge (Exo 21:24). But you now belong to Christ and such a way of acting does not fit with Him as He now is (Mt 5:38-39). In that case it doesn't matter whether the other is a believer or an unbeliever. The Thessalonians were suffering under the persecution by faithless compatriots and experienced a lot of harm from them. But they were not to strike back out of vengeance and retaliation (Rom 12:19-21; 1Pet 3:9). Responding in that way would reveal the spirit of Lamech (Gen 4:23-24).

After the instruction of what you ought not do, you now hear what you ought to: seek after that which is good. And always do so, not for just once, but in all cases. And not just a weak attempt, but to seek after it with the input of all the strength you have. To seek after has something to do with perseverance. A lot of problems could have been prevented or overcome if we always would have sought after that which is good. Then you do not seek to harm anyone spiritually or wound him physically, but you on the contrary would want to be of use.

You want to be of profit to the other person, so that the contact with you delivers something of permanent value. The other refers again to both the believer – which is enclosed in “for one another” – and the unbeliever – which is enclosed in “for all people”. It is God's desire for His children

that each contact that they have with another person, will be a blessing to that other person concerning his spirit, soul and body. A gentle word or gesture and a helping hand may soften the sorrow of the other, may give courage and strength and work feelings of gratitude. This attitude requires self-denial, but in that way you then look like the Lord Jesus.

V16. After Paul has addressed their attitude, care and effort toward others, he tells them what personally should characterize them. The characteristics are joy (verse 16), prayer (verse 17) and giving thanks (verse 18).

“Rejoice always.” ‘Always’ means at any time and whatever the circumstances. There is always a reason to rejoice. Even tribulation and tests are a cause to rejoice (Jam 1:2). You do not rejoice in miserable circumstances, but while you are in it, you rejoice in the Lord (Psa 34:1b; Phil 4:4). If you look up to the Lord and think of Him, there comes joy. He stands above the circumstances. He absolutely knows what to do if you sometimes don’t know how to continue life.

Joy belongs to the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23a). The Lord Jesus speaks about “My joy”, which He wants to be in you, so that you may know full joy (Jn 15:11). That joy is your part if you abide in His commandments, which is if you do what He says in His Word.

Therefore joy is not a feeling of ecstasy, but happens by having fellowship with Him. I know of Christians who say that you should silence sorrowful and hurtful experiences by praise. The Bible does not know that kind of joy. What Paul says would be more helpful to you: “As sorrowful yet always rejoicing” (2Cor 6:10). Sorrow finds its cause in temporary things, joy finds its cause in eternal things and is therefore not to be muted.

V17. The fact that a Christian is not insensitive to misery and need, appears from the second characteristic, prayer. Because of the ever present need, the command is: “Pray without ceasing.” The Lord Jesus strongly encourages us to do that (Lk 18:1-7). You can pray for your own needs and you can pray for what others need. You can pray to the Father (Eph 3:14) and you can pray to the Son (Acts 7:59). You read nowhere about a prayer to the Holy Spirit.

You are allowed to pray everywhere. There are no special buildings for the Christian where he should go to be able to pray. If you are in a place

where you do not feel free to pray, you should ask yourself whether you are in the right place. You are allowed to pray during all your activities, like Nehemiah did (Neh 2:4). If you are busy with things that make you feel hindered to pray, it could be that you are busy with wrong things. From God's side the access to the throne of grace is never closed. You may freely go there (Heb 4:16). He is always ready to listen to you.

Do you see how many exhortations there are for you to pray without ceasing? Praying should be like breathing, you do it without realizing it, but you notice it immediately when you stop breathing for a moment. The point is that you as a child of God, live by a conduct of prayer. The Lord Jesus is also in this feature the perfect Model (Psa 109:4b). He always lived in conscious fellowship with God when on earth, wherever He was and whatever the circumstances He found Himself in. In this you may imitate Him.

V18. You were called to rejoice always and to pray without ceasing. Now you hear the exhortation: "In everything give thanks." If you just for a while think about everything that God has given you, then you will see more and more reasons to give thanks. Can you mention something that you have not received from Him? You will not find it with the people of the world. They will, in case they are polite, indeed say 'thank you' when they receive something. But there is no gratitude with them toward God.

Everything that the modern, autonomous man possesses is gained by him by working hard for it or by his thought of being entitled to it. It is possible that he has worked hard for it, but he does not consider Him to Whom he owes the power and capacity.

The appeal is to give thanks "in everything" (cf. Eph 5:20). Thereby you can think of 'in all circumstances'. If you have to face a trial by sickness or by losing your job or having a financial need, you can still fix your eyes on the Lord in those circumstances and give thanks to Him for knowing your difficulties. You will even experience that He comes to you in your difficulties. You will experience His nearness in a way that you otherwise would not have known. You will even automatically give thanks for that. Yet, it is still not about the circumstances working giving thanks, but that

you will actively give thanks in those circumstances, for instance that He will never allow that things get out of control.

The Lord wants to teach you to give thanks. You can make it your own by concentrating yourself on it. Just like need teaches us to pray, need also teaches us to give thanks. Only, praying is easier for us to do in that situation than giving thanks.

The Lord Jesus is also the great Example in this. When His whole ministry looked to be in vain, when the cities, in which most of His works of power were done, rejected Him, we hear Him say: "I thank You, Father" (Mt 11:20-26).

Nevertheless, the importance of these three typical expressions of the Christian is again underlined by the addition that this is "the will of God". It is therefore not an advice without obligation. It is the will of God "in Christ Jesus", which may probably mean: as you see in Christ Jesus how God's will is to be done. The Lord Jesus is your life. Therefore it is possible that in your life God's will becomes visible, as it also became visible in the life of the Lord Jesus when He was on earth.

Also at this moment that He is in heaven, He is engaged in doing the will of God. You may also look at Him as He is in heaven. He is there for your sake and He is tirelessly making efforts for you there. By looking at Him you will be transformed into His image (2Cor 3:18). Then His power will become visible in your life because you will live as a joyful, praying and thanksgiving Christian.

Now read 1 Thessalonians 5:15-18 again.

Reflection: What could you be more joyful about? For what and when could you be praying and giving thanks more?

**1Thes 5:19-28 | Final Admonitions**

*19 Do not quench the Spirit; 20 do not despise prophetic utterances. 21 But examine everything [carefully]; hold fast to that which is good; 22 abstain from every form of evil. 23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass. 25 Brethren, pray for us. 26 Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss. 27 I adjure you by the Lord to have this letter read to all the brethren. 28 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.*

V19. The rejoicing, praying and giving thanks applies to all believers, but it should be or become the practice in each individual life. Now some exhortations follow that concern the believers collectively and whereby the emphasis is on not to do something. In the first place the call is: "Do not quench the Spirit." The word 'quench' makes you automatically think of fire (Mt 12:20; Heb 11:34). In Acts 2 the coming of the Holy Spirit is related to fire (Acts 2:3).

The Holy Spirit dwells in each believer. But it is also the purpose that the Holy Spirit can use each believer. The believer may be the means through whom the Holy Spirit expresses Himself, through whom He reveals Himself. Each believer has received a gift of grace from the Spirit (1Cor 12:4-11). Those gifts of grace were not given for not to be used. They should be used to the blessing of the fellow believers.

The Spirit is being quenched if the gifts get no room. That can happen when during the meeting of a church everything depends on one person, the reverend or pastor. That also happens if, due to tradition, only certain brothers participate in the service or if the course of the service is being planned. Another effective 'fire-fighting agent' is the cold criticizing of the practice of a gift.

There are some more expressions that say something about a certain attitude toward the Holy Spirit. You read about 'grieving the Holy Spirit' (Eph 4:30), which refers to your own attitude, if you sin; 'resisting the Holy Spirit', which unbelief does if it resists the work of the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51); 'blaspheming the Spirit' (Mt 12:24-32), which the apostate does, who

against his own better judgment ascribes the work of the Lord Jesus to satan.

V20. The second word of admonition for the church is: "Do not despise the prophetic utterances." With 'prophetic utterances' is not meant the foretelling or statements about the future. It is about telling things that a man cannot find out by natural means (cf. Mt 26:68). 'Prophetic utterances' is about the speaking of God's Word through which the hearer becomes aware of being in the presence of God.

It has happened more often that a person after hearing God's Word, said: 'It looks like the preacher knows me, for he says exactly who I am and what I have done.' However, the preacher didn't know that person at all, but that is the effect of God's Word on the conscience of a person who hears God's Word (1Cor 14:3,24-25).

Therefore it certainly is a serious thing when prophetic utterances are being despised, for it is actually despising God and His Word. Despising also happens when believers give more attention to the way things are said than to the content of what is said. That is also a way of despising. They do not care about the message of God. I hope that this is not the attitude that you have in the meeting.

V21. Besides, you are not there as a consumer. Instead of despising you should examine what is being said, as it is written: "Let the others pass judgment" (1Cor 14:29). Your standard to do so is not your feelings, but the Word of God. That implies that you must pay close attention and that you should know how to separate the wheat from the chaff. You can leave the chaff behind; you should take the wheat ("the good") with you and keep it.

Take Ruth as an example. She gleaned in the field of Boaz, beat out what she had gleaned and brought the barley to her mother in law (Rth 2:17-18). You may apply this to a speech you have heard. Take out what has appealed to you and share it with others instead of talking negatively about everything you did not like. That often regards things that have to do with weaknesses in the speech.

It is another thing if people bring wrong doctrines. Then the application is not to be taking out the good things and leaving behind the wrong things.

You are to speak about it. First with the person himself, and if he doesn't want to listen, then also with others (Mt 18:15-20).

V22. Also keep a great distance between yourself and the evil. This evil may be in certain ways of acting, but also in teachings. It can happen in many secret forms. Make sure that you stay far away from it. Don't be a fellow worker of the evil in any way. Do not spoil your testimony by for instance going to occasions where you do not belong as a Christian, or by saying things that are not supposed to be said by a Christian.

V23. The great purpose of all previous admonitions and appeals is 'sanctification'. God is working on it as "the God of peace" and gives you the power for it. He wants that each part of your being, which means "spirit and soul and body", is "entirely" committed to Him. By your body you express who you are. That is what people see of you. That's how you make clear to them what your soul and spirit are occupied with. Your soul has to do with your feelings, your emotions, your way of experiencing the things that you hear and see. By your spirit you are able to have a relationship with God and by which you stand above the animals that have no spirit and therefore have no consciousness of God.

Each of the three 'parts' of your human being is a target for the attacks of satan. Paul desires that the God of peace will preserve you from coming under the influence of satan. The attacks of satan on your spirit are meant to interrupt your worship and prayer life. His attacks on your soul respond to your desires and emotions. With his attacks on your body he wants to succeed to make you do the wrong thing with your body.

Satan has been up to that from Eden (Gen 3:6). These attacks are still going on. Thereby the world is his firm ally (1Jn 2:16). But there comes an end to his cursed activities at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Then there will be no more attacks from satan and the sanctification will be complete.

V24. Up to that moment we can count on the unwavering faithfulness of God. He has called us to this life in fellowship with Him. He will stand beside us in His faithfulness in bringing into practice what is previously said and bring us safely to the end. He will do what He has promised. What an assurance!

V25. The faithfulness of God is also shown in the support that we can give to one another as brothers and sisters. The most powerful support is that we pray for one another. Paul is asking the Thessalonians to do that for him. He trusted God, but that did not make him independent of his brothers and sisters. He and his companions do not consider themselves as super Christians who can do everything alone and consider the help in prayers of such newly converts to be without meaning. He experienced the bond of love and affection and appreciated their prayers highly.

V26. After his request for their prayers he asked them to pass on his greetings to all the brethren. Greetings are expressions of connection. A kiss was the common greeting in that time. It is not a prescription to express connection only in this way. The main point is showing love to those who have received an equally precious faith. Partiality must not happen there – therefore it is said “all” the brethren. The boundaries between the genders should not be crossed with the ‘kiss’ – therefore it says “holy” kiss. Christian love and relationship can also be expressed by a gentle word or a warm handshake.

V27. Not only his greetings go to all believers, also his letter is for all the believers. Each believer in Thessalonica, and each believer now, has to hear the contents of the letter. There should not be any distinction. God’s Word is not for a select group, but for each believer. The letter – and that goes for God’s Word in its whole – contains no friendly advice or commendations of a travelling preacher, but you hear the voice of God in it that addresses the heart and the conscience.

V28. Paul closes his letter with a wish. It is his wish that you may become aware of the Divine grace that has been shown to you. Then you will undoubtedly live with your eyes fixed on the coming of the Lord Jesus, the main theme of this letter (cf. 1Pet 1:13).

Now read 1 Thessalonians 5:19-28 again.

Reflection: How do you think to respond to all the admonitions mentioned?

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