

THESSALONIAN THEMES



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BACKGROUND AND SETTING OF THESSALONIANS

In Paul's day, Thessalonica was capital of one of the four Macedonian districts under the Roman Empire. Paul came to the city on his second missionary journey. He had received a supernatural invitation to this area in a vision by night after being hindered in doing more work in Asia Minor (Acts 16:7-10). Thessalonica was a large seacoast city, busy with commerce and political involvements. Paul's interest was not in the highlights of the city. He was interested in establishing a congregation of disciples of Christ.

When Paul arrived at Thessalonica, he and Silas had just been scourged at Philippi. The Jewish population was aggressive and soon resisted Paul and Christianity. After he had preached three successive Sabbaths and was rejected by the Jews, Paul seems to have focused on the Greeks. It is likely Paul was at Thessalonica somewhat longer than the three weeks referred to in Acts 17:2 because he labored there with his hands for his support (1Thessalonians 2:9 and 2Thessalonians 3:8), he received supplies there more than once from Philippi (Philippians. 4:16), he made many converts (1Thessalonians 1:9 and Acts 17:4), and he left ordained leaders for the congregation (1Thessalonians 5:12-13). Compared to Berea, where the Jews were led to faith by Paul's teaching from the Torah, the Thessalonian Jews were staunch in their tradition. The congregation was comprised largely of Gentiles (1Thessalonians 1:9) which would have included both slaves and freemen.

It is likely after having been rejected by the Jews that the Christian services were held in the house of Jason (Acts 17:5) perhaps the "kinsman" referred to by Paul in Romans 16:21.

Paul's teaching seems to have been strongly centered in the prophetic word, both the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies by Christ and future prophecies regarding the Return of Christ, the Day of the Lord, and the Vengeance of Jesus.

As was often the case, the Jewish unbelievers resorted to violence, and Paul and Silas fled by night to Berea. Nevertheless the church had been planted and leaders were established. In fact those leaders and members became missionaries themselves and soon were spreading the word into Macedonia and Achaia and elsewhere (1Thessalonians 1:7-8)

Paul's writing to the Thessalonians was calm and affectionate. He needed to correct some excesses, but he does not break out with the passion displayed to the church at Corinth or Galatia. Rather he writes with confidence, apparently believing they would willingly obey what he would write.

One interesting note from archeology is the reference in Acts 17:6, 8 that Jason and certain brethren were drawn before the "rulers of the city". The Greek word used is *politarches*; a word that does not surface elsewhere in the New Testament or in Greek history. Sceptics in times past cast reflection against this word usage until an arch was discovered in the ruins of Thessalonica which had this exact word inscribed in it. This confirms the first hand association of the writer with the city.

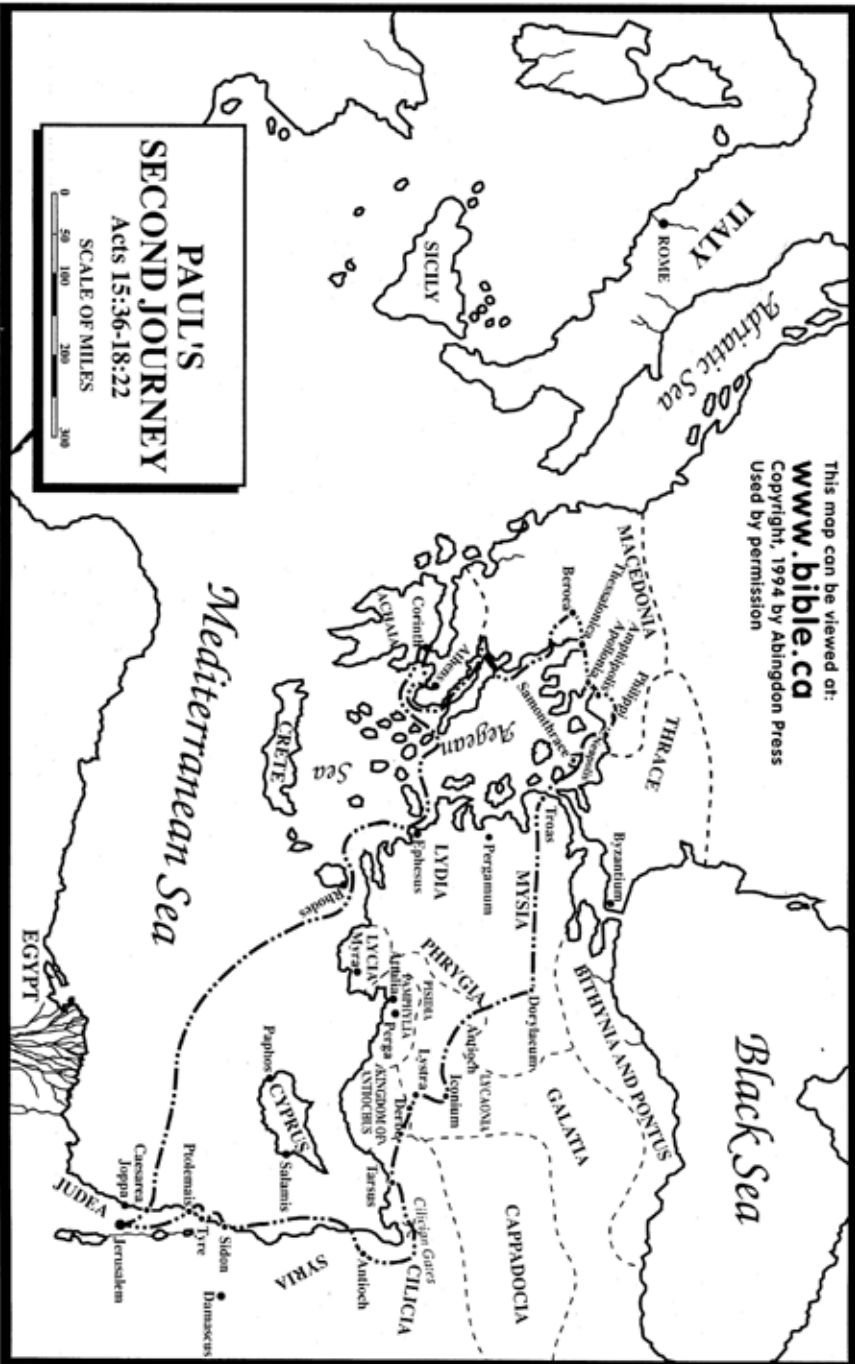
We tend to have negative impressions regarding planting churches in cities, but somehow God did just that. In this study we want to use the window of the letters to the Thessalonians to peer through the wall of time and culture that separate us and to see how God used Paul to establish a fellowship that lasted for centuries.

After fleeing Thessalonica, Paul stayed briefly at Berea, then Athens and finally settled in for a longer stay at Corinth. The letters of 1st and 2nd Thessalonians were written either from Athens (see the closing of the letters) or possibly from Corinth, only a short time after having been chased from Thessalonica. If all of Paul's letters were arranged in the order they were written, 1&2 Thessalonians would likely be near the beginning, probably right after Galatians. While these letters contain much doctrine, especially of eschatology, the doctrine of the future, they are more personal friendly letters than doctrinal treatises. They contain evidence of quickly formed friendships that had been tested by Paul needing to flee persecution.

One of the fascinating historical notes concerning Thessalonica is the *Martyrs Mirror* record written in the early 1600's that shows the church Paul founded continued faithful to New Testament doctrines for well over 15 centuries. (This account is reproduced in the back of this booklet.) The reasons for this accomplishment should be pondered as these letters are studied. The themes of these letters contain the same elements that churches need to thrive in our generation.

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**PAUL'S
 SECOND JOURNEY**
 Acts 15:36-18:22
 SCALE OF MILES
 0 50 100 200 300



❖ LESSON 1 ❖

THE GOSPEL COMES TO THESSALONICA

Lesson Focus: To examine and understand the background of how a church became to be planted in the Gentile city of Thessalonica, and how churches today may be planted in heathen cities.

When did you first hear the gospel story? Many of us were raised in a setting where Christianity has been part of the culture for hundreds of years. For this reason we can hardly understand the collision of ideas when the gospel first impacted the polytheism of the Romans, a superstitious people with many idols and gods.

One might think the Jew's background would logically make them disciples of Christ. They had a foundation of a monotheism (belief in the one true God.) They had the Scriptures, the prophets, and the heritage, but they were proud and unwilling to change.

Let us study these scriptures with a heart to apply what we can to our culture. Is there some way we can better present the Gospel in our day?



The Gospel Power is Unleashed

Paul had developed a method to his evangelism. "To the Jew first..." Romans 1:16 was his approach, but soon thereafter "...and also to the Greek." This method gave him opportunity to develop logical content, the drama of unfolding prophecy. He would take the Jews to the prophesies of the Messiah in the Torah, and then show how Christ fulfilled those prophecies. He wanted Christ to become a living reality to his audience. He wanted them to sense where they fit into the larger scope of prophecy and of eternity.

Prophecy is unique to the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament. No other religion can produce prophecy. Other religions can come up with profound thoughts or noble ideals. Other religions can produce wise human reasoning. No other religion can reach into the ancient past and produce scriptures that are recently fulfilled, and likewise confidently state what is yet to be.

1. Who was in the team that went with Paul to Thessalonica?

2. What was Paul's basis of appeal to the Jews in Thessalonica?

3. What three classes of people listened to Paul's message? What was the difference in their response?

Acts 17:1-4

1 Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews:

2 And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures,

3 Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.

4 And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few.

Word Meaning:

opening: to open thoroughly

alleging: to place alongside, present, to deposit



Opposition Arises

If we wanted to plant a church, we certainly would not use persecution to drive out the main leader. But God had plans. He permitted Satan to stir up the Jews who soon gathered a following. In their zeal they seized some of Paul's companions and turned the city into an uproar. Finally they got the civil authorities involved.

Eventually Paul was encouraged to flee for his life to the next city. He had been in Thessalonica for only a short time. What now? Had Satan managed to stamp out the little flock?

4. What was the motivation for the Jews to stir up a riot against Paul?

Acts 17:5-16

5 But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people.

6 And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the

world upside down are come hither also;
7 Whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus.
8 And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things.
9 And when they had taken security of Jason, and of the other, they let them go.
10 And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews.
11 These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.
12 Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few.
13 But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people.
14 And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go as it were to the sea: but Silas and Timotheus abode there still.
15 And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens: and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed.
16 Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.

5. What kind of people did the Jews get to join them in their riot?
6. What assertions did the Jews claim that greatly alarmed the stable citizens?
7. Were the Bereans more noble than all the Thessalonians? (What group is in focus in the statement of being more noble?)
8. What was the cause of unrest toward Paul's message at Berea?



Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. What general impression do you receive of Paul's time and influence at Thessalonica?
2. How did fulfilled prophecies fit into Paul's successful planting of a Christian church?
3. Why are prophecies a unique part of the true religion?
4. Why do we have the tendency to think the Gospel will be more likely to take root in a rural setting than in cities?
5. What would enable a church to survive even if the leader is whisked away in the first few months of its formation?
6. Why are the Jewish Bereans known as being more noble than the Jews at Thessalonica?
7. When had Silas joined with Paul? (See Acts 15:40) When had Timothy joined them? (Acts 16:40) How did they fill an integral part of the team?

❖ LESSON 2 ❖

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE IDEAL CHURCH

Lesson Focus: Churches are made of individuals but as each disciple has an influence on his brother, a group personality is formed. This lesson focuses on character traits of a congregation that make it a strong witness for Christ.

Parents leave their personality stamp on their children. Church leaders leave their influence on their church members. Church members shape each other. In this way fervent leaders who are truly Christ-centered build churches that shine with the power of the Gospel. Leaders who are ego-centered, are apathetic with the Gospel, build on empty traditions or some other false foundation, leave a reflection in the congregation where they teach.

In our day we can all observe churches that wander off into one or the other extreme of following worldly trends or that stagnate into strongholds of empty traditions. Both of these detract from the power of truth. Christ did not die to establish a people who take their cues from this world. He does not want us to follow empty teachings of the experts of sociology or psychology. His Word is our guide. Likewise, Christ never meant the Church to be dedicated to preserve cultural or technology norms of bygone times. We are here to practice and live the vibrant teachings of Christ and His apostles.

Every congregation that throbs with the heartbeat of Christ is a lighthouse to the world. This is true whether they have many converts from their community or few.

Paul's ministry at Thessalonica was brief, but intense. He had preached in the Jewish synagogue for three consecutive weeks and then was forced to go elsewhere. How long he and Silas remained in Thessalonica is unknown. We know he left leaders there (1Th 5:12-13) but they are not known by name.

Paul's letter back to the Thessalonians begins with a brief introduction. You will then find he highlights qualities he saw that made them a successful Christian church. How much were these qualities evident to everyone? Paul refers to himself as a nurse (2:7) and a father (2:11). Did this connection make him biased? On the other hand, did the Thessalonians live these virtues because Paul influenced them to?



Salutation and Introduction

Paul's introduction resounds with themes that must have been standard in the New Testament Church. We see the unity of the Godhead, the preeminence of grace and peace both in personal and in church life, and the intense prayer life of the Apostle Paul.

Paul's introductions in these two epistles are also conspicuously missing the credentials he used when he opened letters of stern rebuke and challenge. From the very opening, we sense the strong relationship that existed between these disciples and himself.

1. What is missing in the title Paul used for himself in this epistle compared to almost all the other letters?
2. What word did Paul use to communicate to the brethren they were not merely isolated believers.
3. How were these disciples to know they were close to Paul's heart?

1 Thessalonians 1:1-2

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

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



“...Your Election of God...”

Paul's writing does not lack for positive statements. As you study these verses, notice the strong colorful descriptions of God's work in their lives and their responses to Him. Would we say these same things about young disciples? Might it not create pride in them? We know the Holy Spirit was working through Paul, so we can assure ourselves that is not the case. These strong statements cemented their faith and caused them to be more firm in their Christian walk.

Paul declares these disciples are elected of God. Everyone who elects to trust in Christ and follow him becomes elected of God. This knowledge has tremendous keeping power in our lives.

Is there something here for us to learn about Paul's positive comments? Should not we be giving more affirmation to young disciples when they make their commitment to serve the Lord? Finally, it is through having a firm hold on the eternal vision that will help them appropriate the power of God in their personal lives.

Of special interest are the phrases used in verse three. One outline for the book of 1Thessalonians is, Work of Faith, 1:1-2:20; Labor of love, 3:1-4:12; and Patience of Hope, 4:13-5:28.

1 Thessalonians 1:3-5

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

4 Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.

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

4. Faith and works are usually set in contrast or given as opposites. Explain what the phrase, “work of faith” might mean.

5. What do you think the Thessalonians understood when Paul assured them they had been partakers of the election of God?

6. What other traits accompanied the word of the gospel?



“...Followers of us... Ensamples to all that Believe...”

The Thessalonian disciples boldly identified with the gospel and with the missionary group. They had no inclination to “believe only” in Jesus for salvation. Many missionary efforts have failed because the missionaries made a difference in believing in Christ and going on in discipleship to become obedient to Christ’s teachings. Paul made no such distinction.

From the beginning the new disciples were followers, and ensamples. They were expected to make changes in their lives immediately. These changes proved to all that Christ was real to them. While we may wait for some aspects of discipleship until the new convert discovers them in God’s Word, we should not hesitate to stress the concept of discipleship and obedience from the very beginning. It may wear forms of repentance, confession and restitution before it shows up in separated attire, but salvation does not come to the inside without making changes on the outside.

1 Thessalonians 1:6-10

6 And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost:

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

8 For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is

7. In what areas did the Thessalonians become followers of the missionaries?

Word Meaning:

Followers: “mimetes” imitators

8. What areas came under the witness of the Thessalonian disciples?

spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing.

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

9. What hope did the new disciples cherish in their hearts?

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



“...Ye received it...as..the Word of God...”

A spark of faith had been ignited in these disciples’ souls when they heard the Word of God preached. They did not hear it as the word of men, but accepted the Gospel as the Word of God. This came no doubt as Paul had carefully linked Scriptures the Jews confirmed as being hundreds of years old with the recent activities of Jesus.

Knowing they were in the will of God enabled the Gentile disciples to endure persecution from the Jews, the very people who should have been excited about the Gospel because it fulfilled their very Scriptures.

10. How will we need to see the Bible for it to bring its intended changes about in our lives?

1 Thessalonians 2:13-15

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

11. What will the Gospel do to all disciples’ relationships as they open their hearts to receive its teaching?

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

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



“...Your Faith Groweth... Charity... Aboundeth...”

When Paul wrote the second letter he had some weighty matters to address. This even included issues that would call for excommunication. Interestingly he opens the second letter with the same overtones of affection as he used in the first letter. He was willing to see the best in these disciples. In telling them what he saw they no doubt found encouragement to continue on.

2 Thessalonians 1:1-5

1 Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

2 Grace unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

3 We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth;

4 So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure:

5 Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer:

12. What specific attributes did Paul highlight as being noteworthy among the brethren at Thessalonica?



Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. What are some signs that a church is too much influenced by trends?
2. What are some signs that a church is too much governed by traditionalism?
3. How might a new convert be influenced by his teacher's expectations about him?
4. When might positive statements to young disciples be in order?
5. What are some idols disciples need to abandon today in order to serve the Lord?
6. Do you think your church today is a follower of the "churches of Judaea" (2:14)?
7. Discuss the challenges the disciples of Thessalonians would have faced with Paul only being in their community for a short while and needing to move on without being able to leave some of his staff behind.

❖ LESSON 3 ❖

IDEAL MISSIONARY METHODS AND MINISTERIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Lesson Focus: To observe how Paul used personal relationships to win disciples for Christ and the Church.

Which wins the convert, the missionary or his message? Perhaps that sounds like a question which shouldn't be asked. We know the missionary cannot save the seeker. Only the Gospel can do that. So of course the answer to which wins the convert is the message, is it not?

Think a little deeper. If the Gospel has first won the heart of the missionary it will have changed his nature, altered his character, and touched his personality. He will know the meaning of sacrificial love. He will suffer wrongdoing without revenge. He will be patient. He will care when those he ministers to suffer. In other words, he will adorn or wear the doctrine and the seeker will first see the Gospel lived out through his life. Then sensing the Gospel's power through the missionary's life, the seeker will likely come to hear it preached. In Jesus' day, people were first attracted to Christ, and then the message that made Him what He was.

A missionary's methods reflect his message. One of the things often observed at missionary conferences are the first hand accounts of suffering endured in the lives of the missionaries. In Paul's day it was outright persecution. That still exists in many parts of the world. But in areas where there is no known persecution, God often uses some other suffering. Personal illness, death in the family, loss of property are some illustrations. The list is unique to the individual, and not determined by man, but by God. Suffering deepens the character and shapes the personality in subtle and in profound ways.

Should the missionary and the minister use their personality to win disciples for Christ? Of course, but only in being real. They may not use personal charm, but they should use the sweetness of Christ's presence to establish strong interpersonal ties. As you study these verses you will sense the genuine reflection of Christ in Paul's life. We should ask ourselves the following questions. Am I using the personal relationships in my life to the fullest extent for Christ, or does my selfishness get in the way? Do I fear to get too close to sinners in emotional or social ties because I want to protect myself?



Personal Integrity - the Foundation for Relationships

Paul and Silas had been stoned at Philippi. We know the account of their night in the jail and the earthquake that jarred the jailer loose from his old way of life. The marks they received from their mistreatment there were the scars the Thessalonians saw. However, nothing could keep Paul and Silas quiet. They had a message and they were enthusiastic to share it. They were bold because they believed it with all their hearts. This message had changed their lives, and they knew it had the power to change others too.

There is a common thread in the attributes the apostles expressed in their ministry to the Thessalonians. Their relationship with Christ made them bold in persecution, open and honest in relating to others, without partiality in relating to the different classes they met, and without any ulterior motives such as desiring money or the praise of men.

1. What foundation did Paul and Silas have that made their lives attractive?
2. What are some qualities of boldness (v2) that make the gospel appealing?
3. How did Paul's view of where his assignment came from affect how he treated the rich and poor, the slave or the freeman?
4. How would flattery differ from the complementary and encouraging ministry that Paul practiced?
5. How important is it that the missionary or minister does not seek glory for himself for the Gospel to be effective?

1 Thessalonians 2:1-6

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

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

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

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

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

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



Keeping the Personal Touch in Relationships

Paul's preaching and interpersonal relationship with his audience was not only theological and therefore impersonal. His burden was to also impart his soul. He used relationships to form strong bonds with them, to help them choose right in the hour of temptation. Likewise, Paul was not a salaried career missionary. He labored right among the people. This no doubt made his messages the kind the common laborer could identify with. He earned what he could for his own support, and then turned around and shared his earnings with others.

1 Thessalonians 2:7-12

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

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

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

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

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

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

6. What two figures of speech did Paul use to convey personal warmth in his relationships?

7. What terms did Paul use to express the love in his heart for his fellow disciples?

8. How did Paul describe his character and behavior as he related to their individual needs?

9. What father-like characteristics did Paul express toward the disciples?



Sentimental Ties, an Emotional Bond

Absence makes the heart grow fonder... So the old adage goes. What about all the flat spots Paul would have come to know first hand in these disciples? Didn't they have any weaknesses in their lives? Weren't there any who were too loud, or complained too much? Didn't any of them ever revert to strong drink, stealing or habits from their old life? Did they somehow escape from being human?

We know the answer to these questions, of course they were human and of course they had relapses in their lives. Paul will deal with some of those in 2 Thessalonians. But his great heart was ready to reflect the love of Christ as he disciplined them along the way. What a compelling example for us to follow!

1 Thessalonians 2:17-20

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

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

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

20 For ye are our glory and joy.

10. How do you know Paul really wanted to revisit the saints at Thessalonica?

11. What eternal perspective did Paul have about the souls of the disciples he had won to Christian living?



Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. Why might God allow a missionary to suffer deeply even beyond what he has given up to travel to a strange land?
2. What is missing in a missionary's ministry if he is a vacation missionary, does not need to work with his hands, and walls himself off from the day by day needs of his audience?
3. What can we do to have the vision of Paul to care for the needs of sinners/converts the Lord may place in our lives?
4. How should we relate to converts who continually beg for material aid and we wonder if they are only coming for loaves and fishes?
5. Discuss the balance in allowing one's personality to come through in a wise way for the Gospel's sake and an unscriptural using personality to draw away disciples after oneself. How can we use personality to serve the church rather than to serve self?
6. Did Paul have to be out of God's will for Satan to hinder him? (V18) Explain.

❖ LESSON 4 ❖

CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP AND FRIENDSHIP

Lesson Focus: To see the place God intends for fellowship and friendship in the life of the disciple.

God has designed that the Christian experience is to meet our deepest emotional and social needs. Repentance clears the conscience of guilt. Salvation warms the heart with security. Service gives purpose to life, a meaning for living. But for all the merit of these blessings, there is something yet beyond all these things. Fellowship helps round us out as we give and take in interpersonal relationships. Friendship gives us an anchor in the storms of life.

Early Christians came from a spectrum of social relationships. Race divided them into sharp classes of Jews, Greeks and Romans to name a few. Wealth divided them into extreme divisions; from those who owned land and even the lives of their brethren, to slaves with nothing to call their own. How would these people ever learn to love and appreciate each other?

Paul's teaching doesn't have a lot of sermons on how disciples ought to exercise friendship — how they should accept each other. He set a clear example as he led the way. There is teaching about accepting each other, about loving each other enough to warm and feed each other. The strongest message comes as Paul opens his heart's desires to his brethren.

In this lesson we wish to open our hearts to what God has in store for us through Christian fellowship; through Christian friendship. How much should we open our hearts to seekers, to new disciples, to old friends? How open should we be with our affection? How much should we trust each other?



“We... Sent... Our Brother... to Establish You, and to Comfort You...”

After being chased from Thessalonica and Berea by hostile Jews, Paul had been taken by supporters to Athens. He missed his team and sent an urgent message to Silas and Timothy for them to come be with him. (Acts 17:14-16) He no doubt needed their support.

On further thought, Paul realized there was someone who needed Timothy more than he did. So Timothy was sent back to Thessalonica, as the passage under consideration reveals.

This was the first of many errands Timothy was to carry out for Paul. (In Acts 19:22, he was sent to Macedonia, in 1 Corinthians 4:17 he was sent to Corinth, and in Philippians 2:19, Paul was anticipating sending him to Philippi. And of course the last but not least was his assignment to serve as bishop to the church of Ephesus for which assignment Paul wrote both first and second Timothy.)

Some of the message of comradeship and friendship is lived out between Paul and his fellow disciples. He had only recently met Timothy (Acts 16:1), and was now his mentor in Christian leadership.

Paul knew the disciples were facing the scourge of persecution and he knew how cruelty could tend to weaken their resolve. He had warned them of the suffering they would endure, but would they be able to stand?

1. What titles does Paul give to young Timothy?
2. How do you know Paul did not feel threatened by Timothy's rise in influence?
3. What had Paul done to prepare the Thessalonians for the possibility of persecution?
4. How do you know that Paul did not believe in "once saved always saved"?

I Thessalonians 3:1-5

1 Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone;
2 And sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellowlabourer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith:
3 That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto.
4 For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know.
5 For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain.



“We Were Comforted Over You...”

Affection grows out of roots of openness and trust. Paul set the example by being honest with himself. Even today people read Romans 7, the chapter revealing the struggle of a person who lives after the flesh. Though Paul steadfastly followed Christ, we can see through the frankness of what he said that this was a struggle he faced. This is not suggesting that Paul was not victorious in his Christian life. He was simply honest about the struggle. He then trusted his friends not to use this for carnal advantage.

Affection also grows with frank statements of affection. “We miss you and rejoiced to hear that you miss us too! We understand that we need to be separated, but you are constantly on our hearts.” This is the essence of Paul’s communication, and ought to be the communication between leadership and members today. It is right for us to love each other and to express that love to each other. “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” John 13:35

Paul at last introduces the thought that there might be some corrections needed among the Thessalonians. It is Paul’s way to first commend what is praiseworthy, and afterwards to correct what is amiss. We shall discover some of these areas of need as the text unfolds.

1 Thessalonians 3:6-13

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

5. What are some of the things Timothy said about the brethren when he gave his report?

6. How strongly did Paul count on their perseverance in the faith?

7. How did Paul regard possible flaws in these disciples new-found faith?

8. What is the source of increased love for our fellow disciples?

9. What does a growing love produce in the Christian church?

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. Explain how accepting persons with different backgrounds other than yourself is essential in forming lasting friendships.
2. How is it possible to disagree with a brother and still retain his friendship?
3. Why is honesty such an integral part of friendship?
4. Explain how Christian principles pave the way for deeper relationships than the sinner may ever know.
5. How should you respond to a friend you have helped, but then he becomes more popular and useful in the church than you are?
6. What are some ways the Apostle Paul helped the new Christians form deep friendships with each other?
7. What are some appropriate expressions of love in the Christian fellowship?

❖ LESSON 5 ❖

PRINCIPLES FOR CHRISTIAN PURITY

Lesson Focus: To see how Christ's disciples may be pure in their relationships even while living in a society marked by moral corruption.

One area where we may feel very much in common with the clash between Christianity and the Greek and Roman culture is in the area of morals. It is true that our age has new forms of technology and immorality may seem more rampant. But even though we live in the post-Christian era, we do live in a culture that has been tempered by Christianity. As one studies some of the practices of Paul's era, it is shocking how immoral, even beastly, people lived.

Almost all forms of pagan idolatry made immorality a part of their worship. Gods and goddesses were involved in fornication and adultery. Temple worship involved immoral rituals. Polygamy and divorce were common and acceptable. What masters did with their slaves was as wide open as human nature. Most athletic performances flaunted nudity. Pornography through graffiti, sculptures, and art was public. Decent family structure and child nurture were almost non-existent.

Early Christianity made its way into all this with a standard of untimidated holiness. Wherever the doctrines of Christ were introduced, society was impacted, at times even reformed.

In this lesson we need to ask ourselves some serious questions about the influences of our day and the Christianity we profess. Which is affecting which? Am I a disciple of Christ in my heart that even if I find myself in a compromised environment I will maintain my integrity? Does my life testify against the uncleanness and protest the vileness of the age? Or do I secretly admire the iniquity around me? Do I resent or appreciate a church that holds me back from gratifying the flesh?



Purity — Personal Choices

Gratification or satisfaction? These are two words that appear similar in definition, but in reality are worlds apart. We know that God is love. It is His holiness that created the world of intimacy intended for the procreation and blessing of the human race. We also understand that Satan often uses this God-given potential to snare souls. The potential for good may be squandered for evil.

So much goes back to the choice between gratification or satisfaction. Both have overtones of pleasure. But gratification says, “give it to me now. I want my pleasure, and I want it now.” Satisfaction sees an even larger, eternal picture. What will bring me the greatest pleasure? Is this temptation before me part of the plan of the One who created me?

When Paul begins his discourse on moral purity, he begins with what it takes to please God. Keeping that vision plainly in mind, he goes on to address self control and abstinence.

1. How do we know that pleasing God is a continually growing experience?
2. What is the key to possessing one’s body in sanctification and honor?
3. What is to be understood in the thought that the Gentiles possess their vessels in concupiscence?

1 Thessalonians 4:1-9

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

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

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

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

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

Word Meaning:

Concupiscence: *raging desire, especially for what is forbidden.*



Purity — Social Consequences

Immorality always impacts relationships. When someone takes liberties that are not his, others are cheated. If you steal from someone and change your mind, you may return the stolen goods. If you repent following an immoral choice, there is no way to restore what was illegitimately taken.

The Old Testament warns of the social consequences of immorality. Proverbs 6:30-35. Dishonor and reproach are listed as how society in general feels about the immoral, and jealousy and vengeance describe the feelings of those who are cheated.

1Thessalonians 4:6-9

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

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

8 He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit.

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

Word Meaning:

Defraud: *to gain or take advantage, to overreach*

4. What are some forms of vengeance the immoral person suffers from God?

5. How do we know God cares about our moral choices?

6. How does growing in brotherly love relate to abstaining from fornication?



Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. If the new Gentile disciples had come from a setting where fornication was not considered wrong, how could Paul expect them to live pure lives?
2. Expound on the refining affect Christianity has on personal and home life.
3. How does Christ's commandment to abstain from looking to lust after a woman (Matthew 5:28) lay the foundation for purity in relationships?
4. How can a person be made clean again if he has been defiled by immorality?

5. What are some repercussions of low-grade involvement in immorality such as unclean thoughts, jokes and suggestive activities?

6. How does a person rebuild trust if he has chosen the sin of immorality?

Other New Testament Scriptures to Study

1 Corinthians 6:9-7:5

7. Only food truly satisfies the belly. What are some principles given in 1Cor 6 and 7 that show us how God intends purity to satisfy human desires?

8. What does the fornicator sin against?

9. For what special reasons should the disciple of Jesus keep himself pure?

10. What is God's design for keeping the human family pure?

❖ LESSON 6 ❖

THE IMMINENT RETURN OF JESUS CHRIST

Lesson Focus: To study how it will be when Jesus returns for His disciples.

Eschatology. The study of the doctrine of future events. How will it be when Jesus returns? Why do some people believe Jesus will first come for His saints, then the world will pass through a tribulation period before Jesus returns with His saints to bring salvation to the Jews and judgement to the nations?

Paul used prophecy as a central theme with the Gentile disciples at Thessalonica. First he took them back to centuries old Hebrew prophecies and showed their fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Then he boldly outlined what the hope of the disciple of Christ is in the future.

The effects of this type of preaching were the establishment of a stable New Testament church of pure and holy disciples. Sometimes we hear it said the emphasis on prophecy produced people who didn't want to work. This is debatable. It is true Paul needed to address the issue of laziness in the last letter, but it is questionable that prophecy would have contributed to such a problem.

Since Paul treats eschatology in three separate themes we will look at the subject in that way too. This lesson deals with the return of Christ for His Saints. The next lesson deals with the period of time called, "the day of the Lord." Lesson 8 will treat the return of Christ in judgement on the wicked. Whether we see these events as simultaneous or stretching out over a period of time, we need to accept their reality. We need to realize we someday will find ourselves in the framework of one or the other. These lessons are being approached from a literal, dispensational viewpoint, but discussion is welcomed.



"To wait for His Son from Heaven..."

The primary characteristic of Christ's return for His saints is that His coming is imminent — likely to occur at any moment. Let us think through the implications of such a belief.

One implication is that no prophecy must be fulfilled before this return may take place. The Amillennial believes these prophecies will have been fulfilled spiritually. The Premillennial believes some prophecies will take place after Jesus' return for the saints, during the next dispensations. Both agree that Jesus is likely to return any moment now.

Another implication is that there will be no time to get ready. Any preparations must be made now, or rather should have been made already. When Jesus returns, a crisis will be reached. Those ready will enter into joy and those unprepared will enter great suffering.

This also implies that some destinies will be fixed. Those who are saints will forever be saints in the presence of Christ. Those who are unsaved will be rejected. Premillennials believe that a great number of sinners will be saved during the tribulation (day of the Lord) Rev 7:14, but we cannot offer hope to those who have deliberately rejected Christ in the dispensation of Grace.

1. What Scriptural assurance do we have that all saints who are with Christ will escape all future suffering?
2. How do we know present earthly relationships will continue into eternity?
3. What will happen to our human imperfections when Christ returns?

1 Thessalonians 1:10

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

1 Thessalonians 2:19-20

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

20 For ye are our glory and joy.

1 Thessalonians 3:13

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



...The Lord Himself shall Descend from Heaven...

Paul authored two extensive passages regarding Jesus' return for His saints, the scripture here and the passage in 1 Corinthians 15:35-58. This passage here focuses more on the sequence of events, while the treatise to Corinth deals with the manner of the change that will be experienced. These passages contain tremendous inspiration for the disciples as we anticipate our world to come.

4. Why should the grieving of the disciple for a departed saint be different from the sorrow of those who do not obey Christ?

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

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

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

15 For this we say unto you by the word of the

Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

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

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

18 Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

5. Who will come back with Christ when He comes for the Church?

6. How do we know Paul expected Christ to return during his lifetime?

7. How do we know saints will never again be separated from Christ?

8. What three sounds will attend Christ's return?



Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. Complete the following table to compare the parallel phrases of John 14:1-3 and 1 Cor 15 with these verses in 1 Thessalonians 4.

John 14:1 Let not your heart be troubled	4:13
14:2 Believe in God — Believe in me	4:14
14:2 If it were not so I would have told you	4:15
14:3 I will come again	4:15
14:3 I will receive you	4:17
14:3 Where I am there you may be also	4:17
1 Cor 15:23 Resurrection of them that are Christ's at his coming	4:16
14:1 Let not your heart be troubled	4:18

❖ LESSON 7 ❖

THE DAY OF THE LORD AND THE ANTICHRIST

Lesson Focus: To understand what the Bible has to say about the period of time called the “day of the Lord” and to understand more fully the person of the antichrist.

An important key to understanding prophecies is to follow a phrase as it is used throughout the Bible. One of these important phrases is “the day of the Lord.” This phrase is found twenty four times in the Old Testament and five times in the New Testament. Invariably it is used to describe a time of the outpouring of the wrath of God upon this world.

We understand “day” is to be used in the sense of a period of time, even as “hour” is used in John 4:23 to describe the period of time when true worshippers worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The “hour” has lasted approximately two thousand years. The “day” according to Daniel 9:27 and Revelation will last for seven years. The “day” is also given as 1260 days or two periods of three and one half years.

Another consideration is that while much punishment is promised for the heathen and the wicked, even the Jews, there is never any reference to God’s children as being a part of this suffering. In fact, Zephaniah 2:2-3 and Luke 21:36 both agree with 1Thessalonians 5:4-5 that this day will not come upon the child of God.

Study the use of pronouns, and you will find the consistency that in reference to Christ’s return for the Saints, the pronouns “we”, and “ye” are used. When speaking concerning the day of the Lord, then “they” and “them” are used.

It is consistent with Biblical understanding to see Revelation 6-19 and the terrible plagues that God pours upon this world as being this same time frame. Other parallel phrases used are “tribulation” or “great tribulation” found five times in the New Testament, and “wrath” as found here in Thessalonians. This all contrasts with the “dispensation of the Gospel of Grace” which we are presently experiencing, when God “maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust” Matthew 5:45.

Another key in understanding prophecy is to recognize the main personality who dominates the scene on earth during the tribulation. He is introduced in Thessalonians as “the man of sin”, “the son of perdition” and “that Wicked.” In Daniel he is described as “the prince” or “horn” and in Zechariah as “the idol shepherd”. He dominates the scenes on earth in Revelation as “the beast”.



“...as Travail upon a Woman with Child...”

Travail comes on a woman suddenly, but may extend for hours or even days. Once the pangs begin, the mother-to-be knows several things. One is that there is no escape until the travail is completed. Another is that the suffering will only get worse until sometime after the moment of birth. While there are moments of near normalcy between the pangs, she knows the next pang will be longer and bring more pain. Also in light of the present distress, she tends to forget how pleasurable normal life can be.

This is the comparison the Scriptures bring for those entering the “day of the Lord.” It will come at a time when men feel they have entered an age of peace and prosperity. However, as a thief which comes with damage, so the world will suffer loss of the things they prize the most.

As disciples of Christ we are called to live as children of the Light. We have clear Scriptures that teach us not to become enamored with the temptations of our age. We know what the course and end will be of those who live for their immediate pleasure.



1. What are social conditions when the day of the Lord suddenly dawns on the world?
2. How do we know the world won't go from normal to burned up within a few hours time?
3. What responsibilities are we as children of light called to in our present dispensation?
4. What is the “wrath” we as Christians are not appointed to?

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

- 1 But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you.
- 2 For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.
- 3 For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.
- 4 But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.
- 5 Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.
- 6 Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.
- 7 For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night.

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

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

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

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

5. What are some verses that promise suffering to the disciple of Christ?

6. How do we reconcile these verses that promise "escape" as a comfort to the disciple?



“...That Day Shall not Come...”

This passage is one of the most misunderstood of all prophetic scriptures. A hasty reading leads many to conclude the rapture cannot take place until certain things happen. This brings confusion because in many other places the second coming of Christ is taught as being imminent.

Paul is plainly addressing two different, two distinct future events. The first is the coming of Christ and our gathering together unto him. This refers to the imminent return of Christ for the Church. Nothing at all needs to happen before this event can take place. It is an event offered as great comfort to the child of God.

The other event cannot come yet. It is a time which when studied in detail cannot help but bring horror to any human, because of the cataclysmic events and the intense suffering for mankind. There are specific events that need to come to pass before this event can begin.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-3

1 Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him,

2 That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand.

3 Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;

7. Anticipation of what future event is to keep the disciple from being shaken in mind or troubled?

8. What phrase in our King James translation is to be understood as "The Day of the Lord?"

“...Then shall that Wicked be Revealed...”

Paul wanted the Thessalonians to know there are two events that must transpire before the Day of the Lord (otherwise known as the tribulation period) may start. There will be a great falling away, which seems to have at least partially transpired. The second is that the antichrist will be revealed.

Apparently the Thessalonians were suffering so much persecution they felt they had already entered the tribulation period. Either they didn't understand the sequence of prophecy or they had come to believe they had missed the resurrection of the just. This was an eschatological position that Paul had to deal with later in 2 Timothy 2:18.

We are grateful for the clear writings Paul sent the church. Evidently he had given prophecy teaching, but we are not able to learn from those sessions. At least we have the written word and can find our way as we compare Old and New Testament passages.

We have some of the most extensive teaching regarding the antichrist found anywhere in the Scriptures. He will perform many wonders and deceive many. He will dominate a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem. Persons who knew the teachings of Christ and rejected Him during the day of Grace will fall prey to the miraculous deception of the antichrist. Coupled with Satan's deception and the choice of the Christians left behind, we also have God sending a strong delusion. There is serious question if any church member who is not taken in the Rapture with the Church will come to repentance.

9. See John 17:12. Who else is given the title, "son of perdition"?

10. How do we know Jewish attempts to rebuild their temple will be successful?

11. Read Daniel 12:1. Who is the one who hinders Satan from deceiving the world at this present time?

2 Thessalonians 2:3-12

3 Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;

4 Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.

5 Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?

6 And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time.

7 For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.

8 And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:



9 Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders,

10 And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

11 And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie:

12 That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

12. See Revelation 13 for a parallel passage. Where does the antichrist receive his power to work miracles?

13. What is the reason behind the wholesale acceptance of Satan's lies?



Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. How do we know that when the Bible speaks of "the Day of the Lord" it is not referring to one twenty-four hour time frame?
2. What is the Biblical basis for the belief that the Church of Jesus Christ will not need to pass through the great tribulation?
3. Why do we believe that those exposed to the truth will not be given a second chance after Jesus comes for the Church?
4. In Revelation 7:9-14 John saw an innumerable multitude of redeemed which the angel informed him were those who had come out of the great tribulation. If Christians don't have a second chance, where do these Saints come from?
5. How do we know "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and ... our gathering together unto him" is not the same thing as "...the day of Christ"?
6. Give some characteristics of the antichrist. Do you believe he is Satan in a human form? Why or why not?
7. According to Revelation 19:20, what is the final destiny of the antichrist?

❖ LESSON 8 ❖

DEVELOPING CHRISTIAN VIRTUES

Lesson Focus: To explore avenues of growth the Christian must take in order to fulfill the call of discipleship.

We may become a Christian with one simple choice of faith. However for us to walk the walk of the Disciple of Christ we must make continued choices of following the Lordship of Jesus. It is a rewarding walk because of the relationship we have as disciples with our Lord. As we hear His voice and follow Him, He and the Father come to us and make their abode with us (John 14:23). This brings us fulfillment in our life journey.

In His sovereignty, God plans events, trials and successes in order to advance His kingdom in this world. He leads us into all manner of unexpected experiences. Then he ministers to us through His Spirit and His Word showing us how to dispense His grace to other humans He loves and wishes to save.

In this lesson we will discover some of the elementary virtues we need to choose along the way. We will need faith to believe God is behind the scenes. We will need courage to always apply these virtues whether they seem to work or not. As servants or employees of a Supreme Master, it is not for us to determine how everything will work out. We just need to be obedient to His commands.

The journey of faith and obedience produces growth. Growth is the ability God gives us to change to be more and more replicas of His personhood. The more difficult the test and the more faithfully we apply the Word to our situation, the more we will grow in Christ's image.

As we study this lesson, we should think about the trials God is leading us through at this present time. What virtues does He want to put on display? Who is He endeavoring to touch with Christ's love using us as His instrument of mercy? Nothing in this whole universe happens merely by chance, but all is arranged by Him, even though we may not always understand.



“Ye...are taught of God to Love One Another”

It is our human nature to love ourselves and make sure others recognize our greatness. We think we will be satisfied when others serve us, and when we may have what we wish with little sacrifice. The problem with this kind of life is the emptiness and sense of vanity it generates that plague the human soul. Look at celebrities, for example, and you will find people who have everything a person could wish for except true happiness.

When we come to the cross of Christ and witness His example, we find out how petty and selfish we really are. We find the meaning of sacrificial love for our fellow man, even to those who do not reciprocate this love. We learn how to express this through menial service and daily chores.

1. Where will we find the source of love to have tenderness toward the unlovely?

2. What kind of employees are Christians to be?

3. What are some benefits of being steady at our work?

1 Thessalonians 4:9-12

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

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

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

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



Direction for Relationships

Everyday attitudes. That is where the test is. We may make a good profession and impression on Sunday, but what we really are with our fellow man shows up in our lives day after day.

The following verses are an assortment of directives that will apply to everyone in one degree or another. Our attitude toward and relationship with our authority, how we relate to the rebellious, how we treat those we consider weak, or how we respond to insults from enemies, these are areas where our ideals meet reality. These tests are where we see whether or not we truly are disciples of Christ.

4. How are we to relate to imperfect ministers in our churches?

1 Thessalonians 5:12-15

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

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

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

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

5. Answer the following questions by looking up the main words in **Strong's**.

Who are the unruly and how shall we relate to them?

Who are the feebleminded and how shall we relate to them?

Who are the weak and how shall we relate to them?



“...And the very God of Peace Sanctify you Wholly...”

Faith. It is more than a theological term. Faith is knowing that God is in control of life and that He orders events in my life. For this reason the disciple's reactions are different than those of the unbeliever, regardless of his education or wealth. God places great value on someone who praises Him even in the midst of reverses.

Following the directives in these verses has a preserving effect in our lives. Through the tests of life and through the door of death, we will be kept, preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Some miracle here! Little choices made to follow the instructions of the Word become the catalyst for blamelessness through all eternity!

1 Thessalonians 5:16-28

16 Rejoice evermore.

17 Pray without ceasing.

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

19 Quench not the Spirit.

20 Despise not prophesyings.

21 Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.

22 Abstain from all appearance of evil.

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

24 Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.

25 Brethren, pray for us.

26 Greet all the brethren with an holy kiss.

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

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

6. How can the disciple of Christ rejoice even when life seems to go against him?

7. Why are disciples of Jesus usually known to be conservative in their practices?

8. V24. We have been called by the Holy Spirit. What is it that He will do for us?

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. How does an increasing love among the brotherhood express itself?
2. How does having a worth while occupation or employment enhance the Christian's testimony?
3. How will we relate to the ordained among us if we "esteem them highly in love"?
4. What can we do to comfort the feebleminded when we feel we are not professionally trained to relate to persons who struggle with their emotions?
5. How does true faith help us be non-resistant when we are taken advantage of?
6. What are some ways we may quench the Spirit?
7. Discuss what might be involved in being wholly sanctified by the God of peace.

❖ LESSON 9 ❖

THE COMING OF CHRIST IN VENGEANCE

Lesson Focus: To learn what God's Word teaches us about Christ's vengeance upon the wicked.

It just isn't right! There are laws that permit evil and there are laws that condemn that which is right. Judges sometimes condemn innocent people and allow criminals who should be punished sometimes to go free! Our society claims to be influenced by Christianity, but unborn babies are murdered by the millions.

In Paul's day, Christians were being unjustly punished and even martyred. Jews who claimed to be God's holy people were some of their strongest persecutors. Romans with all their claims to justice could be cruel and unfair.

Life is not fair. In fact, there is an aspect where God is not fair. Some are born with more advantages than others. Some live wickedly and seemingly go unpunished. Some who are godly in character and purpose die in their youth. Think about it, had God been fair, Jesus would not have died for us. We would have been immediately cut off for our sins. But as the Scripture teaches us, "Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God..." (1 Peter 3:18).

All our lifetime we have witnessed a God who is merciful to the just and to the unjust. God is non-resistant as He displays His grace to this world. He is too loving and kind and in this He isn't fair!

Soon, that is going to change. The Bible teaches us of a time when there is going to be a major shift in how God relates to this world. When Jesus comes back with His army of saints and holy angels, He will be non-resistant no longer. He will reveal the justice of God, a justice that is just as infinite as His grace has been.



"The Lord Jesus revealed...with his mighty Angels"

The story told here parallels the scene in Revelation 19:11-21 and Zechariah 12-14. Each passage highlights different details, but what is given is clearly in the same time frame.

In short, as might be understood by reading and comparing many passages, after the Church has been raptured to heaven to be with Christ, the Lord begins to reclaim the earth as His rightful possession as kinsman redeemer. Satan will fill the person of the antichrist, and will seek world wide domination. He will come with peace at first

but then take over by force. As seals are loosened to the title deed of the earth, Christ will purge the earth of inhabitants until all that is left is the nations around Jerusalem. There are untold millions who will respond to the preaching of angels, of the 144,000 evangelists and the two witnesses in Israel. But other millions will harden their hearts against God and openly serve the antichrist. Finally the antichrist will tighten his noose against the Jews and armies will surround the Holy Land.

In their extreme suffering, the Jews will come to repentance and cry out to Jesus for salvation. Then He will descend with all the world witnessing His coming with the armies of heaven. He will destroy the wicked with the brightness of His coming.



1. What is the most important cause any generation can give their life to?

2. What is the motivation behind God and Jesus bringing punishment upon the wicked?

3. What two classes will be dealt with in the final judgement of mankind?

4. What will be the time frame and nature of punishment of the wicked?

5. What can we do to escape the punishment God has in store for the wicked?

2 Thessalonians 1:5-12

5 Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer:

6 Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you;

7 And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels,

8 In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:

9 Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;

10 When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day.

11 Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power:

12 That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. Complete the following chart by comparing this passage with Revelation 19.

2 Thessalonians	Revelation 19
1:7	Heaven opened verse 11
1:8	Doth judge and make war verse 11
1:10	Saints following in white raimentverses 8-14
1:8	Eyes as a flame of fire . . . verse 12
2:8	Beast and false prophet cast into lake of fire verse 20

2. 2 Thessalonians highlights that angels come with Christ. Revelation 19 speaks of the saints who return with him as the armies of heaven. What do you make of these two facts?

3. According to Romans 11:26 how many of the Jews will be saved? This is after what percentage has been slain? (See Zechariah 13:8-9)

4. What will the Jews need to do in order to be saved?

5. According to Zechariah 14:12, how will the wicked be slain in the battle?

❖ LESSON 10 ❖
THE DISCIPLINES OF
CHRISTIANITY IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Lesson Focus: To understand God's plan for church discipline when a church member chooses to live after fleshly desires.

The Disciple of Christ lives with two contrasting realities. One is the glorious future promised to those who are faithful to Christ to someday share in His triumph. The other reality is the present, living in the flesh, and in a world affected by the fall of man.

In our present state we need to continually choose self discipline. We cannot be a disciple of Christ without discipline. If we follow the inclinations of our flesh, we will take a course of sin and selfishness. Christian discipline and self denial are not easy. If your version of self-discipline is easy and you can conscientiously live after your wishes, then something is wrong with your definition of Christianity.

Part of Christ's plan is for the disciple to enter into the discipline of a Christian brotherhood. The Scriptures call us to submit one to another. This means we must blend our ideas and practices together. The Church will have traditions and will have its statement of faith and practice to which each member must subscribe. This demands giving up individualism. This is a form of discipline even when one is not under corrective discipline.

If an individual disciple does not exercise self-discipline, then God's plan is that the congregation he is part of should exercise corrective discipline upon him. External discipline is for the purpose of helping the disciple learn to exercise internal discipline. This is a principle of the Scripture that is largely lacking in the nominal church today. However, if we would be disciples of Jesus, it is an integral part of church life.

This lesson should help us think deeply about how we are doing in denying ourselves of base or sinful desires. We may have learned how to sin in secret, but ultimately if we hide our sin or selfishness and do not forsake it, our sin will be discovered and we will need to suffer for it.



“You both do and will do the things which we command you...”

Can't you just sense the love and fellowship that flowed between Paul and these new disciples? “Pray for us...God will stablish you... we have confidence you will do the things we tell you to.”

It is always refreshing to see harmonious Christian relationships. Let us again observe the beauty of how Christian relationships are to work because of Christ's work in our hearts.

1. What did Paul expect the prayers of the Thessalonians to accomplish for him?
2. As far as growth, what did Paul believe God would do for the Thessalonian disciples? What did he expect them to do for themselves?

2 Thessalonians 3:1-5

1 Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you:

2 And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith.

3 But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil.

4 And we have confidence in the Lord touching you, that ye both do and will do the things which we command you.

5 And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ.



“We command you... that ye withdraw yourselves”

A popular philosophy today proposes that if you are a Christian you show love by making sure you never hurt anyone. Love is imagined to be some soft and smooth acceptance of people, no matter what their error. Both Jesus and Paul's writings plainly correct this error. It is love that holds a person responsible for his actions. It is love, that in a correct and proper manner, disciplines the sinner.

Some writers speculate that the Thessalonians got carried away with the doctrine of Christ's second coming. The Bible doesn't say what the reason was but each culture has areas which need correction. The Cretians were “slow bellies” inclined to lie (Titus 1:12). The Thessalonians no doubt needed some of the same Christian teaching as the Cretians to correct their tendencies.

Paul had a proper platform to call for discipline for others. It was the platform of self discipline. When he had lived among them he had plied his trade, sometimes working day and night with great effort to pay his expenses (verse 8). This self discipline had provided an example that Paul did not hesitate to call their attention to as he urged them to disciplined living.

2 Thessalonians 3:6-9

6 Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.

7 For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you;

8 Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you:

9 Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us.

3. What would Paul have done to the brethren who violated apostolic tradition?

4. What example did Paul leave in the area of self-support?

5. Why did Paul give up his rights to be supported by the churches he labored among?



“Admonish him as a Brother..”

The entire body of Scripture admonishes those who have material goods to be willing to share with those who do not have. Here we have a truth that helps us understand the subject of giving to the poor brother. If a brother would begin to justify his lack of labor and wish for constant handouts, there would come a time when he should be refused.

To Timothy, Paul penned admonition regarding which widows should be accepted in systematic church support. The others were to be refused. Here able bodied men are told to work quietly, to eat their own bread.

There is a Christian dignity that comes to people who accept these disciplines. This is a dignity that enhances the testimony of Christ.

For those who still refused to work the church was to withdraw themselves. This direction is after the same fashion as described in 1 Corinthians 5, the discipline for one involved in immorality, and in Titus 3, for one who was divisive in the church.

2 Thessalonians 3:10-18

10 For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.

11 For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies.

12 Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with

6. What was Paul's remedy for the brethren at Thessalonica who refused to work?

7. What other sin tended to go along with slothfulness?

8. What attitude were those diligent in labor to avoid?

9. What precautions should be avoided when a brother is shunned by the church?

quietness they work, and eat their own bread.
13 But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing.

14 And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed.

15 Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

16 Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace always by all means. The Lord be with you all.

17 The salutation of Paul with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle: so I write.

18 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.



Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. How can the Gospel be centered in love and still exercise discipline?
2. Why didn't Paul practice Matthew 18 in his concerns about the disorderly brethren at Thessalonica?
3. How do we know which traditions if violated warrant the exercise of discipline?
4. What answers do you give someone who insists church rules are a man made idea?
5. What principles must be kept in focus for discipline to be redemptive?

❖ Epilogue ❖

The following account is copied from the Martyr's Mirror. It is included to help us understand that from the humble beginnings of this church was to proceed a faithful brotherhood for at least fifteen centuries. When we think about the fact that the Anabaptist church has existed for less than five hundred years we can appreciate what this really means.

The following is a brief account how through some Moravians who had been captured by the Turks, and had come to Thessalonica, in Turkey, the Christians at Thessalonica obtained information that in Moravia there lived fellow believers of theirs, who were there called Anabaptists; and how, in order to ascertain the truth of the matter, they sent three of their brethren to Moravia, in Germany.

"I the undersigned, testify that in Moravia there lived with me, for the space of three years, a man of our brethren, about a hundred years old named Leonard Knar, who related to me that in his time, when he was a servant in the common house of the common church at Popitz, under the steward, Hans Fuhrman, three brethren of the church of Thessalonica were sent to Germany to inquire after their fellow believers, who, as they had learned from the prisoners, as stated above were living in Moravia.

"They first came to Nickelsburg, on the frontier of Hungary, where they went to a priest and inquired after this people. He entered a carriage and rode with these three men to Pausrom, to those who are there called Hutterites, and in the Netherlands, Moravians.

"Having well examined their life and conversation, they discussed with them, in the Latin language, in which they were well versed all the articles of the faith, but found that in three principal articles they did not accord; namely, first in shunning, as this article was maintained by the Hutterites; secondly, in the community of goods, which virtually consists with them more in dominion and servitude, than in equality; thirdly, that they withhold from those who fall away from their communion and leave them the property which they brought in, on account of which these three men parted from them with tears in their eyes, because they had performed such a difficult and laborious journey in vain.

"The same priest then took them in the same place (Pausrom), to the Schwitzer church, who derive their name from Hans Schwitzer, who, through one of their brethren, named John Peck (who, with Hans Fuhrman and twelve other persons, had lain in prison for nine years, in the castle Passau on the Danube, in Bavaria, for the testimony of the faith), discussed in Latin all the articles of their faith. They agreed well in all points, on account of which they being mutually filled with great joy, acknowledged each other as dear brethren, and in token thereof, commemorated together the Lord's Supper, with great gladness, confessing themselves the true church of God. They stated further that the church of God at Thessalonica had remained unchanged in faith from the time of the apostles, and that they still preserved in good condition the letters which the apostle Paul wrote to them with his own hands.

"All this having taken place, they parted in peace, and having commended each

other with tears and the kiss of love, into the keeping of the Lord the brethren journeyed back to Thessalonica.

“One of them who as a tailor by trade, left his shears as a memento in the church at Pausrom.

“This history is not only known to me, but is generally known, not only in Moravia, but also in the upper Palatinate.”

“By me, Jacob Meyster, resident at Amsterdam, fled from Moravia, to Poland, AD 1620; thence AD 1626 to Stettin, in Pomerania, and in the year 1627 to Amsterdam. I acknowledge that this account of Leonard Knar is as related.”

Of these things, Jacob Mehrning, of Holstein, gives this account:

“Thus we have information that even at the present day there are brethren and Christians at Thessalonica, who agree with the Mennists in all articles of religion, also in baptism, two of whom were yet in the time of our fathers with the brethren in Moravia, and then also in the Netherlands, and communed with the brethren, who expressly declared that they still preserved in good condition, at Thessalonica, the originals of St. Paul’s epistles to the Thessalonians. Likewise that many of their brethren were still living, scattered here and there in Ethiopia, Greece and other oriental countries, as well as other Christians, who, like them, were preserved by God, and remained in the same doctrine. And the true practice of baptism, constantly from the beginning of the apostles to this time.”

