

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Exposition of First Thessalonians Lesson 1

Scripture: I Thessalonians 1:

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: May 24th, 1998

Ministry in the Real World

Introduction If you were to meet a first century Christian from the Macedonian city of Thessalonica and were able to communicate, you would find that he pretty much is dealing with the same kinds of issues as are you. That first century believer...

needed to know that he was going down the right path in having signed up to follow his Christian leaders (the apostles).

He needed encouragement to keep living for Jesus Christ.

He needed direction in moral decision making.

He wanted to understand what is the deal with the second coming of Christ and how He will incorporate His disciples *into* that second coming.

Paul's letters to the Thessalonian believers (there are two) may as well have been written yesterday and TO US. They are relevant and real, and my goal is to show you how in the coming weeks and to get you thinking *during the week* about the issues that Paul addressed to these believers so long ago. The issues are fundamental to right Christian thinking and right Christian living. This will not be a hard letter for you and I to get a grip on...

I recently heard Chuck Swindoll say on the radio that he now recommends First Thessalonians to new believers as a first NT book to read and internalize. He used to always recommend the Gospel of John but now he like to introduce a convert to this book. It contains, says Swindoll, many basic discipleship issues that a new Christian profits from knowing about and the letter illustrates how Paul, himself, was dealing with new Christian converts.

This is not a particularly long letter from Paul. It is only five chapters; 89 verses long. It is one of his earliest of those letters that we know he wrote, and it was probably written somewhere around 50 or 51 A.D., some twenty years or so after his miraculous conversion on the road to Damascus. We can summarize its purpose with four priorities. These are the kinds of things you will get from this letter, even as his original readers got them right from his heart:

1. Paul wrote this letter to these believers to **encourage their perseverance**. His motivation is pure—he looks at them with the affection of a loving parent; he's not in it for the money,

for the power or for the reputation. He cares about this assembly because they are God's own chosen people and Paul's calling from God was to shepherd God's own people.

2. He wrote this letter to **refute certain false charges**. Even an apostle was subject and vulnerable to being misunderstood. He felt a great need to personally communicate with these young believers who were hearing bad things about him. He needed to defend his own integrity.
3. Third, he wrote this letter to **correct some errors**. Just because a person is a Christian doesn't mean he possesses balanced theology or a balanced view of the Christian life. Charles Ryrie wrote: *"There is nothing more devastating to the practice of spiritual living than an imbalance. An unbalanced application of the doctrines related to biblical spirituality will result in an unbalanced Christian life. Too much emphasis on the mystical may obscure the practicality of spiritual living, while overemphasis on the practical may result in a lack of vision...an overemphasis on confession could cause unhealthy introspection while an underemphasis might tend to make one insensitive to sin. Balance is the key to a wholesome spiritual life."*¹
4. He also wrote this letter to **instruct them in basic eschatology**. Their interest in future events was not just theoretical—they wanted to know what happens to Christians who die before the return of Jesus Christ. This is perhaps one of *our* most heart-felt ponderings, as well.

Now, let's begin to get into the letter...

The letter was written by Paul, but you will notice that he omitted the customary *an apostle* and instead gives co-authorship credit to Silas and Timothy, a humble gesture. Timothy had just returned *from* Thessalonica and Silas was Paul's assistant, perhaps "administrative assistant" on this, his second missionary journey. His audience is *the church of the Thessalonians*, so called because they were *in God the father and the Lord Jesus Christ*. You cannot call yourself a church if you are not in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ. Religious groups who are not related TO the one, true and living God, the Father, by the office and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ cannot technically speaking, call themselves a Christian church. But this was a group of people—or perhaps a network of small groups of house churches—who, together, comprised THE church of Jesus Christ in the ancient city of Thessalonica.

He gives the typical ancient and typical apostolic greeting—*grace to you and peace*. We have read these words so often, I fear they almost lose their meaning for us but know this: the concept of grace is the beginning of our whole belief system. We perhaps take it for granted but in Thessalonica where there were those who wanted Christians to live BACK under the Law of Moses, *grace* was the signature of the apostle Paul's message. And it is followed by *peace*. The connection is logical. If you really know what God's grace is all about, you enjoy His peace (which is a fruit of the Spirit). If you have put the issue of your *acceptability* before God to rest (because it is "only by grace" that we stand before him) then you can have peace. The battle with worry, insecurity and dread are over. You are at peace with God if you have depended on His grace to save you. If you're still planning to impress God with your goodness or your achievement then you should expect no peace because you must always be MORE good

and achieve MORE. But in grace the Thessalonian believers in Christ could have peace; so can we.

In verse 2 Paul speaks about his own prayer life (although he said *we*) and thus indicates that he and Timothy and Silas prayed together about the same things sometimes. Thankfulness for these Thessalonian believers was a subject of prayer. They would say, "Lord, I really appreciate what you're doing over there in Thessalonica. It means something to ME and I thank you for them."

I think it is so easy for us to get all wrapped up and in fact, imprisoned, by what is going on in our own lives. We forget the importance and significance of what is going on in someone ELSE's life or in the life of another church. This week I got a call from a pastor across the country who called to ask how our weekend went. He had been praying for it and wanted to know the results. I also spoke with one of my closest colleagues and he did not inquire at all. We only spoke in that conversation about what is going on in HIS church. It was a contrast.

Well, as Paul thought of *this* church, he thought about three specific aspects of their corporate faith in Christ (verse 3). I wish we could be known for these three things:

Our ***work of faith***. And you know, real Christian faith *produces* work and effort. I am proud of all the work that I see you doing, here. Real Christians are busy people. They are working for the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Our ***labor of love***. And you know, love *produces* the labor. Picking someone up and giving them a ride is a labor of love. Work Day around here is a labor of love. Consider the Claims was a labor of love. Awana Clubs is a labor of love. When this new building gets started it will be a labor of love.

Our ***steadfastness of hope***. And you know, real Christian hope produces the steadfastness and patience that indicates the person really believes in Jesus' promises.

These three aspects—which Paul heard about in the Thessalonian church, are really what this whole letter is about. These are about Christian ministry in real world. We **work on our faith**, and we work for the Kingdom, even though it is still invisible. And even though it is still invisible, we work to MAKE it visible with the works that we do out of our faith. We give to each other and to the community a ***labor of love***. You know, the Town of Dartmouth will not be sending us a thank-you note for putting on "the Claims of Christ." But it was a lot of work and it was labor, by a few people; the benefits designed to accrue NOT to us, but to the community. We did it for the community, didn't we? And our patience or steadfastness of hope is what sustains us. Not *everyone* is steadfast in their hope. We have seen a number of people over the years, waver in their hope. It is not a foregone conclusion that all who, at one point, name the name of Christ WILL remain patient and steadfast in their hope that the claims of Christ will prove out true. Some who ten years ago would gladly sing *Great is Thy Faithfulness* could not sing it today. So, Paul's acknowledgment of the Thessalonian Christians' ***steadfastness of hope*** is

important. And when we see it in each other or in another congregation it gives us joy and we pray and say, "Thank you, Lord" for what I see in my brethren.

Ministry in the real world involves work, labor and patience. Good things do not happen magically. The kingdom and all that this means, do not advance without belief in them and work backing up that belief, loving effort and hopeful patience. These are what make a church a *real* Christian church. These are what arm us to persevere in our faith. We are not stagnant; just WAITING for the second coming. We are working; we are laboring; we are hopefully waiting on God.

¹ Charles C. Ryrie, *Balancing the Christian Life*, Moody Press 1969, p. 9

1st Thessalonians

- ◆ *from:* Paul (with Silas and Timothy)
- ◆ one of Paul's earliest letters (A.D. 51)
- ◆ from Corinth (140 miles away)
- ◆ *to:* Thessalonian Christian assembly
(city of 200,000)
- ◆ Purpose:
 - to encourage perseverance
 - to refute false charges
 - to correct some errors
 - to instruct in eschatology

1st Thessalonians **1:3**

work of faith

faith produces the work

labor of love

love produces the labor

steadfastness of hope

**hope produces the
steadfastness**

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Exposition of First Thessalonians Lesson 2

Scripture: I Thessalonians 1: 4-7

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: May 31st, 1998

Affirming the Good Stuff

Introduction Today is a special day for me: I'll tell you why at the end of the message. But let me start by asking you, if someone tells you you're doing a good job, that feels good, doesn't it? If someone tells you you're doing a good job and they tell you *why* you're doing a good job, that feels even better, doesn't it? And if someone tells you you're doing a good job and they go on in some *detail* about how you're doing a good job—now that's real encouragement, right? It motivates you to keep doing the same job you've been doing.

What if you could get a personal note of encouragement from a real apostle? What if in that note he laid out some of the good stuff about how you've been doing in your Christian life—some of the things you had been really *working* on. What if an apostle knew about it and let you know that he thought you were doing a good job? Would you like that? That is what we have in the rest of I Thess. 1. You could hardly ask for a more encouraging chapter of the New Testament. As Paul thought about the assembly (or assemblies) of believers in Thessalonica, and as he got fresh news of them from Timothy—he set to write them and affirm the good things about their church. Out of the blue, we received an e-mail this week from someone who just found our web page randomly: here is what that person wrote to us...

Greetings and Salutations, I just wanted to let you know that I stumbled across your web page and my jaw dropped open! A site this cool from a CHURCH in Dartmouth MA? Don't you know you are supposed to be cold and reserved like the other churches web sites? I'm thinking more along the lines of a...a....a.....jewelry store! Yeah that's it! Don't bring your drinks in here don't touch anything and act professional and elitist at all times! That's the way this church thing works, but I suppose you are not aware of that. Do you realize that by having such a detailed user friendly web page like yours that you are clearly placing yourself in danger of attracting us college age people to your church?!!!! What on earth would you do with us? I'm sure there is only so much room in the back of the bus for us to fit in! Though if truth be told we are used to being overlooked, segregated, separated, suffered by the church crowd that loathes us yet is curiously convinced at the same time that they have a burden for us. No passport required to enter your site! That was another thing I noticed. No test to see if we would be considered accepted, no statement of beliefs that we had to read and click "yes I agree to all of the following" before giving us the OK to play the games. Wow. I'm stumped. I remember reading a book once where there

was this guy who went around helping people for free. He hung out with the poor and the crippled, even prostitutes! He'd go have a bite to eat with anyone no matter what their education or lack of it. People called him "their friend" and they never forgot him even two thousand years later the story keeps getting told. I mention it here cause your web page reminds me of that man and I thought you should know that. I'm sure He would approve. Keep the page fun and user friendly and who knows, on a day when I feel quite daring I may just find wherever this Bible church in Dartmouth is and see if the real thing lives up to the image. What a great thing that will be if it does. I'll let you know! For now, I am letting others know about your site. I have it listed as a link on my web page and I am going to include it tonight in my free E-mail newsletter that is sent out to believers on 5 Continents. Allow me the privilege of spreading the GOOD NEWS with a GOOD SITE!

Receiving affirmation is a blessing and a real source of joy for anyone but especially for us Christians, as we try to do things which honor the Lord Jesus Christ. And in verse 3 Paul affirmed the Thessalonians' *faith*, their *love* and their *hope*, we might say these being three important distinguishing marks of a true Christian or of a true Christian assembly. If a group is really connected to *the Lord Jesus Christ* and *God the Father*, we take it that at least in some measure there will be an active, working faith in Him, a love which labors on behalf of others and a certain determined and patient waiting on Him. Forget about the building, the advertising, the snazziness of the worship service or even the preaching. These three things are evident in a genuine Christian assembly.

In verse 4 he affirms something else which is very important: *God's choice* of the Thessalonian believers. Another word is His "election." Election means the selection process whereby God, in accordance with His overall plan for mankind, has lovingly chosen some people in history to become His adopted children. Here are some other NT references to this idea:

And not only this but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac; for though the twins were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose according to His choice might stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, it was said to her, "the older shall serve the younger." (Romans 9:10-12)

In the same way, then, there has also come to be at the present time, a remnant according to God's gracious choice. But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace. What then? That which Israel is seeking for, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen, obtained it, and the rest were hardened...from the standpoint of the gospel, they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. (Romans 11:5,7,28,29)

Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you... (2 Peter 1:10a)

There are many other references to the election of God in the Bible. It is a basic Bible teaching. But up to this point “chosenness” was a term the Jewish people applied exclusively to themselves; but Paul applies it *now* to a church which includes many Gentile converts¹—a new expansion of the word. And these Thessalonians “lived in a world influenced by skepticism and uncertainty about life’s meaning and the ability of gods to control evil and answer questions about human destiny.”² Paul spoke to those cultural beliefs with the doctrine of election.

But remember, this is something that Paul is referring to as an encouragement. He is a pastor at heart, and he wants to encourage these Thessalonian believers with solid truths that will sustain them. Neither Paul nor me nor you can understand all the details of this doctrine. He, himself, calls it (to some extent) a “mystery” (Romans 11:25). But the FACT of it is a blessing, and a basis by which to really bolster up the faith of his readers.

Notice also that attached to the statement of their *choice* is the fact that they are the *beloved of God*. Any doctrine of God’s sovereign election must be wed to the doctrine of His love. He loved His own. He has chosen His own out of love. And in the midst of hard times, or when a group of people decide to be Christians together within a hostile environment, this is a wonderful assurance. Just as Paul wrote to another church:

...He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him, in love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace which He freely bestowed on us in the beloved. (Ephesians 1:4-6)

Then Paul reminds them how they first heard the word of God and the news about Jesus Christ—the good news was not just talk; it was not just words. It was accompanied by *power* by which we take it to mean by a deep conviction (like in John 16:8). Paul knew that his message would change their lives as it had radically changed his.³ The apostles proved themselves to be men of integrity and consistency when they planted the church of Jesus Christ in Thessalonica. The church had a good beginning in terms of mentors and it have been given a solid foundation. The people took Paul and the others as models of how to walk with Jesus Christ by faith.

Leaders need to understand that other people depend on them. They need to be around their leaders and see how the Christian life works out, on a day to day basis. First getting the word into the life of a new believer may be difficult. For the Thessalonians, they had first heard it *in much tribulation*. We can really only guess at what that exactly meant, but it was not fun, I am sure, to receive hostility from their neighbors and family members and former friends who would turn on them and really make things hard to convert to Jesus Christ. Remember: Jesus never said it would be easy to become His

¹ Craig S. Keener, *The Bible Background Commentary*, p. 585, Intersity Press

² W.A. Elwell, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, article on election and predestination, p. 225, Intersity Press

³ Thomas L. Constable, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, p. 692, Victor Books

follower. But the truly hungry, the truly eager and in fact, the truly elect WILL receive the word whatever it costs them, and despite tribulation there will be *the joy of the Holy Spirit*.

I think that is a funny twist that we Christians experience: joy, in the midst of persecution. Only we can understand what that is. We may receive criticism or worse for our faith. But when it is purely because of our faith, God compensates us with His joy. What an amazing thing!

The effect was that they had a ministry without even planning to. They had joy, they were hungry for the apostles' teachings and they supported them and this effected *other* assemblies in the whole region (verse 7).

It is good for one church to be an example to other churches. This notion that some churches propagate that they do not need any other churches is not biblical. It is self-righteous. I need the church in Westport to teach me things. I need the church in New Bedford to give me a little better idea how to grow and walk with God. I need the church in Freetown to exemplify and model how better to get the word out. I need the church in Fall River to show me what it is to have joy when they are being criticized. We need to ever be exploring more and more how to form meaningful connections between the churches.

So, these believers were strong for their active work. They were strong because of their steadfastness and determination to keep hearing the word of God. They were strong because of the underlying truth of their identity as God's beloved, His own chosen people. They were strong because of their reputation and example to many other Christian believers throughout ancient Greece.

How are we strong, dear ones? How can we be affirmed in our faith in Christ? Well, we should probably ask someone outside our assembly for that assessment...

1. But I think we are strong for our willingness to accept people and our openness to enfold them into our body just as fast as they want to.
2. I think we are strong because of our theological balance and being even-keeled in doctrine.
3. I think we are strong because we are teachable.
4. I think we are strong because we are interested in the progress of the faith and the gospel in other churches, too.
5. I think we try our best to love each other and enjoy each other's company.
6. I think we are strong because of our willingness to be a blessing in the community.

Today is the fifteenth anniversary of my first Sunday as Pastor of Dartmouth Bible Church. It gives me real joy to be able to preach this message when I look back on where we have come.

1. Eighteen of you are still here from those thirty five adults who were here when we came.
2. We had a weekly income of \$519.

Now, fifteen years later our total number of people and our budget have quadrupled; and that is evidence of God's blessing and faithfulness but *more* so these other six things which I have mentioned are evidences that the Holy Spirit has worked and is working in our midst. We give Him honor for the work He is doing in us and among us and through us. He is the cause and He is the reason for why we do what we do.

Election means

**the selection process
whereby God**

**(in accordance with
His overall plan for
mankind)**

**has lovingly chosen
some people in
history to become His
adopted children**

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: Exposition of First Thessalonians Lesson 3
Scripture: I Thessalonians 1: 8-10
Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Date: June 7th, 1998

The Reputation of the Saints

Introduction Last week, I kidded you a little with a bogus letter that I “imagined” we might receive from Chuck Swindoll (president of Dallas Seminary, and one of the better known evangelical leaders today). I must confess to you that I wish more people knew what a great church we have here. I admit that it has always been my desire to “put this church on the map,” ever since that first Sunday that I preached in this pulpit (fifteen years ago today, when I preached from Romans 8). It’s not *completely* carnal for me (is it?) to want this for us—I mainly want us to be known for having a clear stand for the good news of what Jesus Christ accomplished and offers, and known also for being a good group of people—a beneficial group of people—to have around in this town. (And, I confess I have sort of had half-ambitions to be known as a pretty cool pastor, witty, keen-thinking, informed, Biblically poignant... I guess I must admit, that in a small way I have wished for us to become just a little bit famous.

I cannot say if that will ever happen but there was at least *one* church that was pretty famous in its own day: the assembly of Jesus-followers residing in the port city (like New Bedford) of Thessalonica. Last week we looked at some of the good things Paul saw in that assembly and how he affirmed those things. The Thessalonian assembly was a “flag ship” church for the new movement of Christians. Today I want us to look at some other BASIC things that Paul noticed in that church; things which are important for us to highlight and understand. I want to do this today by means of considering six verbs in verses 8, 9 and 10 of 1st Thessalonians 1.

Now, Thessalonica was not the “back woods.” In the ancient world it was a major commercial and political center. It was on the main “interstate” between Europe and Asia Minor and to the Middle East. It was a good place, we might say a *strategic* place for Christians to win for themselves a GOOD REPUTATION. Paul thought they had developed a great reputation. And it started with their clear adherence to the ***word of the Lord***.

I think it is hard for us to appreciate the full significance of this (unless we really try). First of all we have no idea (most of us) what it is like to live in a completely pagan culture. Second we have no idea what it is to live in a world with no Bibles. Perhaps some of our international students can understand the *weight* of what Paul is affirming in these Thessalonians.

They were *broadcasting a thunderous sound* like a trumpet blast. They were trumpeting the information about Christ, the logic of believing in Him, the call of the one true God to believe in Christ (not just that of *one* god among many) to a society that had not before heard His voice speaking directly to them. This is the only place in the New Testament where this Greek word occurs (ἐξήχηται, *exechetai*) and it is a wonderful affirmation of what the “First Christian Church of Thessalonica” was known for. They were “the Executai”, the *proclaimers* of what God wanted people in that region to hear. And the information was not related to astrology, to politics, to philosophy, to nutrition. It related to greater things, to epoch-making things. The news the Thessalonian believers were trumpeting related to the world’s one, true hope; to Jesus of Nazareth who was killed but who didn’t stay dead! God the Father (there’s only one of those) raised His Son (there’s only one of those) UP from being physically dead and now these Thessalonian disciples of this Jesus were going around telling people *everywhere* that HE is the deliverer from a great future BUMMER!

It isn’t that God had never before addressed pagan societies, only speaking to Israel. He had addressed Babylon, Ninevah, Egypt and many other cultures through the prophets of old. But now He was using these humble Thessalonian Christians to address ancient, first-century Greece. Seems incredible, doesn’t it? But that is what was going on spiritually and it is what is going on today, spiritually.

Now, how would you feel about being part of a “loud mouth” church? It would depend on what the church was being “loud mouthed” about? If, somehow, the community thinks of us as always talking about Jesus Christ; always trying to show how He is real, how He wants to come into people’s lives—ANY people’s lives—and change them for the better, that would be OK, wouldn’t it? If our message was, if loud, simple and straightforward and clearly just Biblical, that would be a good thing to be known for, wouldn’t it? Not that everyone around would accept it or approve of it but at least we would be thought of as sincere and saying things which make some sense. But if our message is “Come here, come here, come here” or if our agenda is not just proclamation but gets into *marketing* I’m not so sure we want to be “loud mouthed,” then...

Now, people still “turn.” They turn all the time, or rather, they make life-decisions, from one way of thinking to another. We have seen this.

- We have seen people turn from believing in the sanctity of marriage to then believing it doesn’t matter.
- We have seen people turn from believing that there is order and design in the universe to courting the idea that the universe is chaotic, orderless and without design, randomly driven and without meaningful beginning or hopeful end.
- We have seen people *decide* to abandon Christianity for a lifestyle which serves pleasure and self-absorption. None of this is new. Man is little different now than he was two thousand years ago.

But in addition to turning towards carnal things, we still see people do as the Thessalonian Christians did: turn *to God from idols*. We see people, seemingly out of

the blue, turn from being NOT-God-servers to become God-servers. And notice, please, that converts to Christ do not turn from something to a vacuum; they turn to **serve** God (more on what it means to serve God in a moment). It seems almost inexplicable that some people we see **turn** should do this: they are not on "skid row." They are not necessarily "down on their luck," but a change has occurred internally and now they **WANT** to personally, meaningfully serve God. And they seem to know that it is not just some unnamed "higher power." They know His name. They know that He is **living** and what a startling realization that is for someone when they first turn towards Him. They know that He is the one, **true God**, not in contrast so much to **false gods** but meaning that He is the one, **REAL GOD**. When people turn from priorities, life choices and pursuits that are idolatrous towards serving a real and living God they are amazed at Him. And they have learned that this one living and true God has a Son and that His Son is coming back. They want to see Him. They know God's Son is the fundamental *reason* why they do not have to fear the future, the conclusion of what is a downwardly spiraling society. They **wait for God's Son** who will deliver them from the age-ending and full wrath of God. The **wrath to come** is probably a reference to that great time of wrath which the Bible predicts will occur on the planet just before Christ returns, what we also refer to as the Great Tribulation. Christ delivers us from that time, ultimately because He took the righteous wrath of God upon Himself for us. But in a secondary sense, this may be a general reference to a pre-wrath rapture of the Church. In any event, while we're waiting for God's Son, we are filling up our lives by serving God; by busying themselves with:

Serving God involves a simple, four things: it involves a) active Gospel promotion; getting His message out to whomever in your circles will listen with interest; b) it involves waiting for Jesus, which we could, in turn, say involves three major thrusts: 1) vigorous help among His people; a more-than-occasional ministering *within* the Christian community—your church, let's say—with whatever resources you have at your disposal (your time, your spiritual gifts, your support); 2) a deep devotion to your own immediate family; holding it together, nurturing it, making it a happy "mini-church"; 3) it involves community good works; being a blessing out in the community in ways that will incline people to notice who is your Lord and joy, inclining them to glorify Jesus Christ. Now, my thinking is that those four aspects of serving God will pretty much bring you down to the end of the day or week. If a person does those things with most of their non-employment time, and they'll just be *too tired* to serve Satan or other evil activities.

I think that these are the kinds of things Paul was thinking of back in vs. 3 when he acknowledged the Thessalonians' **work of faith**. Working faith is religion which directly, deliberately and intentionally serves God with the newness of life with which He has given me. **in Christ!** The Thessalonians were so carried away with their new life in Christ that Paul didn't have to tell other people about them; the "other people" were telling him! And this gave him a great deal of joy. It had become their reputation as saints in Christ. They were not super-Christians, rewarded by the apostles with special standing. They were regular "Joes" (and "Josephines") who loved their new-found Savior so much they just couldn't *not* talk about Him. You know, being one of God's elect (vs. 4) means that it will be evident *after* conversion to Christ. The true elect of God will want *hard* to get the great news to more and more people. If their testimony is loud, it will be clearly understood and then, inevitably, it will be embraced by some, perhaps by many!

Thessalonian service to God

Turning from idols

to 

serve God Living and Real!

WHICH LOOKS LIKE THIS:

- ▶ active promotion of the Gospel
- ▶ waiting for Jesus to return
 - ➔ vigorous help among His people (the church)
 - ➔ deeply committed ministry to my own family
 - ➔ community good works

I Thessalonians 1: 8 - 10

For the word of the Lord has
1 **sounded forth** from you *Thessalonians*,
not only in Macedonia and Achaia,
but also in every place
your faith toward God has
2 **gone forth**, so that we have no
need to say anything.

For they, themselves *Macedonians & Achaians*,
report about us what kind of reception
we had with you, and how you
3,4 **turned** to God from idols to **serve**
a living and true God,

5 and to **wait** for His Son from heaven,
whom He raised from the dead, that is
6 Jesus, who **delivers** us from the
wrath to come.

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: Exposition of First Thessalonians Lesson 4
Scripture: I Thessalonians 2: 1-4
Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Date: June 14th, 1998

Pastors Worth Their Salt

Introduction Have you ever been of a mind to question a preacher's motives? It may have been a television preacher or a traveling speaker or even just a pastor of a local church...but have you ever had occasion where you wondered about *why* they were doing what they were doing? I have. Like any business manager or shop foreman or supervisor, pastors and church leaders are capable of being motivated by greed, lust for control (or worse) and desire for esteem. It may seem a little disillusioning to hear this but you need to know that church leaders are not immune from these bad motives. They wrestle with their motives just as you maybe sometimes do. We are conflicted by a battle between good and pure motives and lustful and self-centered motives. Some days Christ in me is stronger and other days the flesh is stronger. (By the way, I need your prayers that I will grow in my heart and head, in the deep places, so that my motives are always Spirit-filled and Christ honoring.)

Newsmakers like Jim Bakker or Father Porter dramatize the problem (and the media capitalizes on failures like theirs.) But more often in my own experience, and I believe more common, there are pastors with a more frequent motivation problem--they are power hungry. I have seen several over the years, who while dressed with plenty of Christian terminology and who are surrounded by an *atmosphere* of "spirituality" seem most determined, basically, to elevate themselves. Control of greater and greater numbers becomes the paramount passion for them, although few of these fully realize what they are driven by. In time they may become inaccessible, unapproachable and impatient with day to day shepherding of people. Yes, I have seen too many of these and I can well understand the distaste for this among more perceptive Christians...

The apostle Paul and his associates were charged with these very things. They had come and planted the Christian assembly at Thessalonica but they had not stayed there long. They left and soon their reputation was questioned. If in the passage before us today Paul seems defensive it is because this is, in fact, a defense of Paul's motives.

I think if I ever was invited to address a group of ministers-in-training in a seminary I would be tempted to say, "Gentlemen, get ready to be accused of wanting to make money off of people's spiritual needs. Get ready to be accused of playing favorites and kissing up to a few, selected people. Get ready to be accused of preaching a shallow, crowd-pleasing message so that people

will “feel moved” and put some extra cash in the offering box because you will be accused of all of these things.

In the first twelve verses of I Thess. 2 we have Paul’s defense of his behavior and of that of those of his closest associates. The criticism he had received was real. There were critics on the fringes—maybe even within—the Thessalonian assembly who were ready to trash Paul’s whole ministry. Dr. Ryrie’s headings for this chapter are well chosen. He suggests that in verses 1 to 4 we have Paul’s defense of his *UPRIGHTNESS*. In verses 5 to 9 Paul defends his conduct by means of his *INDUSTRY*. And in verses 10, 11 and 12 he defends himself by means of his *BLAMELESS BEHAVIOR*.

I would like you to expand the principles we read here beyond the official clergy. I believe that all church officers are responsible to live to a high standard, not just pastors. Each elder in a church; each deacon and deaconess; each trustee; the clerk, the treasurer, the financial secretary, the Sunday School teachers, the youth leaders, the nursery workers, the small group Bible study leaders should all be bound to a pledge to commit themselves to do as Paul says in 2:10. This is a good verse to memorize and for us to use as a simple guideline (and we shall look at it carefully soon):

You are witnesses and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers.

In vs. 1 can you see that Paul appeals to what these brothers for themselves, knew from personal experience with Paul: the apostles had not come *in vain*. They had not started this group in a shallow or empty way. They had not frittered their time away in aimless pursuits. No, they had begun with a definite aim and they had secured what they had aimed at.ⁱ

Ministry needs to have focus and goals. For us our goal for the past two years has been to do the best ministry as can here in this building while working hard at providing a bigger and better facility for those who will be in our church in the next twenty years! We have worked to strengthen our leadership and at the same time to develop an outward-looking emphasis. All of this depends on being strong in the Word of God and so we also continue to work at getting the Word into our lives.

In vs. 2 Paul reminisces that, hey—“We paid some dues and you can be proud of us. We suffered for this Gospel in Philippi.” “You would think we would be timid to use the same methodology here, but we did and boldly.” Heroic behavior wins loyalty, in combat, in athletics, in family life. And it should win respect and loyalty in the Gospel ministry, too. I would like you to pay particular attention to something Paul says here:

...we had boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition.

First, the confidence to bring up the Gospel must come directly from God. I believe He will give us that confidence if we are willing to risk seeing if He will give it to me. Second, the prime way of giving somebody the news is to *spea k it*. It just comes down to that. We talk and if it be so, they listen. Maybe in listening, they will hear. An expression Jesus loved to use was *He who has ears to hear, let him hear...* People do have to be willing to listen but we have to be willing to talk about it. Then, what are we speaking about? Our own agenda, our own church, our own opinion about the moral decline of the world? Here, the speaking has as its object *God's gospel, God's good news*. We don't need to be embarrassed about this. It is God's news and if someone doesn't like it or doesn't believe it, they are at issue with Him not us. So give it, dear ones, give it. And then, *they at least*, gave it *amid much opposition*. When we speak it to people, when we talk about Jesus Christ and what He offers to folks there may be those who actively oppose us. Could you deal with that? Sure you can. It's nothing new. People will always be around who don't agree; who say, "that's not what my church teaches," or, "that's not what my teacher says." And people will be around who may be willing to harass you if you talk about Jesus. So be it. Nothing new! God will give you the boldness to speak it if you and I are willing. After all, its not bad news. Its not something which results in damage if people hear about it! Its great news, and the apostles were excited to tell new people about it in Thessalonica, even as their skin was still sensitive with Philippian bruises.

In verse 3 Paul detaches himself completely from any misrepresentation of being part of some cult. There are many cults around now and there were many wandering representatives of cults in the first century, too. Paul's gospel was not cultish. It was not founded on *error, sexual drive or underhanded tactics*. It was theologically sound, morally pure and forthright and up front. Our Gospel presentations need to be accompanied by the same integrity.

Paul's motivations for ministry were founded on one basic principle (verse 4): *to please God who examines our hearts*. God is pleased when Christians speak about the Gospel. He probes and searches our motivations. In the power of the Holy Spirit He will develop within us *pure* motivations. But we engage ourselves in the process of continually trying to bring new people to Christ because GOD IS PLEASED that we should do so. If other men recognize our efforts or even if we ourselves, between ourselves affirm each other's efforts—this is not important. We do it because it pleases God, if we do it with pure motives.

It occurs to me that the cynical watchers of our movement hardly think any pastor or church leader is even *capable* of pure motives any more. I want us to be known for trying to be influential in people's lives with pure motives. This is something we, as leaders in the church, need to insist upon with one another. When improper motives sprout, we need to confess them and graciously and gently encourage each other to cast them aside. And I believe that much of the time our leaders here in DBC are motivated purely, in their service. And they need you, the body, to encourage them and to let them know you think they're doing a good job. Encouragement and affirmation in themselves are motivators to minister with purity. When you see someone doing something in the body with an

UPRIGHTNESS, tell them. Let them know that you appreciate their style and their commitment.

I entitled this message, "Pastors Worth Their Salt" but I've really been targeting more than pastors only. I am aiming at each of you who has any kind of leading or public ministry in or around this church. Our motives for doing ministry will come to light. And we need to be able to say, like Paul, that we have served Christ well and for His glory and not for our own. We need to be able to proud of each other and if someone is accused of improper motives (and this will happen) to come to each other's defense with good evidence at hand.

¹ Leon Morris, *1st and 2nd Thessalonians*, Tyndale NT Commentaries, IVP/Eerdmans, p. 51

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Exposition of First Thessalonians Lesson 5

Scripture: 1st Thessalonians 2: 5-8

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: June 28th, 1998

Godly Techniques for Connecting With One Another

Introduction Most people who are part of a church, *want* to enjoy good relationships with the other people in the church. Most Christians so value what Christ has done inside of them that they naturally find themselves looking for kinship and warmth within the community of the church—the place where *other* people have experienced Jesus Christ. Ideally, your best friends will be found within the church; if not this specific church, then at least within the “universal church.” Deep down, I believe most of us *want* to really connect with at least a small group of other believers. By “connect” I mean that I want some people whom I can trust to treat me well, to care about me and that I just simply will enjoy being with.

Today I want to make a straightforward jab at how we can apply Paul’s words to the Thessalonians from 1 Thess. 2:5-8. And there are five principles in these verses that we can directly apply, although as Paul originally penned these principles he was doing so as an *apostle* and in an apostolic context. But these things are timeless and are just as duplicable today as when he originally wrote them in 51 A.D.

Now, there are plenty of people doing ministry whose motives might be questionable. Some are in it for the money they might grab. Some are in it for power and influence and some are in it just to feel better about themselves. If someone wants to, and if he is eloquent and slick enough, anyone can start his own church; and in some cases it may grow to a significant size. I have seen this in a number of places where gullible or emotionally needy people *flock* to a church leader who makes them feel good. And once his church gets to a certain “critical mass” it starts to feed its own growth and it can really take off. But if you look at the founding leader’s heart it is blackened with carnal motivations. This is a dark place to start with today, but it is the very sort of thing that Paul *emphatically* and deliberately shunned. He was aware of the potential for self-promotion. It is a powerful “narcotic!”

But the apostle tells the Thessalonians that not only have *they* seen his integrity but that *God is witness* (vs. 5c). And the first principle, or we might say “technique” for connecting with people in a godly way is a compilation of things that we read in vss. 5&6. The technique (1) is to SHUN WRONG MOTIVATIONS.

First, he reminds them that in the short while he was with them he *never came with flattering speech*, which means speaking to people with deception by slick eloquence. The guy says one thing which sounds sort of right but is really meant to trip up the listener. Some preachers in his day were trying to cajole people into following them, even as they made them feel good. Folks are little different today. They do not think through what they are hearing; if it makes them feel good and if it *seems* right, they'll buy it. Just consider how many—almost countless—cults are winning more and more new members because they preach morality and clean living. Paul emphatically rejected this.

Also under "Shun Wrong Motives" (if you want to connect with people in a godly way), he says they didn't court greed in their own hearts and try to cover it up. Others were driven by ambition to have more but Paul defends his ministry and those of his associates, Silas and Timothy, by saying "you and God both know that we were not motivated by that." I think this is still with us today when certain Bible teachers fancy themselves *apostles of Christ*. The word simply means, "a sent one" or "a messenger." But in the technical sense today a preacher—it doesn't matter how good he is—is NOT an apostle. We do not have apostles today in the same sense as they were here in the first century. Now, while he was in Thessalonica Paul had, more than once, received financial support from the Philippian assembly (whom he had left in order to go to Thessalonica). We read in Philippians 4:10-16:

But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity. 11 Not that I speak from want; for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. 12 I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. 13 I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. 14 Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in my affliction. 15 And you yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; 16 for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs.¹

The key for Paul would be in what he says in Phil. 4:11 (above). *Want* is not the thing that motivates him, at least personal "want." All of this raises the question of AMBITION in ministry. How ambitious should we be in building our church? The answer is, if we are motivated by the need and the opportunity—we should have endless ambition to build this ministry. There should never be a point when we say to ourselves, "we've reached enough people with the Gospel now..." But if we're ambitious because we (or I) want to feel significant, want to build our own little power-center, then we are being motivated by a *fleshy* ambition.

¹The New American Standard Bible, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1977.

Also under “shunning wrong motives” Paul reminds them (vs. 6) and reaffirms that he and his guys ***did not seek glory from men***. Even though, because they were apostles, they were deserving of a major chunk of honor! But they did not demand it nor did they expect it. They didn’t demand the best parking place. They didn’t insist that people call them certain titles. They didn’t insulate themselves from the lesser or more humbly endowed people in the body (although Luke told us that among the members of this new Thessalonian assembly were ***a number of the leading women, Acts 17:4c***). No, they didn’t act like hot-shots. In fact, they went out of their way to play *down* their status.

This week I had the pleasure of “brokering” a little lunch-time meeting between what I think are two of the most ambition-less men I know. At the BGC Annual Conference in CT., I made introductions of Pastor Ken Harman and our District Executive Minister, Paul Hubley. I really enjoyed the time, from a personal standpoint, because it was delightful to sit between two godly men, discussing important things (not just small talk) and yet each was completely full of humility and kindness. It was a treat for me to watch this. (I wish I were this mature and free of ambition!)

Now, the second principle for connecting with people in a godly way is more positive. Instead of being egotistical, Paul tells the Thessalonians that his approach had been with ***gentleness (vs. 7)***. There is an interesting technical problem here. This might also translated, ***we proved to be gentle among you OR we proved to be babies among you***, the difference between two sets of manuscripts being that one has the word *epioi*, gentle and the other set has the word *nepioi*, babies. Either way, the idea is the same. The apostles enjoyed their closest, most loving and sweet-spirited feelings for these Christians. Over the next thirteen or so years before Paul’s death, I am sure he would think back on this city and these believers with much fondness. He loved them. He had an unusual feeling of closeness to them.

For us, if we want to be close to each other we must be gentle with one another. If leaders want to be loved by those whom they lead they must be gentle with them. It doesn’t mean that we sugar-coat our speech or deny that there are things we need to work on. But it means that we go out of our way to be *careful* with one another. It really is true that we have fragile egos, delicate feelings and tender consciences. We can swagger around with each other. Or, we can be lovingly careful and deferential with one another. If you want to connect with people, a gentle spirit will do you well.

Attached to this is a third technique for helping the feeling of connectedness between us. It is to have ***tender care for one another***. Nobody understands this better than a *nurse* which is actually the word here (you will notice that the word *mother* is in italics, meaning it, itself, is not in the original Greek). The word is *nurse* and the picture of care that had been given by the apostles was of a nurse, caring for her own children. ***Tender care*** is actually ***to warm*** and it’s used of a mother bird. The apostles cherished the Thessalonian converts. They were not just “numbers.” They were real names with real faces. They were very important to Paul. This is so hard to picture because few churches seem to achieve this feeling between elders, deacons and the body. We get distracted by many things, when all we’re really shooting for is to connect and care for one

another. Sometimes I wonder if really we NEED seminaries. If good pastors and elders would simply model and duplicate *tender care* coupled with sound, biblical education they body would be all set!

A fourth principle is to have *affection for one another* (verse 8). Paul really loved these believers, as we have said. He felt a *yearning* and a great sense of good will for them. In the truest sense, he was a “pastor,” a shepherd. No one had to pay him to spend time with these people. No one had to twist his arm to be with them. He loved them and there was nothing he would rather do. When you FEEL that way about a group of people, and when you know they feel that way about you—you are connected!

Last, because they had such affection for these Thessalonian Christians, they did more than just punch the “time clock” for ministry. They *imparted their very lives to them*. They didn’t just bring a message; they brought their very *selves* to these Greek people. What a thing! They poured their lives into these people for the short time they were there in Thessalonica. In so doing, they grew very connected to them.

If when you come here, you feel like someone really cares about you—like someone thinks about you even when you’re not here—you will feel connected. If when you come here, you experience more than just doctrinal lectures and you experience a sense of care and delight that YOU’RE HERE TODAY, you will feel connected. I think this is what most of us want. It’s why when you’re *not* here when we’re here I feel a small bit hollow. I look forward to being with the saints. I look forward to seeing other people too but not like the saints. I care somewhat about other people too, but not like the saints.

These are things we need to ponder and develop. We need to guard against fleshly motivations and call each other on them. And we need to replace those with good care for one another, a gentle style, a tenderness and good listening, and a sense of pouring our lives into each other. When we’re doing that, our size is less important. Our success at one thing or another is secondary and we won’t focus on those things. If I know I’m missed when I’m not here and I’m enjoyed when I AM here, I will feel a wonderful connection to my brothers and sisters in Christ. And there’s nothing else like it on the planet! May the Lord make it so among us!

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: Exposition of First Thessalonians Lesson 6
Scripture: 1st Thessalonians 2: 9-20
Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Date: July 5th, 1998

Paul's Agenda

Introduction In a conversation with a friend of mine this week, I was speaking about one of our other evangelical churches in this area. I said to this brother "Such and such a church has virtually nothing in terms of possessions; they only have their "Christianity", their "being and meeting together" and their particular ministries). That is what this section of 1st Thessalonians feels like to me. As Paul continues to review how he, himself, had behaved with them and what he thought of them, it just seems like pure Christianity. The Thessalonian assembly, of course, possessed no buildings. They had no compensation package (at least insofar as the apostles were concerned). They owned no sound systems, no land, no pews. At the end of our section today, Paul said to them, *you are our glory and joy*. And when you get right down to it, this is all a church really is. It is a group of people who exist to bring glory and joy to God and to each other. I think this is startling because we can get confused and think we are something *more* than that. We can start to think (if we're not careful) that we are, for instance, a political block. Or, for a church that has been in a certain place—like at a certain address for a long time—that they are an institution and an important part of the Town Center. If we're not careful, we can drift into thinking that the building and its upkeep are the important thing. When that happens it represents a complete meltdown from what a church *really* is. A church is a group of people. That is all it is. And *which* specific groups of Christian people start up in a town, preaching the Gospel, seeking the Kingdom, at any particular time—well, those groups can "happen" overnight.

For instance in our little town a new fundamentalist church began eighteen months ago (as I understand it) on the independently concluded premise that there was no gospel witness in this town. Another one got "up and running" eight years ago on the premise that there was no "power evangelism" witness for the gospel in this town (one with "groovy music" anyway). Another one started up about three years ago because it occurred to a handful of Christians that in Dartmouth there is no Portuguese Pentecostal witness for the gospel. Another one started two years ago because they found themselves kicked out of an existing church. Little groups of Christians can "coagulate" and start up a new church at any time, and they do!

This assembly in Thessalonica had started up and their "genesis" had been greatly enhanced by the integrity of the apostles who started it. Paul and Silas and Timothy had

taken great pains to get it started well and with a good reputation. This is what we're reading in 1st Thess.2:9-12. Paul had even foregone any financial remuneration and worked enough hours at his trade (tent-makers, Acts 18:3) so that his being among them would not be any kind of a burden to them. Now, as a single man and not paying huge tax rates, not paying insurance premiums, not paying automobile costs and so forth I think what he needed was limited. But he made it a point in this church-planting situation to take care of his own needs. He did not take anything *from* the people that he was discipling but he gave TO them ***devotedness, uprightness and blamelessness*** (vs. 10). He also gave to them a ***fatherly oversight*** (vs. 11).

Now, Dads do not do what they do with their kids because they're being paid for it. They do it because they care greatly for their kids and they want their kids to grow up and be GOOD kids. Paul worked with the Thessalonian believers with the same kind of attitude.

His agenda was to provide anything he could to help them to ***walk in a manner worthy of the God*** who called them. He ***exhorted*** them—he gave strong appeals. He ***encouraged*** them which means to give them soothing comfort. He ***implored*** or urged them to action by the Holy Spirit's convicting power. You might call Him "pushy." People in our society don't like a whole lot of "imploring" but sometimes that's what a good leader needs to provide. And if the people trust the leader's motivations, they will be more open to his urgings.

By the way, there's that word ***called*** again. The Thessalonian believers had not called themselves into the faith. They had BEEN CALLED. God is the one who issues the call upon the heart. He awakens. He gets a person's attention. He notifies a person, in his heart, of the good news of Jesus Christ. It isn't Billy Graham or you or me who call people to salvation. We maybe ***announce*** the news to people; but God always has been and continues to be the one who ***calls*** them. He is the one who called you and me!

Now, in verses 13 to 20 I just want you to scan those verses, looking for "basic Christianity." What was Paul's basic agenda with these people. He has emphatically stated that his motives were not carnal, self-serving. Well, what *were* they? What were his methods and his activities? What was his "to-do" list there in Thessalonica?

First (vs. 13) the apostles just gave them ***the word of God's message...able to perform its work in*** [those] ***who believe***. The primary job was to tell these people what God wanted them to know. Now, with new Christians—and there were many in this assembly—there's a lot of information they had not known but that they needed to know. Jewish converts would have known who God is and something of His law. But you will remember from Acts 17:4 that in this church there had been added ***a great multitude of God-fearing Greeks***. We can't be sure how much they did or didn't know of ***God's message*** but I'm sure that Paul and Silas had their hands full with simple teaching tasks.

Second, these Christians evidently learned from the apostles what it is to suffer for Christ. They had been "mentored" in this by the example of the Judean Christians and whether they heard about them from these apostles or not we cannot be sure. But we *can*

be sure that Paul and Silas told them stories about what James and the Judean brethren had endured. The Thessalonian believers said, "We want to have that kind of nobility and faithfulness to Jesus Christ." What great people these were!

Notice in vs. 16 that salvation comes through the instrument of the spoken word. It sounds like what Paul wrote to the Romans (10:17), *...faith comes from hearing and hearing from the word of Christ*. Well, Empire-wide it seems, there was a campaign by Jewish people to stomp out what *they* obviously considered to be a cult because they tried to get the apostles to shut up! What Paul says about this is scary: *...they always fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to the utmost (vs. 16 b)*.

God will only allow an individual or a group of individuals to accumulate so much sin, and then He will judge. He does not judge before this **limit**, which He alone knows, has been reached (cf. Gen. 15:16). The Thessalonians' persecutors were hastening God's judgment on themselves by their actions.¹

Again, the church—you, me, spiritual leaders—we are an invisible organization, really. We are connected by somewhat man-made things like buildings, church membership, denominations, etc. But when we get down to it, the spiritual connections are what is permanent. Sometimes *Satan thwarts* God's people, especially the ones who are trying to do a great work for God. We can't see that with our eyes but it is going on all the time.

The true value of the church is also invisible. It is small congregations—new congregations which have been planted by missionaries—who are reason for excitement. Paul calls the Thessalonian assembly the apostles' *hope, joy, crown of exultation*, and reward when these people will be present with Jesus *at His coming*. Here, by the way, we get our first mention in this letter of something of which he will speak more in chapter 4: the second coming of Christ. There will be Thessalonian believers—tagged as Pauline converts—at the second coming.

Will there be converts there with your "tag" on them? THAT will be cause for joy and exultation for you!

✓ The church exists for one reason: ^{TO} ~~the~~ propagate divine glory and joy; to propagate it TO God and to propagate it within the church. When a new person comes to faith in Christ THAT is the biggest news of the year! THAT should be paragraph one, page one in our Annual Report, because that is the most significant thing that happens in, through and because of the Church. Whether we have this building or that; this worship service or that one; this leader or that one—the reason we are here and the main part of Paul's agenda is to *proclaim the gospel of God (vs. 9)*. May God help us to never lose sight of that. May He help us to get or remain excited about that!!!

¹ Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc.) 1983, 1985.

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: Exposition of First Thessalonians Lesson 7
Scripture: 1st Thessalonians 3: 1-10
Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Date: July 19th, 1998

Who Decides Things? Me, or God? (Issues of Divine Sovereignty & Human Responsibility)

Introduction One of the biggest decisions Renée and I ever faced was the question of where to attend seminary and therefore to which city to move. With so many good seminaries it was a challenging decision and we had to seek the Lord to lead us. I had applied to a great seminary in Philadelphia and made two visits to that campus. I also made visits to seminaries in St. Louis, Chicago and Washington D.C. Philadelphia was where I originally wanted to go. But as they made acceptance difficult (requiring undergraduate work in philosophy; or remedial course work in that discipline) I applied to Dallas Seminary instead. DTS accepted my application and so in August of 1979, off Renée and I went to Texas! I am simplifying the story but we sensed that DTS was where the Lord wanted us to go. While we made certain decisions about it, underlying it all was the guidance and direction of the Lord. That is what I want to talk about today as we look at this next section of First Thessalonians.

Now, this matter of *decision-making* is not really the exegetical point of the verses in front of us (I Thessalonians 3:1ff). Let's look quickly at what Paul is *actually* saying. We're in a section of this letter where he is talking about his concern for this flock. He wanted to return to them but instead he sent Timothy as his agent and then when Timothy returned he received Timothy's report about how they were. He had been very concerned about them and he was overjoyed to hear the good news (*evangelisamenou*, εὐαγγελισαμένου¹). So, he's staying put—they're over there in Thessalonica and they're worrying about him and he's back in Athens, worrying about them. There is deep, heartfelt feelings embedded in these verses, the likes of which maybe we might find hard to relate to. Rarely do we feel this deeply about other Christians. But we also learn some important truths in this passage about suffering and affliction. They seem to be part of the package for those Christians who really take a public stand for Jesus Christ. And to some extent, they are to be expected.

¹Aland, Kurt, Black, Matthew, Martini, Carlo M., Metzger, Bruce M., and Wikgren, Allen, *The Greek New Testament*, (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart) 1983.

But what I want to focus on today is the theme of wrestling with divine sovereignty and human responsibility in decision-making, which I think is *illustrated* by this passage. We pray as if God was the one responsible to act in our lives, to open this door and to close that door (although generally we don't seem to *ask for* closed doors...) And we then make decisions ourselves. Let me show you how I'm seeing this "dichotomy" in the passage in front of us:

- ◆ In 3:1 we read ***we thought it best*** which is how we think about decision-making too. We look at the alternatives and we decide which one is best.
- ◆ In 3:2 we read ***we sent Timothy*** which was the specific decision they made.
- ◆ Paul calls Timothy ***God's fellow-worker*** in the spreading of the news about Christ. You see, God is a participant in the work too. He is involved.
- ◆ In 3:3,4 Paul said ***we have been destined*** for certain afflictions in the work, and sure enough ***it came to pass*** (vs. 4c). There is a side to our ministry that has been sovereignly pre-ordained, no matter what decisions we make. There is no better illustration of this than the life of Jonah!
- ◆ Then, back on the human side, we have Paul's very human words ***when I could endure it no longer, I also sent*** to find out about your faith. He had prayed; he was, by faith, waiting on God to answer his prayers for the Thessalonians. But a moment came when he could "endure it no longer" and so he took action.
- ◆ There's another player in the game too: ***the tempter might have tempted you*** (vs. 5). Satan is alive and well and always seeking to get his slimy mitts into the lives of new Christians and new Christian church-plants.
- ◆ Sometimes Satan gets a foothold and ruins a work of ministry and then, again from a human standpoint, ***the labor [is] in vain*** (vs. 5c). God isn't defeated by our failures or by setbacks in the ministry nor is He even intimidated. But He does allow "wasted effort" sometimes—or what appears to be so—as He also allows ***afflictions***.

The rest of these observations illustrate the human part in decision-making...

- ◆ Timothy came back from Thessalonica and brought "good news" (vs. 6a). Paul anxiously awaited the news Timothy would bring. I can relate to this, in a little way. Each day my trip to the mailbox brings a little excitement: I wonder will the mailman bring me a letter of good news or a letter of bad news (I'm thinking about all the mail that has come relating to the new building). *We pray!* But we're also human and we wait for the news. (I can imagine) Paul saw Timothy coming up the street from the boat and he grabs him and says, "Well???"
- ◆ There was a deep and *mutual* longing between Paul and those Thessalonian believers: ***longing to see us just as we long to see you*** (vs. 6c). That tempered Paul's decision making. Nowhere to the *Galatians* do we read these kinds of feelings. He wrote no letter (that we know of; unless he was the author to the Hebrews) to the original Jewish believers back in Judea expressing these kinds of feelings. No, Paul's particular feelings for the *Thessalonian* believers dispatched Timothy and ate up a piece of Timothy's life for a while. Paul made the decision to send Timothy back.
- ◆ The decision that he made brought forth a fruit of ***comfort*** (vs. 7) for his heart as he heard that, yes, they are persevering in their faith and they have a lot of love too!
- ◆ And the Thessalonians decisions to hold fast to Christ had an affect on Paul, as he says in verse 8. We like to think that we each exist in a vacuum—private. But how your faith is doing, affects me; and it affects other people. The decisions you make can bring

either joy or sorrow to other people. Yes, God is sovereign but our decision-making has effects on each other.

- ◆ Finally, in verse 10 we read that part of the apostle's *decision* was to decide to earnestly pray that God would grant him a request. Notice that in this verse, at least, it is a personal request: that he would be allowed to see them again. Asking God for something like this is not in violation of the sovereignty of God. We can ask God to let our paths cross again with believers who have brought us particular joy. It is human *and* it is spiritual!

Now, let me give you some points to apply from these observations on the text:

1. As we said, it's OK to want something from God. It needs to be a godly desire but if the thing you want, you want out of purity, it's OK to want it and to ask God for it. This is basic, and yet sometimes I hear believers say, "I never ask God for anything for myself," as if that is some super-spiritual way to be. No, ask God for your heart's desire and ask Him again. And then wait on Him.
2. Make decisions. Being passive and indecisive is not spiritual at all. A lot of progress is probably never accomplished because Christians sit and wait for the sky to fall! No, make the decision, doing so prayerfully.
3. Understand predestination. (Oh yeah, sure!) Well, really I mean *recognize* and *accept* that there is an overall plan for your life and that God is the designer of the plan and the superintendent of it. Predestination is not just a thing applied to who becomes a believer and who does not. It also applies to the Christian life.
4. Submit to results. Again, joyful acceptance of how things turn out is a sign of spiritual maturity and joyful acceptance is *healthy*. The alternative (agitated rejection of the results) brings anger, doubt and a temptation to despair, when you can't figure everything out! So, here's what you do: you pray, you think, you weigh the costs of a decision; then you act and *make* the decision (praying even as you're *making* it); and then you wait and then you SEE the results of the decision you made and then you submit to the results. This is not the same thing as a fatalistic or passive rolling over... But when you've done all you can, then you have to realize someone bigger than you is in control.
5. See past yourself and your own limited circumstances. Sometimes God answers prayers in light of the bigger picture than just your wants for today! Sometimes He grants those wants; sometimes there is something more important at stake than just your wants for right now.

I do not fully understand all the ins and outs of Spirit-filled decision making and how it fits in with the plans of a sovereign God. But I know that He loves us; I love the first of the Four Spiritual Laws, "God loves you and offers a wonderful plan for your life." And I challenge you to be decisive, prayerful and full of faith as you resign yourselves to results. May He increase our faith in Him as we learn to walk with Jesus Christ!

3:1 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 man may 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 should 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, 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?¹

¹The New American Standard Bible, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1977.

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: Exposition of First Thessalonians Lesson 8
Scripture: 1st Thessalonians 3: 11-13
Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Date: July 26th, 1998

Being Around People Who Love, Unconditionally

Introduction I am at that place in life—called variously, the “forties”, mid-life, Cloud Nine—when a person gets all reflective. Typically (I read) when a man gets to this place he finds himself asking a lot of “what’s it all mean?” type-questions. He looks at his own life and he asks, “have I accomplished anything?” He looks at those around him and if he is a Christian, at his church, and asks, “For all our activity and heat-that-we-generate, are we making any difference in this world?” I want you to know that I am told that this is a predictable past-time for a guy in his forties...

But regardless of it being predictable that I may be brooding over philosophical questions like these, it IS a good thing to ask, “what really means something in this life?” It is *healthy*, every once in a while, to ask, “what’s really important?” In the prayer before us today in 1st Thess.3:11-13 that question is answered. In these three verses Paul lays out nothing short of the MEANING OF LIFE! Here’s what we are seeking in this life: to end up with our...

hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints (verse 13).

Now, that is no small order! Wanting “holiness before God” is not something unique to our religion. How you GET it, is unique to Christianity. But *wanting* it, is not.

Have you heard about that group of young people in Iran called the *basij*? These are Iranian young men who volunteer for a radical kind of enforcement role in their country. During Iran’s war with Iraq, *basij* would go ahead of the regular army to draw enemy fire and clear the field of mines. It is a cult of martyrdom with the belief that death for the cause results in an immediate entrance to heaven. Today, *basij* police the morals of the country and seek to force absolute adherence to the concepts of holiness dictated by the fundamentalist Shi’ite Muslim brand of Islam.

There are many wrong concepts in the wide world of how to become holy before a holy God. For Christians it is through faith alone in the shed blood of God's Son. As we come to believe in Jesus; as we come to trust in Him and seek Him by faith, we become clothed in *His* righteousness. We are given the status of His holiness. That's what happens when a person becomes a Christian. They receive, as a gift, the perfection which He lived so perfectly.

Now, these verses are a prayer. Paul asks God for three things:

1. That he may be allowed and enabled to return to Thessalonica. According to Acts 19:21, 20:1, 1st Cor. 16:5, 2nd Cor. 2:13 he was able to do just that, something like five years later.
2. That *they* would become more and more loving, although they already *were* loving! I like the way Petersen's *The Message* puts this: *And may the Master pour on the love so that it fills your lives and splashes over on everyone around you...*
3. That *they* would be given such a sense of spiritual strength that it would ground them in a true holiness, INSIDE, in their hearts—to such a degree that God would approve them at the second coming of Christ.

There is a necessary connection between verse 12 and verse 13. "An overflow of love is the only route to holy conduct in which no fault can be found."¹ Love has got to become the primary feature of God's people. This is how we can make a real impact and this is the real purpose of life—these things we're reading right here in 1st Thessalonians. If you and I wear ourselves out, and give ourselves to the BIG TASK of becoming a loving church body, exploring more and more the meaning of practicing the grace of God, of sacrificing for one another, of giving to one another even when it doesn't particularly feel good, we will find ourselves at second coming time in good shape.

Notice that in verse 13 the second coming of Christ is stated and assumed. All Christians will be present in some way at that event. I don't know the logistics or the physics of it, but as we are accompanying Him *back* to this planet (those of us who have died, that is), there will be an ongoing review and evaluation of our works *while* we were here. I don't understand it—it's going to be all I can do just to stay on a horse—but it will be marvelous, excellent, powerful, wonderful, exciting, thrilling, humbling and (make no mistake about it) so very REAL that nothing else will matter. The little sacrifices we made in this life for Him will, I am sure, seem worthless to us. But if we build up a history of love here—REAL love—then, on that day it will be remembered and God the Father Himself will acknowledge it.

Dear ones, I think that despite all our frailties, despite struggles with sins and temptations, we get past those if, the rest of the time, we are working hard on developing love. Good works do not *pay for* bad works or sin. Only Jesus can do that. But works of love and decisions of love go a long way toward *burning out* selfishness and sin. God does not miss our efforts to become more like Christ, to become more holy and to experience the guiltless state of *blamelessness*. Paul prayed for this for the Thessalonian believers. It was an achievable prayer request.

Now for us, what's it like to be around people who practice unconditional love? If a church or a fellowship work at this priority, what does it look like from one week to the next?

Well, it looks like commitment. It looks like going out of one's way to GIVE to a needy friend in the church or to someone outside the church, too (*and for all men vs. 12*). We are strong in this country, in the evangelical church, in theology. We are strong in other ways too—organization, worship techniques and so forth. But where we need to become stronger is in love. For all the conferences and seminars and celebrations that are available to us, I have yet to see a “promo” for a LOVE Conference, where the goal is to discuss, pray for and establish new ways to love.

Paul prayed for this and we need to pray for it too. Conditional love is easy to practice. When we say, “We will love you IF you do this or that...,” the world can do that, can't they?

We need to practice love and sacrifice in our marriages and with our children.

We need to accept and welcome and warmly enfold new people when they come to our church.

We need to refuse complacency when we *do* see love in our church and seek to always go the next step...

We need to become a missionary church, which loves to participate in the spread of the Gospel, because we love what the Gospel does for people around the world.

We need to forgive each other when we offend or sin against each other.

We need to never give up on each other in our marriages.

We need to help strangers out when they ask for help.

We need to assist the truly helpless.

We need to give time in prayer for one another.

We need to see love cross between the generations in our church.

We need to replace suspicion and distrust with love.

We need to replace lust with love.

We need to replace self-absorption with love.

If we can achieve a good level of *love* as a church, and doggedly insist on this being what is a real priority for us, we will be ready for the second coming of Jesus Christ. His coming may be soon. Nothing can be more important than getting ready for it...

¹ Robert L. Thomas, *1st Thessalonians* in the Expositor's Bible Commentary, Zondervan, 1978.

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: Exposition of First Thessalonians Lesson 9
Scripture: 1st Thessalonians 4: 1
Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Date: August 9th , 1998

Living For Jesus in Ancient Thessalonica

Introduction The easy part of Christianity is the talking part. The hard part is the doing part. I notice that talking about doctrine and theology is something a lot of Christians love to do. This is to be expected because when a person comes to believe in Jesus Christ as his (or her) personal Savior, that new relationship affects the intellect in a big way. Christ is fascinating and starting to mine in that deep shaft of truth that God has given us in the Bible is a natural occupation for Christians. But just knowing stuff is not the end goal of Christianity. The end goal is to learn how to *please God*. Doctrine, without a change in lifestyle, is pretty much a waste of time (so says the New Testament). No, the reason so many of the N.T. letters start out with a doctrinal section and then finish with a practical (or “experimental”) section is because the doctrine is true! And since the doctrine is true, consequences *follow* for the way we live. Believers in Jesus in ancient Thessalonica faced a great challenge to *live* the way Paul had taught them, despite an environment and a city-culture which fully contradicted that life. In no issue was this more of a challenge than in the area of sexuality. The Thessalonian Christians lived in a culture where people did not see fornication as sinful in any way but as a normal part of life. Greek religion provided no disincentive whatsoever for people (especially men) just “cruising” and finding sex whenever and wherever they could.

We might wish that we lived in a purer society... and until just a few years ago, we probably did. But today our culture is very rapidly beginning to rival that of Rome and Greece. So, Paul may as well be writing to US because we are now facing, essentially, the same conditions as were his original readers of this letter in Thessalonica.

4:1,2 So now Paul turns toward some practical matters as we see his appeal in verses 1 and 2. He *requests* and *exhorts* them to do certain things. This is all a minister can do. He cannot compel a Christian to decide to live for Christ. He cannot bribe him or intimidate him. Laying a guilt-trip on a person only embitters that person. No, he can *request* and maybe a little more aggressively, he can *exhort*. If I request something of you, in terms of your Christian growth, I wish you would consider it. If I exhort you to do something of a spiritual nature, you had *better* consider it. My authority does not come from within me; it comes from the Word of God. For instance, we are told in the Scripture

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that prayer is an important thing. If I exhort you to pray more, that would be a thing plainly supported by the Word. You gain nothing by making my exhorting you the issue. It is not between you and me but between you and God (if it's something of which He has already spoken). Paul fortifies his exhortation in the context of being *in the Lord Jesus*. You can expect certain things of me because you are WITH ME *in the Lord Jesus*. I can expect certain things of you because you are WITH ME *in the Lord Jesus*. You don't GET into the Lord Jesus by being a good person or by being a religious person or by being the child of a religious person or by being baptized, etc. You only get IN to the Lord Jesus by personally, deliberately entrusting *yourself* to Him and to the cross which He bore. When you have really done that, then, along with everyone else who has done that, you are together with them *in the Lord Jesus* and you can have certain expectations of your brethren. I think this runs counter to this culture in which we live because we so highly prize personal liberty. And, I do believe in personal liberty but not when it is elevated above the importance of being jointly *in the Lord Jesus!* Paul appeals to his friends, his brethren in Christ, because he is spiritually joined to them. Nowhere does he ask the regular citizenry or the Jews to follow his model for living. He does not expect it of those people. But since *pleasing God* is the major preoccupation (or should be) of all who are *in the Lord Jesus* he can ask them to *excel still more*.

By the way, if you ever wondered where Microsoft got the name for their spreadsheet program, it comes from right here: Excel!... (just kidding) ☺

We have in vs. 1 a neat kind of affirmation. You know what *affirmation* is, right? It's getting told that you're doing a good job. It is acknowledgment of something you're doing right. I like affirmation and I try to give it. It is a biblical thing for Christians to do for each other, and it should especially come from pastors and elders and other leaders. Well, here is an interesting variety. Paul says to these believers that they're already doing what they're supposed to do (in how they *walk and please God*). But he asks them to consider how to do it a lot more. It is easy to become a little complacent in the Christian life; to think to ourselves, "Well, I know some Bible now. I do some praying. I go to church once in a while. I give some money to the church; maybe even a couple of bucks to a missionary once in a while. I've got my doctrine and my theological understanding down pretty well. I feel the Lord's presence a little in my life some days. I'm pretty OK."

All of that is good. If you're NOT to that place, then let's GET TO that place. But once you're there it is easy to sit back and just coast. But the Word of God always prods us on to bigger and better things. The Spirit wants us to *excel still more*. No matter how mature you may think you have become in your faith and in your walk with the Lord Jesus, He's got more for you. I don't think He will take you to step K until you're lived at step D and then E,F,G,H and I. But let's not be content with staying at step C (whatever that is).

7 I believe one of our biggest problems in the Christian life is boredom. When Christian living just becomes *church* living; when your faith becomes more routine and predictable habit than stretching and being stretched by the Holy Spirit to trust Him for

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(Message to be continued next week...)

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Exposition of First Thessalonians Lesson 10

Scripture: 1st Thessalonians 4: 2ff

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: August 16th, 1998

Pleasing God in Ancient Thessalonica

Introduction There's a lot of talk these days about redefining morality. Specifically, we are seeing—at break-neck speed, these days—a casting off of traditional boundaries and a casting off of the *underpinnings* of those traditional boundaries. (Indeed, even this very week we will hear a publicly showcased and highly visible redefinition of what the term “sex” means.) It used to be that in public schools we could expect a certain amount of moral direction. It used to be that in government we could expect a certain amount of dependable moral direction. It used to be that in the military we could expect certain standards to be promoted and even insisted upon. It used to be that only in entertainment was immorality expected. Things have changed. At least, the *environment* has changed. It has changed from what it was a hundred years ago but it has NOT changed from what it was two thousand years ago in ancient Greece. There, morality was defined in much the way it will be here in a very short time. Specifically, sexual morality was almost nonexistent; until Christianity came along. Along with the great news about Jesus Christ came the news that God was interested in people, at least HIS people (people who seek Him and follow Him), living a certain, well-defined way. The ways that God wanted God seekers to live may have run counter to the mainstream of Thessalonian society but God wanted His people to live a certain way *anyway*. And in no area, on no platform was that more evident than in sexual things. But we must ask, what's the big deal with sex among Christians any way? Why are we so hung up on preaching a certain morality on this subject? We are told that we seem *uptight* about it. We are told that we are *phobic* and a little unbalanced, mentally, about it. We are told that we are *ill-informed* about it and sadly backwards. Why should we have a problem if a man (or woman) wants to arrange a sexual liaison with someone other than his (or her) spouse? What's the problem if a woman decides that she would rather explore and seek sexual intimacy with another woman rather than with a man? If a guy wants to cruise around on the internet and find erotic pictures or even *subscribe* to them and then look at them and do whatever “comes naturally,” why should we have a problem with that? Why should we judge it “wrong” if a person wants to copulate without becoming married? These are all honest questions; and they are often sincere questions.

And here is the answer:

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

(1st Thessalonians 4:2)

We said last week that Paul generally *requested* and *exhorted* people about how to live. I suggested that he had a gentle, careful approach. But here we read the word *command* and that is because Paul (and the other apostles) were merely *relaying* what the Lord Jesus told them, the same thing as God telling them.

To reject Christian morality, in broad terms, is to reject God. Now, we are well aware that the world is saying to us: "No, we're not rejecting God but we are rejecting the Bible." And I understand that. But we are persuaded that a command related as coming from God in the Bible is *reliable*. And you cannot find a plainer statement than what Paul wrote to the Thessalonians in verse 3:

For this is the will of God, your sanctification...

The first part of the verse is positive. God wills our sanctification. That means He desires us to become more holy, more good, more pure, more like Him, more happy. He desires and commands us (since our decision making plays into it) to put off sinful, fleshly, worldly habits and thought patterns and values, and to replace them with new, fresh, godly habits, thought patterns and values. The less we expose ourselves to the old and broken the less we need to unlearn. The more we explore the old and broken and the evil, the more we're going to really have a strain to become more sanctified.

Sanctification means to be "set apart," to be different than the mainstream, to be special. God wants us to be that way. And in specifically what "arena?" Here, we read the second half of the verse and verses 4 and 5:

that you abstain from sexual immorality, that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God...

Paul is specifically addressing the Thessalonian Christians about sexuality. If a practice is immoral, Christians are to *abstain*, to "hold themselves" aloof from it. It is to shun it, to say "no" to it. Now, our society has largely brainwashed so many people, even Christians sometimes, by saying, "No, that cannot be. No one can say 'no.'" But that is the lie of the devil because any Christian is empowered by the Holy Spirit of life to say "yes" to God and to say "no" to any sin at all, at any time. Saying "no" is quite possible in the heart that wishes to learn the skill.

Sexual immorality is a broad term encompassing any sexual practice, any lustful pursuit that is outside the revealed will of God. God HAS a will on sexual matters and if I am prudish and ill-informed and hung up and phobic, let me tell you, He is not. No one is fresher, hipper, more informed and more progressive than the God of the Bible, the Living

God. So, if He says adultery, pre-marital sex, internet longing and fantasizing, prostitution, erotic literature, provocative or revealing dress are wrong than it comes from One who knows. There is no one who is going to sit God down and inform Him about some aspect of sexuality of which He is unaware. Of course, this goes hand in hand with our conviction that God created us in the first place and He did so with sex glands, with sex hormones with sexual distinctiveness and with sexual desire. It is a package deal: God made us, God engineered how we would operate and even though it all got broken by sin, He still makes us capable of living a certain way and making certain moral decisions, especially when we get the NEW NATURE by receiving Jesus Christ as our Savior. Becoming a Christian introduces us to a whole new potential for living in the ways God intended in the first place.

God wants us to each *possess his own vessel*, to learn to control our own bodies *in sanctification and honor*. That means, that you do not allow compromising situations to occur. It means that if you are tempted, you get your little body up and FLEE. Young people, if you are on a date and it is dark and private and you feel your hormones getting warm you don't take your clothes off, you get up and get out of there. You exit. That is not prudish; it is not snobby. It is to be like Jesus. It is to be an honorable person. To do otherwise with the heat is to do DISHonor, to yourself, to the person you're with, to your family and to the Lord. But you say, "But I love him." Or you say, "She says she loves me and it 'feels so right.'" If you haven't committed to love and honor that person and to be permanently loyal to them and to learn LOVE of that person as a way of life then it ISN'T right even if it feels warm.

Gentile lustful passion is not the sole domain of young people. I have had many married people say to me, "I don't love my spouse any more and I DO love this person over here because they make me hot." Oh yes, people are sometimes that blunt. I am glad they are blunt because that is where they are truly at. It comes down to choosing to live like Gentiles, like pagans or choosing to live like followers of the Son of God.

I remember being a brand new Christian, fresh out of the world with all its lusts and high-tech ways of engaging those lusts. I heard Pastor Emerson say on a Sunday night "College students: if you engage in sex outside of marriage you're no different than two dogs copulating out in the yard. Indeed, you're no different than two ants getting it on." I was a little offended that he would insult us that way (remember, I was a brand new Christian). But I think that is true.

I believe one of our biggest problems in the Christian life is boredom. When Christian living just becomes *church* living; when your faith becomes more routine and predictable habit than stretching and being stretched by the Holy Spirit to trust Him for more...then, at best we get bored and at worst we become jaded or cynical. God intends to keep doing work in us and through us; no matter how old you are. He is never done with you. He wants to take you "to the next notch." And when we're honest (and courageous) enough, we really know that we NEED more of the Holy Spirit's work of sanctifying us. The mature Christian is ever increasing in his awareness of the need for

grace and power. This year he is sensitive to his own spiritual needs “this much.” Next year, he will be sensitive “this much + a little more.” That is a growing Christian. You and I need to **excel still more**, even if we’re already doing a good job of walking by faith. (Notice that Paul uses this expression again in vs. 10).

Dear ones, let us not undervalue the revelation we have already been given. That we have been given any light at all is a demonstration of grace. Sometimes God will give individual direction. But *all the time* He has already revealed what it takes to live a life which pleases Him from a general and day-to-day standpoint.

The will of God, put in the most general terms, is that you and I will become more holy, more pure, less enchanted with rebelliousness, more OUT OF LOVE with sin, more like Jesus. The biblical term is *sanctification*. And **sanctification** has to happen from the inside, out. It can’t be legislated by a parent, a pastor, an elder or a Christian friend. It has to be WANTED by the individual person. God wants it (*for this is the will of God*); do I want it?

“But, if I become more like Jesus, I won’t get to be immediately gratified when I have a hunger.”

“If I become more like Jesus, then some of my friends might think I’m *not* cool.”

“If I become more like Jesus, it may affect my profit margins.”

“If I become more like Jesus, I might have to make amends with people from the past.”

And more immediately, in this context:

“If I become more like Jesus, I will have to abstain from sexual immorality.”

But if you become more like Jesus, these things are also true:

1. You get joy; real joy—such as cannot be simulated or replicated in the world.
2. You fulfill (or approach fulfilling) the plan that God has for you, personally. Even though He wants to “sanctify” us; make us more like the Son of God—I do not believe that means we become “drones” of some kind. Somehow, marvelously, we keep our individual uniqueness and become more like Jesus at the same time.
3. You become a real blessing to other people.
4. You are blessing God; that is, receiving from His hand *life*. As opposed to the scary prospect of doing what is mentioned in vs. 8.
5. You become an honorable person (vs. 4b). Unsanctification (“carnality”) is never honorable. Satan spreads the lie that it CAN be honorable. But it cannot. Becoming something other than what God wants you to become is ALWAYS dishonorable. It is NOT noble.

We will continue more on what it means to live for Jesus next week, Lord willing, but in the meantime—think about this: What is the most important thing to you in your life? Is it becoming more like Jesus? Would you sell *everything* to become more like Him? Would you forfeit *every* freedom in order to more fully reflect Him to this world? These are a lot to ask but then again, He paid a lot to make us eligible. May the God of grace continue the work of sanctification inside of each of us. May we be a people of much prayer, seeking His work inside of us.

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: Exposition of First Thessalonians Lesson 11
Scripture: 1st Thessalonians 4: 5ff
Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Date: September 6th, 1998

Why We Must Get Better

Introduction There seems to be the sentiment in our society today that adultery is OK if the circumstances are right. If the adulterous parties are sufficiently needy or unappreciated at home or worse, abused at home then adultery is understandable, even something to be celebrated, as a vindication. This was the sentiment, I think, in the book and in the popular movie *The Bridges of Madison County*, which, while a little out of date now surely captured a great audience and sympathy even among Christians just a short while ago.

We don't hear about adultery right in the church a lot. But we do hear about it a great deal out in the world. And "out in the world" there seems to hardly be anyone any more who think that adultery is evil. It is described as "unfortunate," "hurtful," "too bad" but we rarely hear anyone just call it "evil." You get in trouble if you use words like "evil" or "wicked" in a serious way. But a Christian walks to the tune of "a different drummer." A Christian must order his or her life by a different set of standards than what is currently in vogue. And one of the standards that Christians need to maintain is that the idea of a man stealing another man's wife (or vice versa) and even *wishing* he could pull this off, is evil. It is wicked. It has always been wicked and it will always be wicked.

I can say that before I became a Christian I really had no idea that sexual *cruising* was, in any significant way, wrong. It was not a part at all of my religious upbringing. "Mutual consent" seemed to be a reasonable governing principle. And, I suppose maybe I learned the seventh commandment at some point, as part of "the ten" but there was certainly no exposition given to it and I knew no one in my immediate neighborhood who thought that it was still in effect. No—all my friends, all my friends' friends, and most of the adults I knew practiced a kind of quite paganism about sexuality. (I say "quiet" because in the 1960s there was still a sense of shame and restraint, a little—it is not that way today.) And among the young men that I knew the rule was to go as far with a girl as you could and then to be able to brag about it with your friends. Girls were sort of like "pelts" and the more you could collect the cooler you were considered. I knew a lot of guys who had "steady" girlfriends but I knew of no one who considered that girlfriend "precious," to be honored and protected. In other words, I am admitting to you that my

own upbringing and experience as a young adult is pretty much as we read about the ancient Macedonian culture in 1 Thessalonians 4:5, ***in lustful passion like the Gentiles who do not know God***. Out of that background God awakened me, “re-booted” my conscience, enlightened my sensitivity to sin and righteousness and gave me insight into the mindset in which I had lived and felt was completely normal.

Paul’s statement is that people who do not know God are motivated primarily ***in lustful passion***. We might say, their prime motivations are *instinctual*. Their hormones say to them, “Go get it” and so, they go get it. People who know God have been made alive, given new capacity to rise above instinct. People who know God see Him in their lives and they are liberated to live better. Dear ones, we need to get better. You and I need to recognize the lusts to which we are still susceptible and then to begin a war of putting them to death. We need to get better at holiness. I do not say we need to get better at *inventing* holiness or at watching one another or at filling out the report card on one another. But we need, internally, secretly to become more pure.

The implication from the text is that there are two kinds of people in the world: people who know God and those who do not.

There are Americans who know God and there are Americans who do not.

There are Vietnamese who know God and there are Vietnamese who do not.

There are Pakistanis who know God and there are Pakistanis who do not.

It is irrespective of nationality, family origin, intelligence or beauty. It is by God’s pure grace that some come to know Him. And when they do, they become *enabled* to live beyond pagan motivations. You will notice verse 7: ***For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification***. That is a wonderful verse, to me. I want you to notice, first of all, the word *call*. The “call of God” can be defined this way:

“an act of God’s grace and power by which He sovereignly unites us to Christ”¹

When God calls to people, He makes a universal invitation for them to receive His Son as their Savior. That “call” is offered to the whole planet, insofar as people have heard it. But the *effectual* call of God is more than that. God is not only inviting people but also powerfully and graciously “*introducing* us into His kingdom according to His eternal purpose in Christ, which can never be undone (see Romans 8:28-30; 11:29). What we call the ***EFFECTUAL CALLING*** is a sovereign act of God and cannot be defined in terms of a person’s response. It is the first step in the application of *redemption*, after which come faith, justification, sanctification and finally glorification. But it all begins with the *effectual call* of God when He begins to awaken a person.

Now the call of God has a goal. God doesn’t just awaken people randomly and then set them spinning like so many little tops, bumping around chaotically until they run out of energy. He has NOT called us ***for the purpose of impurity***, Paul says first of all. Getting back to marriage—which was the issue on Paul’s mind—pagan husbands were inclined to view their *women* as receptacles of their wanton lust. There was a very typical absence of holiness and an absence of respect for wives. A man could grab his wife, or someone

else's wife for that matter, have his way and that was just the way it was. Not that all pagans DID that all the time but few if any thought there was basically anything wrong with it. No, when a person becomes a real Christian, they "plug into" a real purpose in life: to GET BETTER. The idea of a divine *calling* is prevalent in the NT:

- ❖ For Christians, God has CALLED us out of darkness and *into* fellowship with His Son (1st Corinthians 1:9);
- ❖ He has called us to *bless* us and to make us blessing-givers (1st Peter 3:9);
- ❖ He has called us to a new *freedom* in which we can now really love people (instead of lusting after them), Galatians 5:13;
- ❖ He has called us into a lifestyle of peace, even within times of marital conflict (1st Cor. 7:15);
- ❖ He has called us to be participants in His ruling Kingdom (1st Thess. 2:12) and finally,
- ❖ He has called us for the future, to live forever (1st Timothy 6:12).

Now, this isn't just a bunch of theological mumbo jumbo. This is all to get us to see that we have no business committing adultery. He has rescued us from the world for a great purpose, to become a BETTER people at living; to be a growing people who are really, genuinely improving. So, we have no business, even just in our thinking or in that private place in our hearts, of taking a brother's wife or a sister's husband. We do not ponder these things in a vacuum. Look at 1st Thess. 4:6. God is described as *the avenger in all these things...* And this is a warning—and a warning to CHRISTIANS who have earlier been affirmed in this letter as those who *actually DO walk* to please God. You would think that warnings need to be given to people who do *not* walk pleasing to God but this is a warning to good people, to Spirit-filled Christians. That's how dangerous it is to live on the edge of the world. Even then, Christians were temptable. Even then Christians were seducible by the currents and trends of their Thessalonian society. How about us, in this American, Southeastern Massachusetts society? Are we temptable? Remember, God is the avenger of these things. We live in a Kingdom and the King will come out of His castle on a white charger to avenge the oppressed. That is Who we serve now. It should make a difference in our lives and in our choices. It didn't before we came to know Him.

In verse 8 the warning is made even more plain. *He who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.* Notice a couple of things in this verse:

1. When we redefine sexual morality, we are not taking issue with other men. We are disputing the rightness of things with God Himself.
2. The Holy Spirit who lives inside of every Christian from the moment they embrace Christ, is a GIFT. He is not earned by particularly fervent or faithful Christians. He is not the award at a certain *point* in the Christian life. He is given to all believers as the down-payment on their future AT the moment of faith; at the moment of their *effectual calling*. Praise God, what a blessing to us He is. We do not worship HIM, because He just would pass it on to the Lamb. But we appreciate His presence IN us and we need to *honor* His presence in us by

honoring the laws which He writes upon our hearts. One of those is the Law of not defrauding a brother or sister in Christ of what is rightfully theirs. That includes their spouses.

So, we need to get better, dear ones. We need to pray and ask God to root out the lusts that can crop up. We need to pray *again* and ask Him to do it. We need to love one another by not *attracting* each other's lusts. That means we are careful, loving in fact, with how we dress, how we touch each other, how we speak to one another. To accommodate lusts like the world does is to just act like animals. Christians are not animals. We are the called of God. We are the bride of Christ. We are the temple of the Holy Spirit. May He indwell us with wisdom in these things. May He give us discernment so that we will circumvent tempting situations. May we have power to resist and love and laughter to prevail in victory. That's what God has called us into; He has called us and fashioned us for sanctification, a thing, admittedly, that the world cannot understand. But He has plans for us, good plans. Let us be excited about it!

¹ *New Dictionary of Theology* editors: Ferguson/Wright/Packer, IVP, 1988, p. 119

**The “effectual”
call of God:**

**an act of God’s
grace and power
by which He
sovereignly
unites us to
Christ**

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: Exposition of First Thessalonians Lesson 12
Scripture: 1st Thessalonians 4: 9-12
Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Date: September 13th, 1998

Loving Loudly, Living Quietly Part 1

Introduction My thinking these days is that if we are honest, most of the time when we do something good for somebody it is motivated first by something inside of us that the doing good does for *us*. That "most of the time" is punctuated by occasional events of truly *selfless* motivation but the "continuum" of good works that we do is generally characterized by a deep, maybe sub-conscious personal pleasure that we derive from doing the good thing that we did.

For example, if I buy my wife a gift, am I doing it because I know it will bring her pleasure or because deep down I fear *not* doing it and so I go out and do it to hose off that sense of fear? Or, if I volunteer to help in a civic organization am I doing it because I really care about the people out there I'm serving or because a) I like to be around people, b) I enjoy sports, camping, music, politics, and so forth? c) my kid is involved with that organization and I don't want to feel the guilts by not supporting the organization? Or, if I demonstrate some interest or give some help to a missions organization, am I doing it because I care about the needs of the target people that the mission is trying to help? Or is there some hidden personal agenda that I *really* need to satisfy?

Now I do not mean to tell you that I think this is bad. But if it is true then it does us good to simply acknowledge it. We would be something other than human if we didn't do stuff for other people and enjoy it ourselves too. But if we sort out our motivations for doing things, I think we'll see that sometimes we're doing it for US primarily. The other side is when we "do the sort" and realize that, "Well, I did that because I really care about the best interests of the other person."

You will remember that I suggested to you that this letter is very personal. Paul knows these people and he cares about them. And the thing about them that really knocks Paul over is that *their* general practice of doing good things for people is rooted in real love. We're going to consider this carefully as we look first of all at verses 9 and 10.

Why is Paul turning to this subject now in verse 9? He was just giving a warning about the opposite of love, which is lust. He was telling them to be real serious about

matters of purity and impurity because God, Himself, takes those things seriously. So now it is logical that Paul would *turn to* love and say something about that. He affirms them as ***having no need*** for basic instruction about it. They're DOING it. And what these young Christians have learned ABOUT love they have learned from God, directly: ***you yourselves are taught by God to love one another.***

Some of the things we learn in the Christian life we learn from books. Some things, we learn from classes and people through whom, we trust, the Spirit is working. But some of the things we learn in the Christian life—things about how to really treat each other—God sits us down and instructs us. It is a direct teacher-student relationship; no middle man. I think the biggest and most important course you can take in the Christian life is in “learning how to give godly love.” As I said before, I have yet to see a seminar or a workshop in this, for all the conferences we like to go to. Why doesn't someone offer a course in How to Love? (Maybe they do and I just haven't seen it advertised)...

I would like you to think about the matter of loving the brethren. I think there are three general “seasons” of love among Christian brethren. I think there is “early love,” “middle love” and “mature love.” By “early love” I mean the kind of affection and interest you have for another Christian when you are just getting to know them. “Early love” is a good thing. Remember, we're talking about Christian love; ***love of the brethren.*** I'm not just talking about infatuation or liking someone new that you've met because you find them more interesting or funnier or something than all your current friends. No, “early love” is a good thing. The Christ-in-you senses the Christ-in-me when we first meet. I like you for that and I sense that you're really a Christian too and I want to get to know you. In churches this is probably a lot of the heat for a lot of the social activities. We are still intrigued with each other in this “season.” And let me say that until you're IN a church or a small group for a while, this is the love you've got to work with.

By “middle love” I mean that love for your brother or sister in Christ which comes after you've known each other for a while. The newness and the intrigue have worn off and now you see each other regularly; you've served on a team or a committee with each other, maybe taught a class or led a group together. You can somewhat predict the other person's ways and you know something of how they think. You have come to depend on them a little and you look forward to seeing them in that usual pew-spot of theirs. “Middle love of the brethren” is a blessing. It comes with a little time.

“Mature love of the brethren” only comes with time. It will come probably only with a few—unless you are really Spirit-filled and you spend a lot of time with the Lord. This is the kind of love which Paul saw a *vacuum* of in Corinth and so he needed to describe it for them. “Mature love” gives basically to better the other person's situation. You look at the other brother or sister in Christ and you think to yourself, “what can I do for them?” How can I give them what they need? Never kind what it costs me...” It *studies* the other person and it *prays* for the other person. It *absorbs* the roughness and the tiredness, even the sins of the other person, not taking them into account. It doesn't say, “well, I'll be leaving you now—the Lord is leading me to THIS CHURCH over here now and so, catch

you at the rapture..." Mature love enjoys a rich loyalty for the brethren which have providentially been brought into your life. I think this is what the Thessalonian brethren had developed, and most of them were young Christians who were probably also mostly blue-collar, working class or even slave-type people. Whoever they were, these Christians to whom Paul was writing were among his favorites because they really knew some things about love, having learned them directly from the Lord. The Corinthian Christians, although possessors of greater resources, were not in the Thessalonians' class. The Galatian Christians were still in Christianity 101 compared to these Christians. These folks knew what was important to God: sanctification, love.

You will notice in verse 10 that Paul says they practiced love for *all the brethren*. There's a good marker for divine love. It doesn't stop at certain boundaries. I get so tired of modern Christians who choose to hang out only with their own, specific theological "friends" and who spend all their time promoting their own little theological agenda. They separate from anyone who doesn't polish their theology quite as they do and then pat themselves on the back for being "faithful to God's Word." Well *this* group of young Christians mentioned in God's Word were commended for loving *all the brethren*.

This week I received a phone call from the former head of the Interchurch Council in New Bedford. He probed me to see if we, as a church, might be interested in ministering to a Fairhaven women, mentally challenged, who wants to get hooked up with a "Baptist" church. He said he had gotten nowhere with the mainline Baptist churches in New Bedford and then thought of us. I told him to have the social worker-contact person call us. I want us to be known as a church which *practices love for all the brethren*. We'll see...

It ought to be a basic part of DBC orientation of new people: hang out with us and you're going to hear about other people who have needs than only people around Morton Avenue. As we grow in Christ, we learn to become interested beyond the boundaries of just my own life and friends. That is how Jesus was. That is something the Spirit begins to teach you the moment you come to Christ!

Even though the Thessalonians were pretty good at all this, Paul exhorts them *excel still more*. Do you feel like you're pretty good at loving other Christians? Excel still more! There are surely ways of loving we, as a church, haven't matured in yet:

- Recently one of our people told me he feels ignored and unnoticed here every Sunday morning.
- Another time recently I brought up about U.Mass.Dartmouth and I was told, "when God sends us someone who really is gifted in working with college students, then we'll reach out to them. Until then, well..."
- Regularly, I hear husbands say or wives say, "I don't love my spouse any more."

Loving the brethren is more than church dinners and giving little gifts. It is getting involved with each other beyond the normal routine of church life. We need to learn how to take notice of the good things that other people are doing and tell them that we appreciate it. We need to be at each other's side when a real need is apparent. We need

to not be demanding and to not keep score and even to not maintain high expectations of each other.

Paul says, *We urge you, brethren, to excel still more.* When you feel like you've notched in a love-event in your logbook, do you get smug for a few minutes or a few days? Do you say, "Well, I've done the love thing for this month. Surely Jesus is satisfied with me for a while and I can devote the next few weeks to myself?" If you come to a Work Day or give an Awana Council Time message or host a dinner or give someone a ride, fill up a Christmas box, do you then back off for a period with the thought, "I've done my part." We need to become more *continuous* with love and with sacrifice and with "contributing to the needs of the saints." Love needs to BE the continuum, not just the occasional event.

The Thessalonian believers, loving as they were, needed to keep deepening in their love for other Christians. We need to also.

There are many *doctrines* which Christians get interested in. Many of you are interested in prophecy. Some of you are interested in the Holy Spirit. Some Christians are very excited about Calvinism and the doctrine of soteriology. All of that is good. But the doctrine of LOVE is probably the most important TEACHING in the New Testament after the nature of God and the Gospel itself. But when we're learning about the nature of God, we learn about where love comes from. When we learn about the Gospel we're studying the supreme example and demonstration of love. So, those doctrines are love related, too.

Are we a loving body? Are you practicing love for the brethren? Is this high on your agenda? It's high on the Holy Spirit's agenda, dear ones. And so it ought to be high on our agenda to become "Thessalonian." May the Lord Jesus make us this way, even if it's a hard road to travel...

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: Exposition of First Thessalonians Lesson 13
Scripture: 1st Thessalonians 4: 11,12
Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Date: September 20th, 1998

Loving Loudly, Living Quietly Part 2

Introduction This message (and last week's) is entitled "Loving Loudly, Living Quietly." That, in a nutshell, is probably the whole Christian scheme of behavior and lifestyle choices, rolled up in one little saying. This is how Paul advised the early Thessalonian believers in Jesus Christ to live. But there is a great "driveness" in our culture today. Men and women are stretched and pulled with many demands and many ambitions. A typical "composite" day may look like this:

You get up at 5:15, grab a granola bar or two and dash to the gym to work out, "network" with some friends there, pick up a newspaper and a cup of coffee on the way to work. You get to work with about 2 days worth of work to accomplish in one day. The day zooms by, you've got a headache now and you blast home to get your kid to the soccer game and run by Home Depot to pick up a couple of things. Dinner together with the family? What's that? You get back home, sit down in the chair with the morning newspaper and then the phone starts to ring. It's the pastor. Oh brother. He wants you to serve on some committee. Sheesh. And he's so polite and smarmy on the phone. Well, we're polite back and then you hang up and flee to the garage or basement to escape the phone and work on some little project. Before you know it, the time is 10:30 and then you realize, "Man, am I tired." And there were still about five things left on that mental list you had this morning for things you hoped to get done today...

But I think that basically our lives are no more challenged than were those of the early saints in Thessalonica. Our technology is far better; our language is different and we are more mobile. But for every stress-element we have that we think is unique, they had one to match. The thing is, what God expects of a man or of a woman is really the same from one generation to the next. Today we look at the second part of a passage in First Thessalonians that really is a simple "code" for Christian living. Last week we read verses 9,10 about loving the brethren. They were known for being a very giving and unprejudiced assembly of believers. Today we go further and look at verses 11 & 12. The idea is simply this: Part of being filled with the love of God is to work hard, with good focus, and thus contribute to the reputation of Christ. Work hard at what you do and in general, your life will be better off, you will be happier and you will help the standing, the *image*, that Christians have toward the world.

The opposite is to *not* work hard; to expect someone else to pay your way and provide for you, to be a whiner and then if someone finds out that you claim to be a Christ-follower, they just look at your life and say, “yeah, right...”

The key word in the passage is *quiet*. Paul says to them to *make it their ambition to lead a quiet life*. When you set out to craft your life, O Thessalonians, set as a high goal to *lead a quiet life*. He is telling them to be less frantic, although he is NOT telling them to be less *exuberant*. That is interesting. Can we really apply that to OUR lifestyles and OUR culture? Do you have to become a Mennonite or some other type of withdrawn-from-culture person in order to put this into practice?

When I was in the Shenandoah Valley a month ago, I enjoyed a couple of quiet days. I sat on my friend's front porch, read, dozed, sipped cool drinks and watched the Mennonites ride by in their horse and buggies. I have always been intrigued with “old order” of Mennonites and their determined if futile attempts to hold off the twentieth century. But there is a deliberate simplicity about them and their buggies on the roads there in Bridgewater, VA are their statement that “we're going to keep things as simple and quiet as possible.”

The word *quiet* means a restful pace and atmosphere, not “quiet” as opposed to talkativeness. In 2nd Thess.3:12 we read, *Now such persons we command in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread*. The context is about some Thessalonians who were leeching on others and who would not work. They expected others to provide for them and to pull them along. In this sense, they were not being “quiet” and you can understand that because people who are not being productive in our society are sometimes those who make the most “noise.” Paul says that everyone (by implication, who is able) is to develop a hard-working attitude, if they are really followers of Jesus.

In 1st Timothy 2:1,2 Paul wrote: *First of all then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, in order that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity.* (ON TODAY'S BULLETIN FRONT!)

In that culture—with the political climate a lot more volatile than we have had to endure—PEACE was a valuable thing. In just a few short years it would cost you your life in Thessalonica to name the name of Jesus Christ as your God. Christians would be harassed, chased, hunted down and killed, whole families sometimes. “Quietness” and the chance to just live out your life and have a good testimony about Christ were things to be valued and not taken for granted. In 51 A.D. it was possible. It would not be in 95 A.D.

Now, we know very little about Jesus' first thirty years. But we know he was a working man who worked with his hands. When I was in Nazareth, which in Jesus' day had a population of only about 300 people, I learned that very possibly Jesus and his father would have traveled each day to another much larger town very nearby called Sephorris. Sephorris was a town of around 20,000 people in those days with many more opportunities for carpentry and as I walked the ruined streets of Sephorris it was easy to imagine Joseph and Jesus walking the same streets. I do not know much about carpentry

but I have always liked watching carpenters work. It can be hard work but it is fulfilling work because when you're through you can always stand back and LOOK at your work for the day. It is a good work to be in, at least philosophically. But it can be hard work, too.

As we said, part of being a loving Christian is to be a hard working Christian. When you're working hard you HAVE something to give to other people. Paul also says for them to **attend to your own business** which is the equivalent of saying "mind your own business." Proverbs 25:17 says,

Let your foot rarely be in your neighbor's house, lest he become weary of you and hate you.

Each person should take care of their own needs as best they can. They should work hard to see that this is done. The truly needy should be provided for by the Christian community but the Christian community should not *enable* people who can work, *not* to work. Each Christian is also responsible for the testimony they maintain out in the world (**behaving properly towards outsiders**). Outsiders can tell if our religion is phony or if it is genuine. They notice us, particularly since our brand of Christianity is now so well "franchised" around the country. We say one thing and we sing it. Is it real or are we hypocritical? They want to know, "do you live it?"

Do we live like people who have a "peace that the world cannot understand, peace to live, peace to love, 'My peace, I give unto you.'"

They want to know if we have that joy, joy, joy, joy down in our hearts?

They want to know if we really have more love and more power than they do?

Has He renewed a right spirit within us?

We love loudly and we live quietly. We use up our energies in ministering to one another, NOT in just furthering our own portfolios. Generally, that's the person's strategy who has not yet met Christ. "Make your own portfolio fatter. Get frantic about it. Grab every opportunity."

Folks, life is short. You have a few years to live either this way or that way. You have a few years to add something to the kingdom of God, to contribute something to the reputation of Christ. People, both Christian and non-Christian, appreciate somebody who loves by giving. People appreciate those who do not take advantage of them. A mature love for the brethren maintains a balance between the extremes of expecting financial help from the brethren, and being so fiercely independent and self-sufficient that you never need anyone.

Love loudly; live quietly. Give to others cheerfully, sacrificially and systematically. Work hard with focus but enjoy life too.

Sometimes I find that the simplest statements of theology or philosophy are the most useful. We are different from the world. We look at the world differently. We look at the future differently and we live in light of a future that will see the Lord Jesus actually

return to this planet. That is what Paul will turn to next in this epistle. The second coming of Jesus Christ is the most exciting part of what lies ahead for us. It is not imaginary and it is not just wishful thinking. He is coming and our day to day choices here can reflect that He is coming.

- Let us seek a *quieting* of our lives even as we become “louder” in our love for each other.
- Let’s simplify and eliminate some activities if we need to.
- Life should be working, raising and enjoying our families.
- Life should be an enjoyment of an expanding *community* (Christian), which should be built on an expanding, effective witness.

Beyond that not much else is all that important, dear ones. Not much else matters all that much...

And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you; That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing.

KJV

Stay calm; mind your own business; do your own job.

You've heard all this from us before, but a reminder never hurts. We want you living in a way that will command the respect of outsiders, not lying around sponging off your friends.

The Message

1st Thessalonians 4: 11,12

Love of the brethren

Early love

Middle love

Mature love

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Exposition of First Thessalonians Lesson 14

Scripture: 1st Thessalonians 4: 13ff

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: September 27th, 1998

When the Body Lies a'Molderin' In the Grave

Introduction There have been a lot of books written in recent years about the subject of death and dying. It has become a major subject of seminars and trendy counseling centers. A very brief "cruise" on an internet search engine will get you to a host of web sites on the subject, for instance: at one site you "click on" the "Death Clock" and it will predict the date of your death. Mine was Sept. 21st, 2026—which is interesting because that's just before Hilary Clinton is supposed to die. Bill is scheduled to die—according to the "Death Clock" in 2020, which is humorous!) You can also click on sites like: "Project on Death in America," "DeathNET," "The Dead People Server," "Tinted Photos of New Orleans Cemeteries," "Disneyland Deaths," "Dead Lawyers," "The Tibetan Book of the Dead," "The Egyptian Book of the Dead," "BuddhaNet's Electronic Books on Death and Dying," "Morbid Fact du Jour", and "Real Dumb Ways to Die."

The interesting thing about this, is that the "body" of data that is offered to people about death and dying is drawn from just about every source imaginable; except the Bible. This is because either people simply disbelieve what the Bible says about death and dying or because people are just ignorant about it. But it is not as though the Bible is unclear about death and dying. In fact, we begin a section today of Paul's first epistle to the Thessalonians, the purpose of which is specifically TO INFORM the recipients of the letter ABOUT death and dying. His purpose is to comfort them (see vs. 18 **therefore comfort one another with these words.**)

For some reason these young Jesus-followers in Thessalonica were uninformed about what actually happened to some of their number who evidently had died since Paul's visit there. They sensed that to just "default" back to whatever they believed about death before trusting Christ would be somehow inappropriate—"but hey, Paul, what really happens to us then when we die or if we're killed?" It's a good question. No one for whom we have a *recorded* testimony (except Jesus) has ever come back and spoken about what they experienced in death. (Perhaps Lazarus or others who were resurrected at the time of Jesus' resurrection said something to their friends, but we have no written transcripts...) People today are in the dark about death and the world "out there" offers fantasies of all kinds. But the apostles of the New Testament spoke about it directly and reliably. That

gets us to verse 13 of First Thessalonians 4. We need good information and to be comforted about death too. No matter how long you have named the name of Jesus, you probably still worry some about death. You might wonder about your own. You may dread the death of your spouse or your parent or your child. You may be the sort of person who ponders multiple deaths—war, disease, disaster. Most of us probably are uncomfortable with the reality of death. It's normal. It happens to everyone (we're all going to be dead in a hundred years and very few of us will be remembered). Our bodies—precious though they are to us at the moment—are gonna lie a 'molderin' in the grave (like John Brown's body!) Christians are not different from non-Christians by being immune from strong feelings about death. We are different because we believe that we know what happens in death and we believe that we know what is GOING to happen to dead people in the future. Now let's simply take the apostle Paul's words at face value and see what he says:

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope (1st Thess.4:13)

Now, notice some things about this verse:

1. First, it is addressed to ***brethren***, that is to real Christians. Real Christians own the key to understanding death. They are brothers and sisters—equal to each other--covenanted together by this understanding. We know with certainty that in Christ, death and dying are not terminal. When your body dies, you still exist and you still have a future. It is not JUST a future like to maybe be reincarnated as a cow or as a giraffe. It is a *better* future. In fact the ***brethren*** have an incredible future that I believe we can't even really comprehend yet.
2. Although we have to endure the loss of our Christian friends and family sometimes, they are not in purgatory or in suspended animation. The Bible uses the picture of sleep in reference to biology. Our bodies wear out, get wrecked or get so sick they have to conk out. But when a Christian breathes his or her last, biologically, they then find themselves immediately in the presence of Jesus Christ (see 2 Cor. 5:8; Philippians 1:23; 1st Thess.5:10).
3. Grieving is both good and natural and *not* good if it lapses into despair. Sure, losing a loved one is a separation and no one likes that, Christian or non-Christian. But the question is the *duration* of the separation. When one of our brethren pass away—it might be a brother who is also your father or a sister who is also your wife—you must go on without them and learn how to do that. But you always have the assurance that you will be reunited with them. You will see them again. And *when* you see them they're going to be different and you're going to be different! Grieving that is filled with hopelessness is a contradiction or a belittling of our convictions about these things. We can know for sure that we will again see and enjoy everyone who has died in Christ.
4. Without Christ there is no hope. There is no hope in Buddha. There is no hope in Mohammed. There is no hope in Marx. There is no hope in *Star Trek*. There is only hope in the resurrected Jesus Christ who alone has defeated death. The "hope Club" is a closed club. You can't experience the benefits without joining. No other club HAS the benefits but the neat thing is that ANYONE can join this club! I think

that we grieve the loss of a loved one mostly because we do not want to be alone. We love the person and we don't want to have to go on without them. But a Christian accepts the reality of aloneness for a while in light of what is coming. Reunion is coming and it won't just be with *that person*. At the same moment that we are reunited with other Christians we are united with Christ! Oh man, too much joy! ("She can't take any more, Cap'n!")

Verse 14 says, ***For if we believe*** (meaning more with the sense of *SINCE*) ***that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.*** The certainty of OUR coming back from the dead is that Jesus came back from the dead. The key is in believing in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Everything hinges on that. We stake everything on Him being who the Bible says He is. It isn't hard to give people the good news. You tell them about Jesus, dying on the cross, being dead and really, truly buried in a tomb and then getting NOT DEAD! He became alive once again. He defeated death and promised that He will return to this planet. When He comes again He will be accompanied by the whole vast company of people from all nations from all centuries who have died in Christ. That's what the apostle Paul proclaims. We choose to take him seriously, at his word.

Again we have the metaphor of sleep. This is not the sleep of the soul as some Christians choose to interpret this word (the doctrine of "soul sleep"), but the sleep of the body. It is actually a *comforting* metaphor, I think. I remind you that most of the time, sleep is a thing that your body welcomes. Paul could have used other metaphors to depict death. But he intentionally chose sleep. When you're tired, you want to just lie down and go to sleep. And, one day your body is going to be completely tired and the picture of sleep will be welcome—at least to your body.

But all that we ARE: mind, spirit, soul, intellect, emotion, will pass immediately into the presence of God. How does that work? I don't know; haven't any idea. But I am willing to believe that He is in control of it and will explain it to me when I'm with Him (if I still want to know at that time...)

Then you will notice in verse 15 he says, ***For this we say to you by the word of the Lord*** (which is to indicated NO doubts about this one, folks!) ***that we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord*** (do you see that even then the apostles thought that Christ's coming could be at any time?) ***shall not precede those who have fallen asleep.*** Somehow there is a certain chronological order to the resurrections, even if only separated by a split second. First to be raised up will be those who had died. Then immediately following them will be all Christians who are living on the planet at that time. It's *whoosh #1* and then *whoosh #2*. I cannot lay out for you all the *physics* of how this occurs, but I have no problem with not knowing that. However He does it, it will be scientifically correct! And folks let me tell you: it will be the coolest thing you ever see! I wish we could go on, but I want these things to sink in and I want to suggest a couple of practical applications:

- 1) Don't get duped by the funeral industry. A lot of money is made on preserving dead bodies down in that grave. You and I need to be good stewards of our resources and I assure you that your body is going to return to whatever elements it was made from one way or another and that is how it is supposed to be. Don't waste the inheritance you're going to pass on to some loved one or to some Christian ministry on the folly of trying to keep yourself dry! On the other hand, I am personally a little bit uncomfortable with the rush to cremation we see today. I am uncomfortable a little bit because you do not see it practiced or endorsed either by the Jews or by the early Christians. They had the practice back then as now, and the Jews and early Christians shunned it. Second, fire seems more often than not to be a picture of judgment in the Bible and there seems to me on that basis an *impropriety* in using something which is a picture of judgment just to save money. The bottom-line is to use sound judgment in whatever funeral arrangements you are involved with.
- 2) Some of the sweetest fellowship believers can experience is at the time of funerals. This event, in a sense, is what we are all moving towards and a big part of our ministry is to encourage and comfort one another. People need a funeral or a subsequent memorial service to *receive* comfort from the body. There's lots of hugging and kindness. There's a closeness that is unusual. I'm not suggesting that funerals are fun times but when it is Christians that are there with each other and the departed WAS a Christian, it is a time of hope. There should be hymns sung, eulogies of how that person ministered to you and mingled with the pain of separation, the joy of hope for the future. Let's not focus on loss but on gain. Remember, Paul said (and we sing in the song), ***for me to live is Christ and to die is gain.***

Our beliefs about death and dying are intimately tied to our beliefs about eschatology. Bible-believing Christians treasure what the Bible says about the second coming of Christ. It is the most practical, immediately relevant thing we believe. Even though our bodies are gonna molder in the grave, our future is secure. Next we will look at more about when Jesus returns...

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: Exposition of First Thessalonians Lesson 15
Scripture: 1st Thessalonians 4: 14ff
Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Date: October 4th, 1998

CAUGHT UP IN THE CLOUDS

Introduction This week I heard from three different Christians in three completely different situations, "Man, I wish the Lord would come back today." One was another pastor, who has lately been refereeing a nasty quarrel in his church between two key families whose kids married each other. Another was a Christian high school student who feels assaulted by the carnality and callousness of most of the students in that high school. The third was a saint in a nursing home. There seems to be in quite a few Christians a restlessness and a certain *expectation* for what we call "the rapture." There is also a lot of confusion among Christians about what the rapture is exactly and so it is good for us to look carefully at what the Bible says about it.

First Thessalonians chapter four is a key section on the second coming of Christ, which is a major claim that Jesus made. You will remember we entitled our Spring outreach, "Consider the Claims" with a view to introducing people to the simple claims made by Jesus Christ (and His apostles). Now, 1st Thess. 4:14 says, ***For if we believe (meaning more with the sense of SINCE) that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.*** Here is what we're absolutely sure of: OUR coming back from the dead is intimately tied to the fact that Jesus came back from the dead. Jesus' resurrection is one of the best attested and documented facts in all of history and the key, for us and for anyone who will listen, is in believing in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Everything hinges on that. We stake everything on Him being who the Bible says He is. It isn't hard to give people the good news. You tell them about Jesus, dying on the cross, being dead and really, truly buried in a tomb and then getting NOT DEAD! He became alive once again. He defeated death and promised that He will return to this planet.

Now, we also teach what He proclaimed and what was echoed by the apostles: that He is actually going to come again to the planet. When He comes again He will be accompanied by the whole vast company of people from all nations from all centuries who have died in Christ. That's what the apostle Paul proclaims. We choose to take him seriously, at his word.

Again, in vss. 14,15 (and in 5:10) we have the metaphor of sleep. This is not the sleep of the soul as some Christians choose to interpret this word (the doctrine of “soul sleep”), but the sleep of the body. It is actually a *comforting* metaphor, I think. I remind you that most of the time, sleep is a thing that your body welcomes. Paul could have used other metaphors to depict death. But he intentionally chose sleep. When you’re tired, you want to just lie down and go to sleep. And, one day your body is going to be completely tired and the picture of sleep will be welcome—at least to your body.

But all that we ARE: mind, spirit, soul, intellect, emotion, will pass immediately into the presence of God. How does that work? I don’t know; haven’t any idea. But I am willing to believe that He is in control of it and will explain it to me when I’m with Him (if I still want to know at that time...)

Then you will notice in verse 15 he says, *For this we say to you by the word of the Lord* (which is to indicated NO doubts about this one, folks!) *that we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord* (do you see that even then the apostles thought that Christ’s coming could be at any time?) *shall not precede those who have fallen asleep*. Clearly Paul believed that he and his readers could possibly still be alive when the rapture would take place. He believed in an *imminent* rapture. And somehow there is a certain chronological order to the resurrections, even if only separated by a split second. First to be raised up will be those who had died. Then immediately following them will be all Christians who are living on the planet at that time. It’s *whoosh #1* and then *whoosh #2*. I cannot lay out for you all the *physics* of how this occurs, but I have no problem with not knowing that. However He does it, it will be scientifically correct! And folks let me tell you: it will be the coolest thing you ever see! Now at this point I want to make an application in an area which all of us will face: funerals. I want to say two things about funerals, or about the way we deal with death:

- 1) Thing #1: Have a sense of balance in dealing with a dead body. On the one hand don’t get duped by the funeral industry. A lot of money is made on preserving dead bodies down in that grave. You and I need to be good stewards of our resources and I assure you that your body is going to return to whatever elements it was made from one way or another and that is how it is supposed to be. Don’t waste the inheritance you’re going to pass on to some loved one or to some Christian ministry on the folly of trying to keep yourself dry! On the other hand, I am personally a little bit uncomfortable with the other extreme, which seems to be gaining popularity: cremation. It seems to be motivated on economic considerations and on fear considerations (claustrophobia). I am disturbed somewhat about the wholesale rush to cremation, because we do not see it practiced or endorsed either by the Jews or by the early Christians. They had the practice back then as now, but for some reason the Jews and early Christians shunned it. Second, fire seems more often than not to be a picture of judgment in the Bible and there seems to me on that basis an *impropriety* in using something which is a picture of judgment just to save money. Because the Bible is silent about this I’m not prepared to say that cremation is a sin but it seems to be an

impropriety, something inappropriate. The bottom-line is to use sound Biblical judgment in whatever funeral arrangements you are involved with.

- 2) **Thing #2:** Some of the sweetest fellowship believers can experience is at the time of funerals. This event, in a sense, is what we are all moving towards and a big part of our ministry is to encourage and comfort one another. People need a funeral or a subsequent memorial service to *receive* comfort from the body. There's lots of hugging and kindness. There's a closeness that is unusual. I'm not suggesting that funerals are fun times but when it is Christians that are there with each other and the departed WAS a Christian, it is a time of hope. There should be hymns sung, eulogies of how that person ministered to you and mingled with the pain of separation, the joy of hope for the future. Let's not focus on loss but on gain. Remember, Paul said (and we sing in the song), ***for me to live is Christ and to die is gain.***

Our beliefs about death and dying are intimately tied to our beliefs about eschatology. Bible-believing Christians treasure what the Bible says about the second coming of Christ. It is the most practical, immediately relevant thing we believe. Even though our bodies are gonna molder in the grave, our future is secure and that is what Paul is really getting at in this section of 1st Thessalonians.

In verse 16 we get to an incredible verse! Paul's *tone* is blunt. He doesn't say that *he thinks* this MIGHT be the way it could happen. He is not speculating. He says, "Here's how it will be." I was having fun imagining "how does he know?" And the answer is that the Lord simply revealed it to him somehow (in a dream, a vision or in his mind) and probably on more than one occasion. Peter had been given the same basic outline about the last days as had John. The apostolic record is consistent. Now, notice the catalog of sounds mentioned here: 1) in coming down from heaven (it's interesting that the second coming is a *downward* direction) the Lord ***shouts***. 2) It is tied to a command (***voice***) of Michael, the archangel and 3) there is a ***trumpet sound***. Perhaps all of these are separate sounds but all occurring at the same moment, announcing forcefully and dramatically that Christ's return from heaven FOR the saints and WITH the saints has arrived.

Then in verse 17 he says that those ***who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.*** This is what we call the rapture. It gives us no details except it shall be a ***snatching*** (like in Acts 8:39). And it involves ***clouds*** and terminates, apparently, in the upper atmosphere (***in the air***). Now for many of us this is review. You have known these details for years. But when you first hear about this you go "What? Run that by me again!" I remember when I first heard about all this in 1972, when my roommate was reading Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth*. I felt ripped off that I had never heard about this before. The rapture is also called "the blessed hope." It is something that affects our whole view of the future and of OUR future. It is not just something that will *happen*. It will happen with *me as a participant*. Why do liberal churches short change their people from hearing this truth? It is the best solution to despair, fear and worry about death.

Finally, he says, *thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.* Notice that we SHALL BE WITH THE LORD. His presence with us will never be lost. Maybe we will be transformed into beings who are weightless, I don't know—but I'll tell you this: it ain't gonna be boring! And one of the things we can do to help each other in grief, in depression and in trial is to remind each other that this is not all there is. Another *state* is coming. Just as sure as Jesus did not stay in that grave! What a blessed truth we have been given...

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Exposition of First Thessalonians Lesson 16

Scripture: 1st Thessalonians 5: 1-5

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: October 11th, 1998

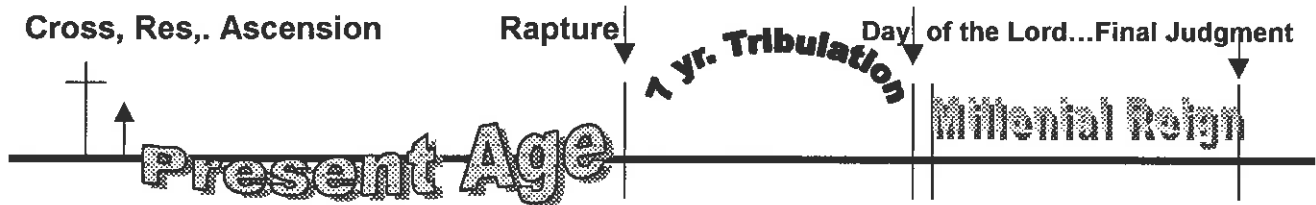
THE WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD AND THE 2ND COMING OF CHRIST

Introduction A person could take the following perspective on the times in which we are living: 1) Never has there been more money in most people's pockets than right now. 2) There are more and more diseases being successfully attacked by modern medicine and even the toughest may be solvable in the future. 3) The likelihood of our country being surprised and disabled by nuclear attack is so small that almost no one even considers it any longer. Indeed, as my wife observed this week, none of her fifth graders seem to know much about military terminology as it just isn't part of our culture as it was thirty years ago. 4) Electronic technology is becoming so sophisticated that we can utilize security systems so effectively that the predatory criminals now have to play "catch up" to law enforcement rather than the other way around. In other words, these are pretty good times; pretty safe, actually, at least as compared to former times.

One of the most interesting things about what we have seen *this year* is the supposed approval of our President's performance on the basis of how much money people have or *feel* that they have. Evidently, a great many Americans don't really care too much about how our President carries himself in the Oval Office as long as *they* are doing pretty well, financially. This lackadaisical outlook on moral accountability, along with a great many other global indications makes the thinking Christian wonder if indeed the age is beginning to draw to a close.

The Thessalonian believers in Christ were also watchful for the end of the age—more specifically, for the return of Jesus Christ. Some of the their number were beginning to die off and still, Jesus had not returned. Again, let us make it clear: a basic claim of Jesus Christ is that He would return to the planet. It is fundamental in understanding just whom Jesus said He was to understand that when He ascended from the Mount of Olives He was not through with this planet. And in Acts 1:11 we read the words of ***two men in white clothing*** (whom we assume to be angels): ... ***This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.*** Jesus Christ will return visibly, presumably to the Mount of Olives, accompanied by a great number of angels and saints. It will be the culminating event of time as we understand it.

On the chart, you see that time changed when Jesus came, was crucified and then rose from the dead and forty days later ascended back into heaven. It was the dawn of a new age (or **epoch**). We are still in that **epoch** now, although many of us believe it is coming to a conclusion. The conclusion of this present age (if you like titling things, I like “the age of grace”) is Christ’s return. But in the New Testament, there are in essence *TWO* comings: a coming *FOR* the saints and a coming *WITH* the saints. The coming *FOR* the saints is what we call “the rapture.” It is a catching-up into the air of all departed, quickly followed by the then-living. Then with them, Jesus will come again *WITH* those saints and this is called **the day of the Lord**.



Now, we do not get all of this information in 1st Thessalonians. We build our eschatology—our view of the last days—from the sum total of prophetic information in the whole Bible. That includes what the Old Testament prophets said and predicted. It includes what Jesus, Himself, said. And it includes those sections from the writings of the apostles which were prophetic. We do our best to fit it all together into a single picture of what the end times will look like. And while it is surely exciting and full of hope and reasons to press on *now* for Christians, it is not all pleasant!

But let’s not delay our investigation of the text itself any longer. In 1st Thess. 5:1 we read, **Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you.** We notice three things in this verse:

1. The expression **times and epochs** (NIV says **times and dates**), referring to the ages (and their duration) and events (and their kinds) leading up to the **day of the Lord**. This is an expression which, I think, Paul borrows from Jesus Himself (from back in Acts 1:7).
2. He calls them **brethren** again. He does this a lot! It is an affectionate term and judging by the amount of emphasis the NT places on love we cannot too often receive encouragement to view one another as different from our unsaved friends. To each other, we are **brethren** and I always love seeing some brother I haven’t seen in a while in the bagel shop, in the supermarket or at a football game. The relationship that exists, universally, between real Christians is a family relationship. They just feel like family, because of what Jesus Christ has done for us.
3. Although they were a “hungry” assembly they already knew as much about the “map” of time as they needed to know—in fact, maybe more than any other ancient church. People may WANT more detail, but essentially we know all we need to know. That’s why I, myself, don’t go to prophecy conferences and get all excited about the latest book on prophecy. I’m not running out and buying all of Jerry Jenkins’ and Tim LaHayes’ *Left Behind* series books (of which I’m told seven have been written and there will now be a four-volume children’s series). I love the Lord’s appearing too but I know all I need to know. It’s soon, I think. And so we need to live as though He could come any time. That’s the Lord I think the Lord wants us to have. It means we

don't get too enamored with the sparkle and the "things" of this world. It means we don't get too upset about this country's ups and downs (as much as we love our country). It means we work hard to get the gospel to folks who either haven't heard it yet or just don't understand it yet.

In verse 2 we read ***For you yourselves know full well*** (indicating that he had instructed them fully in eschatology when he was there) ***that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night.*** Now the phrase **the day of the Lord** refers to the whole period of time that begins with the rapture. In the Old Testament it is predicted in places like Isaiah 13:9-11; Joel 2:28-32; Zeph. 1:14-18; 3:14,15; and most of the Book of Revelation is about this period (Rev. 6-19). As I understand the chronology of the New Testament, the rapture occurs in an instant and with it we exit this age of grace and enter the times of the ***day of the Lord.*** This period concludes with the end of the millennial reign of Jesus Christ. It is a time of judgment, and great blessing too. Things happen in this time to come such as have never happened on the planet before. The Thessalonians knew a lot about this period of time but they longed to know **WHEN** it would begin. They hoped and even believed it might start at any minute—back there in 51 AD. Some people were even quitting their jobs!

Now the day of the Lord will not be a surprise for you and me. Why? Because we won't be on the planet when it starts to unfold. We will have been ***caught up*** and will be ***with the Lord.*** Now let me say that some believers today—some that you and I know and love—are convinced that we will have to go through part of or all of the Tribulation and that we will **NOT** be caught up until later, on into the day of the Lord. I think Scripture indicates that the rapture occurs as the **OPENING EVENT** of the day of the Lord. I think we will not be surprised by its coming, as a ***thief in the night.*** The rest of the world will be **NOT** caught up but caught by surprise! A thief in the night steals something. WE will be what has been taken.

The implications of this are enormous and a lot of speculation has gone into what it will mean if Christian airline pilots are raptured from their pilot seats and Christian train engineers are raptured from their trains, and what will it mean if little children are raptured up and *not their parents* or vice versa, and will it literally be at night (it will be **SOME** place on earth!) and so forth. They are good questions. And here is my well-thought out answer to how does that work? I dunno! But however it works it will be just as the Lord wills it and in not one individual Christian's case will the Lord think to Himself, "Whoops... Made a mistake catching up *that* one—better send him (or her) back." But Paul's point is that for most of the planet, the day of the Lord will be unexpected. And that surely seems to be people's cynical, unbelieving reaction today to this teaching.

We read in verse 3 ***While they are saying "Peace and safety" then destruction will come upon them suddenly like birth pangs upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.*** Three things here to notice: 1) There will be a sense of security. 2) this period begins suddenly and 3) no one living on the planet at that time will be exempt from it. Perhaps this is the result of the antichrist's influence and enchantment and deception. Daniel 9:27 says, ***And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is***

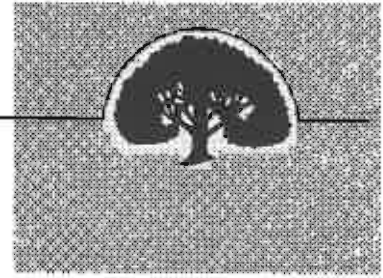
poured out on the one who makes desolate.¹ To most people on the earth, things will be calm and happy. There will be few prayer meetings, few revivals and little sense of need for God's grace. The economy will be strong. Military nervousness will be at an all time low. Those missing from the Rapture will somehow be explained and folks will, amazingly, have gotten over it. But the period of security will end as abruptly as it began (with the Rapture). And the second half of "Daniel's seventieth week" (which *is* the Tribulation) will explode with a fury. It is the time of God's wrath. This is what I meant when I said that the ***day of the Lord*** will not all be pleasant. God will strike the evil and unbelief and wickedness on this planet. The idea of birth pains suggests suddenness, discomfort and inescapability—just as a woman experiences when a birth is immanent.

Now, to the reasonable mind, maybe these predictions seem fantastic, maybe unbelievable. I remind you though that many times in history have seemed fantastic to those who experienced them. The American Civil War was unthinkable to those who lived before it. No one would ever have thought before this century that it was even at all possible for the entire world to be engulfed in a global conflict. A thousand years ago, when William the Conqueror was conquering England, who would have envisioned climbing aboard a rocket ship and traveling to the moon? When the pilgrims stepped out upon Plymouth Rock, could they have thought it possible or articulated the necessary science needed to go to the bottom of the sea, retrieve artifacts of a shipwreck *two miles down* and return to the surface with them? No, things we think to be impossible, given enough time, seem to become quite possible.

In verses 4 and 5 we read ***But you, brethren, are not in darkness that the day should overtake you like a thief for you are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of night nor of darkness.*** He again calls them ***brethren***. It is such a title of affection. It is a comforting thing. The terrors of the Tribulation and the wrath of God need not terrify the Christian—Thessalonian or "Dartmouthian." When a person turns their life over to the Lord Jesus and becomes one of His children, he becomes a ***son of light***. He becomes enlightened by the Holy Spirit. He receives *family status* and that means the promise of rapture. We stand in the blazing sunshine of DAY. We are not walking around in the fog; stumbling in the dusky gloom of confusion. We can SEE and we therefore walk as those who see. Praise God for the light of salvation. I have not earned it. I couldn't even imagine it before it happened. But when you entrust yourself to Jesus, by faith, your whole perspective and your whole reason for living completely change. You look at the future as one who knows what's going to happen! May that transform how we live NOW. May we never recover from the knowledge we have about what is coming. Christians, the

¹The New American Standard Bible, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1977.

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: Exposition of First Thessalonians Lesson 17
Scripture: 1st Thessalonians 5: 4-11
Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Date: November 1st, 1998

Drunk at Night

Introduction Christians know stuff. We seem to have this awareness about what is coming in the future. And I think this is one of the reasons through history that Christians irritate non-Christians. We know stuff about the future. It isn't that we're smarter than non-Christians. And it isn't some kind of secret knowledge like the early Gnostics were going around saying *they* had... We just choose to read our Bibles, to interpret them at face value and to believe what we read. That means we know stuff. And even many unbelievers sense that a real believer has a "sixth sense" about what is coming and what is happening. Because we live in a "different sphere—the difference between night and day" (Bible Knowledge Commentary).

It comes down to this: Christians are called ***sons of the light and sons of the day***. That means we are ***not of night nor of darkness*** (1st Thess. 5:5). Night is a time for sleeping and partying (drunkenness). But Christians know stuff and we are to ***not sleep as others do***. In other words, we are awake. We are aware. We can see the course of things that are happening.

Have you ever had the experience of feeling that your non-Christian friends just don't get it. They go on from day to day, from one activity to another and they seem to be clueless about the meaning of life. Have you ever felt like that? Well, it's because it's true! Even the smartest are asleep, spiritually speaking. They may be the most intelligent people around; they may be well-read. They may be talkers and networkers and well-connected. But as to seeing what is going on in the world spiritually, they are asleep. An asleep person does not see and is not aware of what is happening. They are unconscious.

A little problem here is in telling someone that this is where they're at. And I may well shy away from telling an unbeliever that he is ***asleep*** or that the Bible portrays him as being ***drunk at night***. But the Scripture does not shy away from saying things as they are. The future for unbelievers is not bright. It is a time of wrath that is coming to this planet which shall catch them unawares. Times will change—with the rapture of the church—abruptly and completely. Christians will be gone and it will be like they have been stolen away when no one was looking.

In verse 9 we are told that we, as Christians, are not *destined for wrath*. No, we have been destined, *predestined* in fact, for salvation. Spiritual rescue comes through *our Lord Jesus Christ*. It does not come through any other. He is the only one who died for Christians that we may *live together with Him* (verse 10). The *wrath* referred to here, I believe, is a reference to the time of wrath—the tribulation; the thing most of the Book of Revelation is about. We will not have to endure that time. We will be together with Christ as will all who have ever entrusted themselves to Him.

But there is also a scary implication here. If Christians are *not* destined for wrath—the time for wrath, or the final wrath of God—does that imply that some *have*? There is some justification in Scripture for the doctrine of double-predestination or, as Reformed theologians call it, the doctrine of reprobation. We're not going to investigate that today but sufficient to know that whatever the mysteries of all the ways the sovereign God has chosen to work, the greatest and most wonderful of His works is His free offer of rescue for all and for every one who will simply cling to Christ.

The Exhortations, Therefore...

Now, throughout this section Paul gives several exhortations to these non-wrath destined, saved, awake, light-bearers of Christ. I see five:

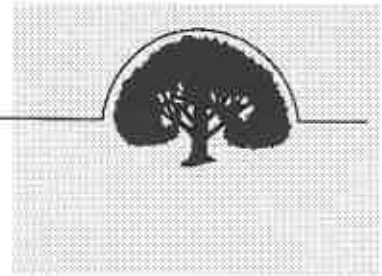
- 1) Verse 6. *So then let us not sleep*. That means let's not be like non-Christians around us, as though drunk at night, spiritually. Let's not allow ourselves to fall under the sleepy, sway of the seductions of the world's way of thinking. What contributes to this in *your* life? Shake it off.
- 2) Verses 6 and 8. *Let us be on the alert and sober*. A second exhortation is for us to be like guards—alert, not intoxicated with the world. Christian alertness means a WATCHFULNESS. This is where those of you who like to follow current events and like to listen to prophetic specialists are to be congratulated. Believers, in 51 AD and now are to heed Paul's words and Peter's as well: *Be of sober spirit, be on the alert, Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour* (1st Peter 5:8). This world is still governed by the prince of the power of the air. The adversary, although not all-powerful and not omnipresent and not all-knowing, is still very present or, as Hal Lindsey used to say, "alive and well on Planet Earth."
- 3) Verse 8. *Equipped for battle*. A third exhortation is like what Paul wrote to the Ephesians (across the pond). We are to don the armor of war. Romans guards were the ones who were awake at night. They wore armor. So should we. What armor? Two pieces: a *breastplate of faith and love* and a helmet of salvation hope. Here is another mention of Paul's favorite Christian virtues: faith, hope and love (see 1st Cor. 13:13). It is the basic jewels, the basic tools, the basic treasures of our faith which arm us against spiritual sleepiness and drunkenness. Having faith in God, loving Him and His and reveling in the understanding of His love for me, and the hope for the future that He gives me in my head (like a helmet).

- 4) Verse 11. **Encourage one another**. Then he tells them to encourage each other. If we don't do this, who will? Encouragement is positive. It is refreshing. It is personal. It is one of the precious and valuable gifts of the Spirit to some believers but all of us are to make it our occupation and *study* to LEARN how to encourage one another. This sounds like Hebrews 10:23-25: ***Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.***
- 5) Verse 11. **Build up one another**. This is very "Ephesian" sounding once again (4:12) and we are to look for ways to edify and build each other up. Along with getting the good news to people who haven't understood it yet, edification is the main occupation of the Christian. Are you looking for ways to build your brethren up?

There were several things this past week which got me a little down—just normal things out in the workaday world. It is easy to lose our joy in Christ. But I do appreciate those brothers and sisters around me who seem more awake than I do, to myself. They are watchmen. They are marching guard duty. They are watching for the enemy to sneak in at night "under the wire" and they are prayer warriors. I appreciate those people. They are our "special forces." If they aren't always the most happy-go-lucky and humorous types, they are always alert, ready for action.

I have never been drunk with alcohol. But I grew up, an only child of two sad-hearted, alcoholic parents. Probably half of all nights from my tenth birthday on both parents were drunk. During the day they functioned remarkably well. But at night they got drunk and on weekend nights they were drunk all night. It taught me much. It marked me. I know what it is to be drunk at night. As children of the day we revel in the sunshine of the Son of God and in the pure light of His saving smile at us!

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: Exposition of First Thessalonians Lesson 18
Scripture: 1st Thessalonians 5: 12,13
Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Date: November 8th, 1998

Appreciating the Instructors

Introduction It is a challenge to imagine the situation in Thessalonica in 51 AD. Our sources for understanding the situation there are limited. But what we have in First and Second Thessalonians tells us a fair amount. When you study these two letters, along with the Book of Acts you get the idea that the new church there in that very cosmopolitan city was restless. The apostles had been there and had set them up but then, of course, left and moved on to other places. They obviously did not stop *thinking* and praying for the Thessalonians. But they were not there and so it was inevitable that some problems should crop up. The implication from 4:11,12 is that one of these problems might have been that there were some who wouldn't work; who wouldn't carry their own weight. The leaders of the church, then, would have had to rebuke those Christians, saying, "Hey, our testimony is at stake here and you guys are damaging it by being lazy and not working." The commentaries suggest the possibility that the elders may have been less than tactful; blunt, direct. The two verses we want to consider today do not occur in a vacuum, although they are often quoted without regard for their context. The context is a young and restless church, in restless times, with a fairly young leadership group. The leaders of the church were almost certainly "elders" and while the job description may not have been as "exact" as ours is today they were still the leaders, the ones the apostles left in charge.

Every organization, spiritual or not, needs someone in leadership and there are different styles and systems of leadership. Some organizations (and some churches) are run by one or two people. Some are run by a group of leaders who are given the responsibility by the rest of the organization to operate and govern the organization. Most churches of our type are run in this way. In some churches the governing board are the deacons. In others (like ours) the governing board are the elders. In our church there are currently six elders (and one elder trainee). Among the six, there is one full-time elder or "pastor" and that is me. The role I play on our board of elders is as leader of a group of leaders. And each of us leaders has his own ministry, mine being busier because this is my livelihood and I have more time. But each is involved in the shepherding of the sheep in some fashion. None of the elders is idle and none are unconcerned about the flock. All care about each of you and all desire that each of you is properly cared for.

Now Paul takes a gentle approach to these Christians. He isn't there and he is finessing a delicate situation from long distance. He says *But we request of you, brethren*. Look with me at Proverbs 15:

***A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger (verse 1).
A hot tempered man stirs up strife, but the slow to anger pacifies contention (vs 18).
And Proverbs 25:15 says *By forbearance a ruler may be persuaded and a soft tongue breaks the bone.****

Just like in our homes and on our jobs, it is a good thing to be careful in the church as to how we speak to each other—especially when there is some point of discipline or correction that needs to be addressed. Paul is here addressing the body about how to relate to their leadership but since he is not there he uses a careful touch.

He describes these leaders as having three functions: 1) diligent labor, 2) government, 3) give instruction.

First, these are hard-working men. They work hard within the flock. More than likely few, if any, were “full time” yet in the sense that we think of the professional ministry (it is still only twenty years since Jesus’ ascension). But they gave a dependable kind of work to the Thessalonian assembly of Christians. Let’s not gloss over the word *labor*. Good elders WORK at their ministry and at the business of furthering the kingdom. It is not much “glory” and there are not many “strokes” and “perks.” People who want to aspire to the ministry—either full time or part-time—need to know that it is hard work. The sheep get dirty. They get lost and need to be found. They need to be fed, and frequently because they get hungry. Sometimes they get sick and need doctoring. A good analogy for the work of shepherding would be some of the tales of James Herriot from *All Creatures Great and Small* fame. It is *labor* and these men worked hard among the Christian sheep of ancient Thessalonica.

Second, these were the men who *had charge over* the Thessalonian Christians. Now, we will quickly cite Peter’s words in his first letter, *Therefore I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed—shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; NOT AS LORDING IT OVER those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock (5:1-3)*. Elders of a church HAVE A CHARGE—a responsibility, a calling from the Lord, Himself, to do this work. In a sense, an elder looks at the sheep and says “they are my sheep” because God wants me to care for them. He doesn’t own them of course and he needs to guard his heart from crossing that mental line. But they are *their* responsibility to govern. This is why the elders spend a lot of time together and out, among you. You are not just random church-goers. You are the sheep of this fold and when you make the decision to join this church, you are saying “these elders are good elders. I trust them and I will pray for them and help them in *their* work in any ways I can.”

Third, he says that these leaders *give instruction*. The elders are responsible for the food that the sheep are given to eat. They give it themselves and they carefully inspect the teaching that others might give within the body. The oversight of the whole instruction program of the church is the responsibility of the elders. It is not just the responsibility of the pastor alone. That is a naïve concept. The pastor needs the teamwork of other godly, mature men, gifted a little differently than he is perhaps, to provide and maintain a good “feeding system.”

Now, instruction can take a number of forms. It involves doctrine which means “how we think and what we believe” about spiritual things. Doctrine is vitally important. We have not made a big deal about doctrine around DBC for some time because several years ago we put in place a very fine doctrinal statement. It is stable and it states well what we believe. Instruction also takes the form of looking at “how to live the Christian life” which encompasses a great many issues. You and I both need continual instruction in this because you and I both are continually changing. A teenager needs one kind of instruction on the Christian life but when the teen becomes a “20something” his needs change. When he starts a family his needs change again. When he reaches mid-life his needs change again. When he becomes a senior citizen his needs change again. We never outgrow our need for instruction. But I also believe that we should work hard to keep the instruction that we give interesting. And I am thankful to the Lord because I think we have one of the best teaching staffs in the entire area in this little church!

Then he tells them HOW to relate to the leaders (which we are assuming is the elders) in three ways: 1) appreciate them 2) esteem them and 3) live in peace towards them. The word translated *appreciate* is literally the word *know* in the Greek. It means first to ACKNOWLEDGE the leaders—to KNOW who they are. And it means to respect them and to appreciate them. Appreciating someone is more than a simple statement “I appreciate you” although that’s a great place to start. But leader appreciation also means telling them *specifics* about what you appreciate. It means supporting them in their ministries and *receiving* from them the instruction and oversight and labor that they offer. If an elder is teaching a class, do you come? If an elder wants to meet with you, either to get to know you or to speak to you about something specifically, do you accommodate that? If the elders call a special series of meetings or a special event, do you *appreciate them* by supporting it?

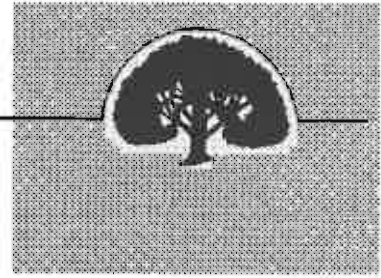
We are also told to *esteem them very highly in love because of their work* (5:13). I believe we work very hard at making sure our elders don’t think too highly of themselves and keeping them humble. I regularly hear the caution: “you elders better not lord it over us.” But while that is always something to watch out for (and I do believe there are churches which err in this), we need to work harder at ESTEEMING the elders and the text says to do so *very highly in love*. Do you pray every week for the elders of this church? Do you talk to them? Do you speak to them respectfully and do you manifest affection for them. Their work is sometimes hard. It is spiritual work, the work of prayer and doing battle. Do you think of the men who have voluntarily taken up this charge with esteem?

Last here, he says to them the simple statement: *Live in peace with one another.* The first application that comes to my mind is that there should almost never be church splits. A rebellious or frustrated faction in a church violates this verse. For sake of our testimony, for sake of avoiding the grieving of the Holy Spirit and for sake of our own spiritual sense of well-being and happiness we need to promote peace and unity in the church. When the leadership is the issue—what do we do? You go out of your way to make peace. You concede TO them what is not really a life and death issue and you submit in a Christ-like way to their government. No, you don't passively let them bully you. But your job is to bless them for doing the work they willingly do, and guard the peace of the church. THAT is a Spirit-filled person, I don't care how many foreign languages he can pray in! Notice also that this verse includes the phrase *one another*. It is the elders job too—perhaps FIRST—to promote peacefulness and harmony and unity in the church. They set the pace and the flavor of the church. If they are a contentious, cantankerous lot then that will “trickle down” to the body too.

Let me conclude with some words about pastors in particular which would be the more typical thing you would hear about these two verses. Pastors are a little different than the rest of the elders. You, as the body, and the elders need to “learn how to have a pastor.” It is a learning process, just as the BEING of a pastor is a learning process. Some of you will not be in this church long enough to learn how to have a pastor. But if you stay in one place long enough you learn to appreciate the strengths of a pastor and you learn to understand his weaknesses. Christians need to learn this. The attrition rate for pastors in this country today is extremely high. Many men are leaving the ministry and not so many are entering it. The job of “Minister” has become complex. There are many hats that a pastor is now expected to wear. But no one can wear them all. The body needs to think about this and talk about it too.

We are entering the last section of this letter and now we are going to see some “rapid fire” exhortations, all of which are very practical. In the coming weeks, we will go through each one of these carefully.

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: Exposition of First Thessalonians Lesson 19
Scripture: 1st Thessalonians 5: 14
Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Date: November 15th, 1998

Four Quick Priorities

Introduction This is a message, like most of these dealing with First Thessalonians, which deals with living the Christian life. In other words, this is for Christians. If you are not yet a Christian you may wonder, "what's the big deal?" You may feel, "we do the best we can, go with the flow, don't make too many waves and pretty much gauge our behavior by how other people are behaving." But a Christian, a follower of Jesus, uses the Word of God to gauge how he's doing. We're not just shooting in the dark, navigating in the fog, flying by the seat of our pants with the subject of "ethics."

We hear a lot about cheating in the schools. A Christian student would understand that cheating is a violation of both the eighth and the tenth commandments (see Exodus 20).

But as Christians we can go back to the Scripture and see the plan for how to live and how to treat people. So, this message is basically going to be about that.

But it was brought to my attention on two different occasions this week that people who are just beginning to explore Christianity will not necessarily profit right away from sitting in a church and hearing a sermon on Christian ethics. And I have been thinking about that; about what a "seeker" first needs when they walk into a Christian church building. They need to be noticed and welcomed in a warm but not overbearing way. They need to be extended the courtesy of a good seat, given a bulletin with the order of service printed out sort of like a roadmap of the service. They might need someone to show them where in the hymnbook to turn for the hymns and where in the Bible to turn for the Scripture reading. They might like someone to ask them a question or two about themselves and not just be rushed on past in the aisle. They may enjoy an invitation for lunch or dinner that night. They need the Christians here to show some interest; to demonstrate that Jesus is real and somehow makes a difference in behavior, even if just for a moment or two. That's what a non-Christian who visits our church needs on that first Sunday. (Other visitors might enjoy that kind of treatment too...) But this is a message for Christians today, and I wanted to warn you!

Now, we are coming to the end of this great letter of Paul to the Thessalonian Christians. In front of us are a number of "rapid fire" exhortations. Today we want to consider the first four which are in 1st Thess. 5:14. Keep in mind that he has been talking

about leadership in the church, both how to DO it and how to RECEIVE it. He has told the body that they need to appreciate their leaders (which we are assuming were the “elders” of the assembly). Now he gives some exhortations, some *urgings* that apply to *them*, the elders, but which I believe also apply to the body at large—not *only* to the elders. The unity of the body and the sense of order and discipline of the church are the responsibility of every church member, not only the leadership. It is good for all of us to look at the whole church, and say, “This is my church and I am concerned for every aspect of it.”

The first is for the leaders, primarily and perhaps the body at large generally, to ***admonish the unruly***. The Greek word for “unruly” is a military term, used only here in the New Testament. It usually refers to a soldier who does not keep rank. Most commentators envision that Paul is thinking of those people who are deliberately *idle*, who will not work and who will not pull their own weight. These, he says, need to be admonished and warned NOT to be that way. Another translation of “unruly” would be *undisciplined*. There is to be a sense of order and protocol in the body of Christ., I believe this is going to be harder and harder for churches to maintain in the last days. We read in 2nd Timothy 3:2 that ***in the last days...men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God...*** Sounds like a time of “unruliness” doesn’t it? And the church in the end times will feel the influence of the end times, I think, and therefore need to work extra hard to admonish the undisciplined, the unruly and the defiant.

A practical note here: although we maybe don’t like to think about the self-discipline of the church too much, we need to remember that when it is necessary, it needs to be direct. By that I mean, if a person is unruly they, themselves deserve to be directly confronted—not their spouses, their children or some other person. If a person is out of line and disorderly in some fashion then he needs to be directly admonished or warned or maybe just instructed. Any less direct approach will usually be counterproductive.

The second exhortation or priority is to ***encourage the faint-hearted***. There are almost always going to be some people in the body—particularly if the body is growing and reaching new people with the Gospel—who are fearful and afraid. For whatever reasons there are those who are Christians who are worriers. Paul maybe has in view especially those who have lost loved ones, or who are new in the faith and wonder if they’re really saved. I find that as a pastor, these are two frequent issues that people need reassurance about. Am I really saved? Does the Lord really love me? Is my husband, wife, child, parent with the Lord? We need encouragement about these things. It is the job of the leaders and the body at large (particularly those gifted to encourage and build up) to come alongside those who might faint! Paul and the other apostles have a tender heart for the plight of Christians. Contrary to what the world may think of the early Christians (or modern ones) the apostles were very loving men, by and large. They had spent a lot of time with Jesus and they often reflected how He is. The Savior cares about the faint-hearted and so must we.

The third urging of Paul here is to *help the weak*. Now, a lot could be put under this heading and mentioned. But at least we can say that those who are weak need to feel that they are not alone and that strong Christians are there to hold on to them. The commentators suggest that Paul has in view especially *spiritual* weakness rather than only physical weakness. Spiritual weakness, they say, which would imply *moral* weakness. What is our response to a Christian who admits to being weak in the area of anger or avarice or fearfulness or lust? Is it Christ-like to spank them or to take them out behind the woodshed? Or is it Christ-like to help them? We are told here to *help the weak*.

This is perhaps the core reason why I believe so much in the basic principles of Promise Keepers. I know that Promise Keepers has become a little controversial because of some of their reported links. I don't know about that too much nor do I care too much. All I know is that the original book targeted some basic needs for men to help each other. And I could plainly see that this emphasis was ministering greatly to a lot of men. Whatever we think about Promise Keepers as an official *entity* we need to glean the good from it and I believe a big part of that was the message for men to explore better ways to support and help each other in an increasingly seductive and destructive culture.

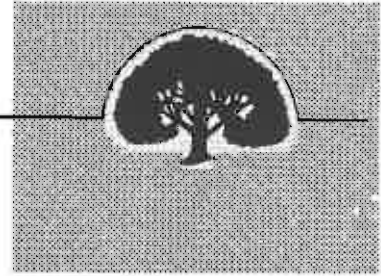
The fourth quick priority for Christians and especially for the leadership of any Christian assembly is to *be patient with all men*. Can you think of why? Because that's the way our Savior is, whom we are asking people to entrust themselves to. He was patient and not only with His immediate disciples. Paul told the Thessalonians to exercise patience, a long, long fuse, a longsuffering and forbearing spirit with everyone around us. That means with the antagonistic journalist, with the self-focused neighbor, with the arbitrary beureaucrat, with the insulting educator. It means that in Christ we make it a PRIORITY to be patient with each other and also with those on the outside of the church. I was gratified when some time ago one of the local Board of Health members said to me, "you people have been very patient." That's our job description as Christians. No qualification; no exceptions. That is the kind of thing which makes us different from non-Christians. It is part of what love means (see 1st Corinthians 13:4). In the end times it may be harder and harder for us to manifest this but we must highlight it. Practiced patience may speak louder about the veracity of our faith than all our evangelistic bumper stickers and radio spots!

You know, someone who doesn't really know Jesus yet might find these ethical standards nitpicky and smarmy. But when a person has met Jesus and grown to love Him he wants to be like Him. And Jesus' word gets right in our face and tells us directly: disallow idleness and poor discipline; make encouragement and strengthening the weak a hallmark of what you're about; exercise forbearance and forgiveness. These speak louder than words. They smell good to people. They make the body of Christ a good place to be part of; a haven from the world. May the Chief Shepherd herd us towards pastures like this.

Ethical Priorities for Christians

- ✓ **Disallow idleness/unruly discipline**
- ✓ **Make encouragement and strengthening the weak a hallmark of our church**
- ✓ **Exercise forbearance and forgiveness**

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: Exposition of First Thessalonians Lesson 20
Scripture: 1st Thessalonians 5: 15, 16
Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Date: November 29th, 1998

More Quick Priorities

Introduction This week we lost our brother Cliff Sparrow. Our loss is heaven's gain, of course, but still—it makes us think about the things that are really important. A death close at hand forces us to get back in touch with the really “core” things in our faith; the bedrock convictions we have about life and what it's about...

As I look at this thing we call “the Christian life” it seems to me that there are a few strategic moments or times that we face, which are very *telling* about the authenticity of our faith, or not. There are just a few basic kinds of challenges which *reveal* a lot about the realness or genuineness of our claim to possess a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. We say that we know Him and we sing like we know Him. As I observe it then, there look to me to be some fundamental areas of living which will show if we are really in touch with Jesus. The rubber meets the road with things like how we respond when faced with death, or with the death of a loved one; with things like who we like to spend time with, how we treat our Bibles, how we spend our money and today, with this next passage in 1st Thess. 5 we have to look at human conflict.

Human conflicts are inevitable. There are always going to be clashes, misunderstandings and hostilities between fallen people (which is all of us), as long as we are living in this dispensation—that is, until Jesus Christ returns. And the proof of a true follower of Jesus Christ is not that he never experiences conflict. It is inevitable. But we must admit that as Christians (as Christians who have a high opinion of the nature and the importance of Scripture), we are sometimes confused that conflict should happen between us, since we say that we take the Bible so seriously. 1) Christians divorce each other and we say, “Why?” 2) Churches split down the middle and we say, “How can this happen?”

3) Almost twenty years ago I knew a church where the pastor (and his board) hired that pastor's best friend to be his associate pastor. Everyone thought it would be a wonderful partnership—two men, each very gifted and long-time best friends. It lasted two years and ended in great turmoil and depression. We scratch our heads and wonder, “This is not the way it is supposed to be between Christian brethren, equally under the sacrificial blood of the Son of God...”

It is for this reason that I think that it is one of our greatest tasks to learn how, NOT to avoid conflict altogether (for that is futile), but to learn what is the Christlike way to *deal*

with it when it happens. And it is not an easy lesson, or set of lessons, at least for some of us.

Some of us were indelibly marked by home situations growing up that were steeped in conflict.

Some of us are by nature “hot tempered,” for whatever reason.

Some of us will smell a conflict coming a mile away (or think that we do) and so we isolate ourselves behind a stone-hard wall of privacy and caution so that we never will be exposed to conflict.

Learning to negotiate conflict and manage it in the power of the Holy Spirit is not an easy task but it is an important task. It is a basic part of what the Holy Spirit is working in Christians to make us like Jesus. I have always been intrigued by Jesus’ words to His Father in John 17:21a when He asked that all of His disciples (vs. 20) ***may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me; and I in Thee...*** My former professor, Ed Blum, says that Jesus was “praying for a unity of love, a unity of obedience to God and His will, and a united commitment to His will.”¹ I’m sure Jesus foresaw that after his crucifixion and even after His ascension that conflicts would occur between His disciples. He wanted His disciples to be one, to be together and to enjoy a loving feeling of being on the same team. But conflict between Christians destroys unity. It sets up “camps;” you know: “my camp” and “your camp.” In Thessalonica there may have been the Camp of the Idle and the Camp of the Hard-working Contributor. There may have been the Camp of the Leaders or elders, and the Camp of the Followers. There may have been the Camp of Growing and the Camp of the Stagnant. But whatever elements of conflict compelled Paul to say what he wrote in verse 15, he said ***See that no one repays another with evil for evil but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all men.*** Oneness in a church or in a family is blasted if a person retaliates for something done to them that was unjust or hurtful. An action taken against you which was unprovoked, intended to injure you or even just an insult, is something which Paul terms *evil*. And sometimes we absorb evil actions from each other. That is hard to imagine because we usually reserve the word “evil” for “Those Outside,” for the world. But Christians are capable of inflicting *evil* upon each other because we are still struggling with sin. And any sin is evil. Period. So, IF you take a hit from someone—again I say, either in the church or in the family, how do you respond? Do you immediately start to plot something which lets you “get even.” Or is there another way?

You know, the Jews of Paul’s day might have responded with “Well, what about Exodus 21 (vss. 12-25) or what about Deuteronomy 19:21 or what about Leviticus 24:19?” Aren’t we licensed to extract an eye, if someone does me the evil of injuring my eye? But the scribes of Jesus’ day had distorted the commandments’ original purpose (to restrain people from punishing someone beyond *equal* retaliation) to *justify* personal revenge. They used the civil law of the Torah to justify ventilating anger and the desire for “getting even.” For Christians, nothing is more inappropriate. And when tempers run short—which I am telling you is inevitable for any group of Christians, sometimes—the whole group is responsible² (***See that...***) to for seeing that revenge is not sought. When we run out of patience we need to have the courage to admit that is what happened, and then we need to police the vengeance urge!

Dr. Paul Meier told us in our class on Pastoral Counseling in seminary that the number one cause of clinical depression in this country is holding grudges. The Scripture tells us (Ephesians 4:26,27) ***Be angry and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity.*** The devil will take any opportunity we give him to escalate conflict, to deepen hurt. Grudges are a taking-of-vengeance; they are a secret violation of God's love.

In fact, Paul goes further in this verse and says, ***ALWAYS seek after that which is good for one another...*** Well, what would THAT be? What is good for my brother or for my sister? That which builds them up. That which ministers Christ to him or to her. That which gives them joy. But, you say, what if they don't *deserve* my doing something good for them?" To that we have to say, since when is *anything* we do based upon earning it? Isn't our whole message grace and mercy? Well, here is where it really comes into play. Yes, we are to be do-gooders. We are to seek after that which is beneficial, helpful and edifying for one another regardless of who deserves it or not. That is the way Jesus was and is, we say. We are to be just like that.

And I am afraid that the responsibility for this do-gooding doesn't end at the boundaries of the church. Paul also says ***and for all men.*** In other words it was the Thessalonian Christians' responsibility to repay evil with good. Man oh man, that doesn't feel natural, does it? But if you're not sure then check out what Paul wrote to the Roman believers (12:17-21) who lived in the "capital of paganism", which sort of sounds like an expanded version of 1st Thess. 5:15, doesn't it?

Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord. 'But if your enemy is hungry, feed him; and if he is thirsty give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

See also 1st Peter 2:18-23 and 3:9...

So how do we do this? How do we honor this command of Paul to the Thessalonian Christians? If it feels so natural and right to get even with people, how do we resist that and instead go out of our way to seek good for people? Well, the answer is simple: we can't. The desire for revenge is too strong and too seductive. We cannot, that is, except by the empowerment of the Holy Spirit and only a true Christian has the accommodation and indwelling presence OF the Holy Spirit. In the power of the Spirit we can do lots of things that we were heretofore UNABLE to do.

We can love when the natural thing is to hate.

We can forgive when we want to remember.

We can assist someone whom we don't think *deserves* assistance because we are reminded by the Spirit of how undeserving we were of His rescue.

1st Peter 1:3,4 tells us that God gives the ability to escape the natural tendencies of the old nature! By grace we **become partakers of the divine nature**. That means, dear ones, that we can actually do “divine” things we were previously incapable of doing—like forgive and giving freely good things to people.

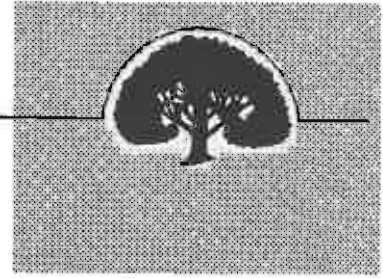
I think it is interesting that the very next thought Paul had after this was to tell them to **Rejoice always...** Joy comes naturally in a community where there is do-gooding for each other going on and where people are forgiving each other and **bearing with each other**. In a place where people are not writing down the offenses they had absorbed, where they are not using their energies to plot “getting even” and who instead, are using their energies on **seeking what’s good for each other** it is an easy place to feel joy in! It’s natural and easy for him to tell them to “rejoice always” when the environment—at least among the Christians—is a place where everyone is working on forgiveness; on seeking good even when there has been hurt and injury.

So what about it? Who has injured you, either within these walls or out in the community? This is where our “profession of faith” becomes “possession of faith.” Are we *really* Bible-believing Christians or will we default back to getting even and nursing grudges. Will we euphemize distrust by saying, “I’m going to be wise and watch my back...”? Or will we seek the filling of the Spirit and try to be supernatural in our relating to each other and to people on the outside? May the Savior, who willingly took all of our offenses upon Himself, give us insight into this beyond this morning. May we be an assembly which polices itself and **DISALLOWS** vengeance and *insists* upon goodness flowing out of our church...

¹ Dr. Edwin Blum, in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, N.T. edition, p. 333

² J. E. Frame, ICC commentary on First Thessalonians and Robert L. Thomas in the *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: Exposition of First Thessalonians Lesson 21
Scripture: 1st Thessalonians 5: 17-22
Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Date: December 6th, 1998

Spiritual Discernment

Introduction As we come down to the end of this letter of Paul, here's where this message is going today: *we need to be the kind of people who talk with God a lot.* That is because God *wants* our fellowship so much. He is like the Mom or Dad whose kid is away at college and as soon as they hear the kid's voice on the phone they say, "Gee, it's good to hear your voice." We also need to talk with God a lot because we need the benefits that doing so brings to us. Of all people on the earth, Christians need the good things that consistent prayer gives. Here is the main idea of the passage before us in 1 Thess. 5:17-22. *By keeping open lines for communication with the Lord, and giving Him thanks and appreciation when you're talking with Him, enables us to be filled with His Spirit and therefore to have sharply focused discernment, seeing clearly what is good and what is evil.* I have entitled this message "spiritual discernment" because that is something we need and it is something that we, as Christians, are uniquely eligible to receive. It is a "bennie" for us that no one else on the planet can have, as we can have it. Many people have financial discernment, political discernment, artistic discernment and so forth. But as believers who speak often with our Lord, we can enjoy an insight into things which evaluates reality from the bigger picture—from *outside* this world. That is an incredible benefit and privilege and it hinges on our prayer lives.

In Luke 11:1 it is interesting to see that evidently Jesus had a regular place in which He would spend time with His heavenly Father. That is a good idea. It's a good idea to designate a special place in your mind where you go to pray. It might be a place in your house; it might be in your car at a certain time that you're regularly there. It might be outside someplace or while you're on a regularly scheduled walk. It is also a good idea to have a hymnal or songbook or to listen to a favorite praise tape as part of getting alone with the Lord. There are all sorts of particular ways you can "customize" your prayer time. But you and I need to talk with the Lord a lot. We need to have conversation with Him and act like we're really taking seriously the places in the Word that speak of prayer. In Luke 18:1-8 there is the story of the unjust judge. Why did Jesus tell that story to His disciples? He told them about the woman and the judge so that they would understand that if a corrupt judicial and political figure can be moved to act, how much more can their heavenly Father be moved to act? He is receptive to what's on your mind. He cares about what you're caring about and He desires your speaking with Him.

Now, I want to say something about prayer that bugs me. It is the word, itself, "prayer" or rather that I fear the word "prayer" has had its main meaning changed. Sometimes I flinch when I hear the word used today... I was watching a well-known television evangelist the other night and he was saying that "prayer is the thing that cleanses us from sin." And he had a huge stack of thousands of printed prayer requests (supposedly sent to him by his audience) in front of him that he was praying over. As he spoke about prayer he quoted several individual Bible verses, and they flashed on the screen, one by one, making the whole deal look very "biblical." But as he spoke *about* prayer I heard very little that was really right. It was all as if prayer is some kind of independent power source that we just need to tap into, somehow, and then we'll get power.

Prayer is talking to God and trying to listen to Him. It is communication with Him, but doing that communication on His terms—that is, through the Lord Jesus, our one and great high priest, and in the Holy Spirit, who is given to believers as a pledge and seal. Prayer is expression of your thoughts, feelings, dreams, frustrations, praises and thanksgivings directly to the one God of the universe. It is being real with Him; very, very real; so real that there is nothing that you cannot talk over with Him.

Now, in 1st Thess. 5:16 he had said ***rejoice always*** and then in vs. 17 he says ***pray without ceasing***. I take it that as joy comes from resisting the desire for vengeance and retaliation, so it is natural to pray when we are joyful and close to the Lord. ***Without ceasing*** of course, means to always be in an attitude and in a state of readiness for prayer. This is not so hard. I love my wife and my girls. I want to always be ready to talk to them. We don't talk, literally, "without ceasing." But we're always ready to communicate, I hope. I talk to Renée early in the morning; we talk while we're getting ready to leave in the morning. Sometimes we talk by phone during the day. When we meet at home in the evening we update each other on the day's events. We talk around the dinner table. Often we get in the car then to go someplace and we talk then too. Then we often talk some at bedtime. The conversation is frequent, though not continual. This is all the Lord wants from us. And He promises to give us discernment in the process.

Welded right to verse 17 is vs. 18. As we are talking with Him we are to give thanks for everything that is going on, even the hard things. Now, I don't think the Lord is looking for us to say, "Oh Lord, I'm really miserable today because lots of bad things are happening, but how I thank you for them..." No, He isn't looking for us to *enjoy* any bad thing that happens. But we are to have the opinion and the conviction that God is sovereign and that He is in loving control of my *whole* life, even the episodes of Bad.

I love how Larry Crabb puts it: "We all rage at God, demanding He do more than He is doing. He remains quietly unthreatened, saddened beyond words that we think Him cruel or indifferent, but unswervingly committed to the course He has set. He refuses to redesign the plot of the book, having already written the last chapter and knowing that the ending is very, very good, and THAT EVERY THREAD IN OUR STORY IS NECESSARY TO THAT CONCLUSION."¹

You and I need to really appreciate what Paul then says in verse 18. He says that giving thanks in everything is **God's will for you in Christ Jesus**. Do you want to know what God's will is for your life? Here it is, in black and white. In everything give thanks. Be appreciative for the plan of God for you that is unfolding around you, day in and day out, with each passing year. You see, in Christ, your life is not a random roll of the dice. It is part of a grand plan. Therefore you can and need to give Him thanks for each thing that you have and for each thing that happens. And to do that you would need to have confidence that He is in control. And that is called "faith."

In verses 19-21 we have this interesting exhortation then, first, not to **quench the Spirit**, then to not **despise prophetic utterances** (whoa! How do we apply THIS verse in a non-charismatic church?) Well, at the time of this letter there were clearly prophets ministering. It was an office in the early church and it was a spiritual gift. But then as now it was possible for Christians to get out of balance in these things. Some people were so excited about the second coming of Jesus that they unbalanced about that. Some were constantly looking to prophetic utterances because they're so "NOW" and so supernatural. The tendency in Thessalonica was to embrace such things uncritically or to categorically reject them outright. To foolishly just believe anyone who SAYS "Thus says the Lord" was to quench, to *douse* the Spirit. That is because a person who fraudulently claimed to be the voice of the Lord was by definition misleading people, distracting them and therefore diverting them from really hearing the Spirit. On the other hand to say that God was not ever leading or speaking in a special way through something someone was also to put out the fire and kill the warmth of what the Spirit was doing. Because maybe the Lord, in His sovereignty was really communicating, supernaturally, urgently, through a prophetic utterance. If they just said, "God doesn't do that," and He was...

Now, getting back to the original idea of this message (God wants us to talk to Him a lot), if we ARE in frequent prayer we gain a sense of discernment about these things. If you listen to Rush Limbaugh on the radio frequently, or to James Dobson or to Howard Stern then if you received an alleged letter from them, you would have the background of familiarity to know if what was in this letter was consistent with how you know they think, act, the kind of vocabulary they use, etc. Being a man or a woman of prayer familiarizes you with the difference between good and evil. You can tell when someone is saying something (maybe even religious stuff—maybe *especially* religious stuff) whether that something is good or evil.

But how we need to become a people of prayer. We need to get together for prayer in groups more but we need to individually become people of much prayer. And the discernment we receive is not just related to judging prophetic utterances. If I am walking closely with the Lord, He gives me spiritual discernment about things like the entertainment I'm going after; the rightness or wrongness of civil and political trends and legislation; the associations I'm keeping. He lets me see with His eyes and feel with His heart about a great many things because, after all, He *wants* to communicate His will and His very nature to me, personally. Part of becoming like Jesus is to see as Jesus sees.

Two years ago when we introduced the idea in our church of a “50 Day Spiritual Adventure” about 25 adults “signed on” and enjoyed those eight weeks. Together, we learned a little motto called “The Listening With Jesus Prayer:”

Lord, I long to be part of a caring church family. But often I’m not sensitive to what people are really saying. Please teach me to listen with Your ears of compassion... Lord, help me respond with a heart that cares the way You do.²

If you and I were to be somehow able to walk with Jesus through the North Dartmouth Mall, I wonder what we would learn from Him... I think we would be very attentive to what He said, remarks He might make about people we passed, what and how stores were advertising. He might speak to someone or do something for someone and we would be fascinated, wouldn’t we? By walking with Him we would see what is important to Him and we would *discern* the good from the bad. That is what prayer does for us. It gives us spiritual discernment and we desperately need that! We need to think as He does, to evaluate the world around us and the society in which we live and the people we have in contact AS HE DOES.

¹ Larry Crabb, *Finding God*, p. 187.

² *The Church You’ve Always Longed For*, Adult Journal, p.11; 1996, Chapel of the Air Ministries

**KEEPING OPEN
LINES OF
COMMUNICATION
WITH THE LORD**

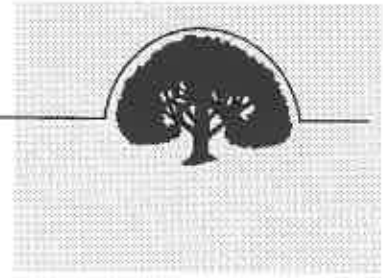
**WITH
THANK-
FULNESS
AND
APPRE-
CIATION**

**ENABLES
BEING
SPIRIT-FILLED**

DISCERNMENT

**TO
CLEARLY
SEE
GOOD &
EVIL**

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: Exposition of First Thessalonians Lesson 22 [of 22]
Scripture: 1st Thessalonians 5: 23-28
Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Date: December 13th, 1998

Final Priorities

Introduction If we were to poll the body here and ask, “What is the purpose of the sermon in worship?” I think we would hear things like, “instruction,” “encouragement,” “correction,” “the Gospel,” and “just tell me about Jesus.” But another of the things a good sermon is supposed to do for us is to remind us of what’s important. Sometimes we learn new things in a sermon; ideas or doctrines that we didn’t know before. (Some of you here today still need basic instruction in Christian doctrine and I hope we never get to the place where we have no one here who needs that!) But other times, maybe *most* of the time it is edifying to simply be reminded and re-challenged about all of the basic elements of living the Christian life (that are easy to forget during the week.) Studying First Thessalonians is great for that.

Back at the beginning of 1st Thessalonians we read:

We give thanks to God always, for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; 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 (1:2,3).

At the beginning of this letter and at its end, Paul is praying for them. It gets me thinking that prayer is a big part of the Christian life. Even when we can’t think of specific things to pray for, for each other, we can always mimic him in the kinds of things HE prayed for. There is always room to thank the Lord and tell Him that we appreciate the people He has brought into our lives. And to talk with Him about the ministries that people have had for you and for your family. When you are aware that someone has worked hard in the faith—thank the Lord for them. When you are aware that someone has sustained some trial and some tribulation and yet continues to praise and serve the Lord, thank the Lord for them. This is not trivial—God is present, right there, when you do that and He welcomes that kind of prayer.

This first letter of Paul to the Thessalonian believers has focused our attention on the imminent return of Jesus Christ to this planet, on sexual purity,

on respect for leaders in the church, on loving one another, on taking personal responsibility for your own livelihood, on prayer, on rejoicing in Christ even at such times like when we lose loved ones in the faith. All of these are basic priorities for believers. Now, as we get down to the end of this letter Paul expresses his wishes for them a final time. This is the kind of prayer that was characteristic of the apostle's devotional life.

To begin with, he wishes for them to keep on growing in their Christian lives. You never get to the end of the maturing process—there is always more that needs sanctifying. But it is a **God of peace** whom you're involved with. He is not the God of judgment for you. He is the reconciled one and the God who wants you to have the filling of spiritual peacefulness; the sense that hostilities between you and He are ceased. And really a main point of this whole book (which admittedly might get lost among all the other "points") is that it is the **God of peace** who both initiates and completes our faith. When a person wakes up one morning and finds that they now have real faith in Jesus Christ, it is the God of peace who put it there. When that same person arrives at their final week in this life, surveys his or her heart and finds that faith in Christ is still there and that in fact it has marvelously grown over the years, it is the God of peace who made that happen too. Paul prays and says, "Lord, for these wonderful Thessalonian believers, complete the process for them."

I don't think he is implying that it is possible to actually BECOME "entirely sanctified" in this life. That is a doctrine which suggests that it is actually possible in THIS life to reach a state where, for a while at least, you are completely free of sin in your life. I don't think that is exactly what Paul is asking God to do for the Thessalonians but that has been taught by some famous Christians over the centuries (notably John Wesley). But I think he is praying that, for these particular believers (and we have no names here as we have in others of his letters), that God will take them through to the "finish line," that God would *invade* every area of their lives—their "inward" side (**spirit and soul**) and their "outward" side (**body**). You see, if you're going to walk with God and really be a Christian you have to be willing to admit God to every corner, every closet, every aspect of your life. God is not at all interested in being given *partial* admission. He did not sacrifice His Son only to have *part* of our lives in return. Such a response would cheapen the value of Christ's death. No, He wants (and Paul knows this and so he prays for it) to be recognized as Lord of our whole being. Paul wants us to be ready to appear, face to face, before Jesus and He has been working on *every* area of our lives.

- ♦ That means that at some point we surrendered our physical and hormonal and genetic and medical and recreational lives to Him (that's the **body**).

- ♦ And at some point, “O Thessalonians, I hope that the Lord invades your psychological side” and they grant the God of peace admittance to their thought lives and to how they emotionally feel about things.
- ♦ And at some point—we would expect very early in their faith—they would feel the need to develop and renew their spiritual relationship with God through the means of grace that God has given by which to do that (Bible study, prayer, fellowship, worship).

God wants IN to every corner of your life.

- ♦ He wants in to your finances—that’s part of your mind and your body.
- ♦ He wants in to the decision-making you do about personal relationships and male-female relationships.
- ♦ He wants in to your *personality* and whether you are moody or bouncy and how you govern those things.
- ♦ He wants in, so He can make you more Christlike, to your daily *faith*—how much you are willing to rely on Him TODAY and for what things.

Paul’s biggest hope for these people was for them to arrive at the second coming of Christ, blameless. This is a little daunting. It is a big prayer request but I want you to know that what Paul was asking for was and is possible. As you turn over more and more of your life to the Lord, He can make Christlikeness *happen* in your life. You may feel powerless. You may feel addicted. You may feel worn out and depressed. That’s OK—God already *knows* you can’t do a THING on your own. Do you see verse 24? ***Faithful is He who calls you, and He will also bring it to pass.*** He’s not asking you to breath life into yourself. He will respond to your outcry for help to made more like Jesus Christ. You can depend on Him to do so if you will keep pursuing Him.

Then in verses 25-27 he gives three last requests or exhortations:

- ♦ Pray for the apostles. Christian missionaries and significant leaders *need* to pray for them. When was the last time you spent an entire prayer time in your life just for missionaries or just for Billy Graham or James Dobson or Elisabeth Eliot? This is a heart-felt request not for money or time or anything else but prayer support. Sometimes we are willing to write a check or attend a meeting but we are unwilling to take the effort and the time and the trouble to remember to pray for those who are on the front lines.
- ♦ Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss. This was a Jewish custom, maybe more often than not between male brothers and female sisters—of affection and real love. Between Christians there should be a willingness to show affection. I think we need to be careful about doing things that would stir up lust between us but at the same time I don’t think we need to be stoic out of paranoia either. Jesus said outsiders would identify us as His followers by the love we have for one another. And some times you ought to be able to SEE that.
- ♦ Last he says ***I adjure you by the Lord to have this letter read to all the brethren.*** This is an interesting verse: Paul is not there. He cannot control who hears his words and he wants no one to miss out. His exhortations and teachings and affectionate greetings are for *every* member of the Thessalonian church. This is another example of how you can’t have too much communication. It is always good to enhance how

much we know about our missionaries, for instance. I praise the Lord for all the means we have to communicate with each other today.

With the final verse in the book I want you to grab hold of a basic theological fact. Jesus Christ is full of grace and willingness to give us so much that we do not deserve. Grace is “getting what you don’t deserve.” Paul wishes that the premier thing they believe about Jesus is that He is gracious. No member of a Christian church should ever be misled or misinformed as to that fact. (*May His grace be with **you all***). Grace is the message we each were startled by when we came to Christ. It is the message we bear to new people now. It ought to characterize our whole ministry. Grace should energize and renew our relationships internally, between the leaders of the church and between every age group. We ought to be full of forgiveness; giving each other lots of slack and chances to start over again. Our marriages ought to be full of grace. Our parenting should be full of grace. Our relationship with the community and with the neighbors ought to be full of grace.

As we think about how soon the second coming may in fact be, let’s get busy with the important stuff—the 50-Day Adventure will be a good time to renew our minds. I hope all of you will participate. These are the things it would be nice to be busy with if we were to awaken one night soon to hear **Lord descend with a shout**.