

**BECOMING**

**A**

**MATURE**

**CHRISTIAN**

By Ron Christian



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I THESSALONIANS  
BECOMING A MATURE CHRISTIAN

DEDICATED TO:

BISHOP ELMER PARSONS

- a godly leader and joyous saint of God -

whose mature faith I have  
sought to imitate for many years.

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BECOMING A MATURE CHRISTIAN

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Chapter 1

The Gospel -

Received And Proclaimed!

I Thessalonians 1:1-10

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The Gospel - Received And Proclaimed

O U T L I N E

SCRIPTURE: I Thessalonians 1:1-10

TEXT: "For they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God." (v. 9)

INTRODUCTION: What are the fundamentals of conversion? How does conversion take place? What are the fruits or results of conversion? These are some of the questions which we must answer.

The power of the Gospel to change lives is declared in I Thessalonians 1:1-10. We must look at Paul's description of Conversion as shown in chapter 1. Note four things about Conversion: (1) Fundamentals of Conversion; (2) Foundation of Conversion; (3) Fruit of Conversion; (4) Fulfillment of Conversion.

PROPOSITION: When people are truly converted, they become fruitful and productive people - people who are committed to faith, stimulated by love, and driven by hope. Such followers of the Lord, undaunted by suffering, are bold and effective witnesses - spreading the Good News to people far and wide!

I. FUNDAMENTALS OF CONVERSION (v. 1)

- A. What is the basis of conversion? It is God's grace.
- B. Peace is the God-wrought result of a sinner submitting to the grace of God.

II. FOUNDATION OF CONVERSION (v. 4-6)

- A. Conversion is first the result of God's election.
- B. Conversion is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit.
- C. Remember, conversion is the result of God's election and of the work of the Holy Spirit.

III. FRUIT OF CONVERSION v. 2, 3)

- A. Conversion results in the "Work of Faith".
- B. Conversion results in the labor of love.
- C. Conversion results in the steadfastness of hope.

IV. FULFILLMENT OF CONVERSION (v. 6-10)

- A. Look at the Basis of Witnessing (v. 6-7).
- B. Look at the Boldness in Witnessing v. 8-9a).
- C. Look at the Benefits of Witnessing (v. 9b-10).

CONCLUSION:

Have you turned from your idols (false gods) to serve a living Savior? Are you living for Christ today, persevering in the faith regardless of life's challenges or persecutions, and are you looking forward to the return of Christ who will deliver you from the judgment and the wrath to come?

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C H A P T E R     O N E

SCRIPTURE: I Thessalonians 1:1-10

TEXT: "For they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God." (v.9)

INTRODUCTION: What are the fundamentals of conversion? How does conversion take place? What are the fruits or results of conversion? These are some of the questions which we must answer.

Paul was a driven man - driven to share the Gospel message with the unconverted people of his day - to Gentiles as well as to Jews, or, more accurately stated, especially to Gentiles as well as to Jews.

Paul went from Gentile city to Gentile city, preaching the Gospel of Christ to virtually pagan people - people devoid of any knowledge of Christ. In his missionary journeys, Paul came to the city of Thessalonica (The story is in Acts 17:1-10 - read.)

"He (Paul) had tremendous success, such success that the Jews were enraged and raised such trouble that Paul had to be smuggled out, in peril of his life, to Beroea; the same thing happened in Beroea (Acts 17:10-12); and Paul had to leave Timothy and Silas behind him and make his escape to Athens. What exercised Paul's mind was this - he had only been in Thessalonica for three weeks. Was it possible to make such an impression on a place in three weeks time that Christianity was planted in it in such a way that it could never again be uprooted? If so, it was by no means an idle dream that the Roman Empire might yet be won for Christ. Or, was it necessary to settle down and to work for months, and even years, before an impression could be made? In that case, no man could even dimly foresee when Christianity would penetrate all over the world. Thessalonica was a test case; and Paul was torn with anxiety to know what would happen.

"So anxious was Paul that, when Timothy joined him at Athens, he sent him back to Thessalonica to get the information without which he could not rest. (I Thessalonians, 3:1, 2, 5; 2:17). What news did Timothy bring back? There was good news. The affection of the Thessalonians for Paul was as strong as ever; and they were standing fast in the faith. (I Thessalonians 2:14; 3:4-6; 4:9, 10)." (Barclay's I Thessalonians; page 214)

The power of the Gospel to change lives is declared in I Thessalonians 1:1-10. We must look at Paul's description of Conversion as shown in chapter 1. Note four things about Conversion: (1) Fundamentals of Conversion; (2) Foundation of Conversion; (3) Fruit of Conversion; (4) Fulfillment of Conversion.

PROPOSITION: When people are truly converted, they become fruitful and productive people - people who are committed to faith, stimulated by love, and driven by hope. Such followers of

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the Lord, undaunted by suffering, are bold and effective witnesses - spreading the Good News to people, far and wide!

FUNDAMENTALS OF CONVERSION (v,1)

A. What is the basis of conversion? It is God's grace.

"Grace" is God taking the first step to redeem lost mankind. "Grace" is God's unmerited favor towards a lost race of people who deserve nothing but the wrath of God. There is no conversion of man without the grace - the unconditional love - of God.

There is nothing in man that calls forth a natural love response in God. Grace means that God loves the loveless; God cares for the careless; God seeks the complacent; God saves the worthless. It was John Newton, a lost and hardened slave trader of another century, who wrote (following his conversion):

"Amazing grace! How sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me!  
I once was lost, but now am found,  
Was blind, but now I see."

B. Peace is the God-wrought result of a sinner submitting to the grace of God.

When a sinner says, "Just as I am, without one plea, but that thy blood was shed for me", then the peace of God floods his soul. Peace is the condition of the human soul which falls helplessly into the arms of God's mercy and grace. Notes Ogilvie, "Grace reveals the nature of our Lord, and peace describes the evidence that proves that His nature has been reproduced in us." (Life As It Was Meant To Be; page 16)

Did you presently experience the peace of God in your heart, as a result of your full surrender to Jesus Christ? Have you confessed your sins to Christ, humbled yourself before Him in self-abandonment, and pled for God's mercy? Peace is not a product of personal attainments - economically, socially, religiously, and educationally! Peace is the result of acknowledging your own unworthiness and acceptance of God's grace and love and mercy!

II. FOUNDATION OF CONVERSION (v,4-6)

How is one converted? Conversion is the work of God, not the achievement of man, but conversion cannot take place without the positive response of man to the direct call of God. But before we look at the positive response of man, let us first look at the direct call of God.

A. Conversion is first the result of God's election.

Note I Thessalonians 1:4- "Brothers loved by God, we know that he has chosen you." We must understand the meaning of election (of "God's choice"). Does God arbitrarily choose to save some persons

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and to condemn others? Did God predestine in eternity to save some and to allow others to be eternally lost in hell, regardless of individual response? It is important for us to understand that election is not based on some kind of arbitrary choice of God. There is no such thing as an unconditional, particular election of certain individuals for salvation with the result that all others are eternally condemned to destruction. Election is open to every human being who chooses to identify with Jesus Christ who is the object of the Gospel Proclamation of Grace. "Grace" means God's "unmerited favor" towards the entire human race, with no exceptions or exclusions. "Peace" is the individual enjoyment of a right relationship with God, resulting from a personal positive volitional response to God's universal offer of salvation, "Grace" is objective and universal. "Peace" is subjective and personal. God wills to save all (Grace); those who choose to surrender to Christ are personally reconciled to God (Peace).

**B. Conversion is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit.**

Note I Thessalonians 1:5 - "Our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction." The Good News which Paul preached to the Thessalonians was received by eager hearts resulting in transformed lives! Why? Not because of the cleverness of the preacher, but because of the power of the Holy Spirit who alone has the ability to transform human nature. God used Paul as His persuasive instrument, but Paul was only the mouthpiece. The messenger is important. The openness of the listener is important, but the change, called conversion, is the supernatural work of God alone. It is not the persuasive message of the messenger nor the open response of the listener that produce the change; it is the transforming power of the Holy Spirit that produces the change called conversion in human nature!

Do you realize that God loves you, that Christ died for you, that God does not want you to perish eternally, that God wills to save you, that the Holy Spirit is calling you to repentance, that God's Spirit alone can convert your human nature, that you can enjoy peace and reconciliation with God? Have you listened carefully to God's message of forgiveness, spoken to you through the lips of God's messengers? Have you responded to the wooing of the Holy Spirit who convinces you of the possibility of peace with God through personal faith in Jesus Christ?

**C. Remember, conversion is the result of God's election and of the work of the Holy Spirit.**

In other words, (as we earlier noted) conversion is the result of the direct call of God. But conversion is also the result of the positive response of man. Note I Thessalonians 1:6b - "You welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit."

Have you welcomed the message of salvation? To welcome the message of salvation means to recognize that salvation is the work of God.

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There are those who deny their need for salvation, claiming that they are good enough to merit God's favor. Such people glory in their own works of righteousness. These proud people will not welcome salvation, for to accept salvation one must declare personal moral bankruptcy and cast himself helplessly and humbly upon the "mercy seat" of God. There are others (in the opposite direction) who feel that they are too wicked to be accepted by God. The degree of their sins hinders them from welcoming the message of salvation. They feel that they are 'too far gone' to be recovered and that their sins are too black to be cleansed away. These déspairing persons need to get a vision of God's grace. In seeing God's grace, they will see that God's power is unlimited. God loves the worst of sinners and God is able to change the worst of sinners. He loves the loveless and He can change what seems to be changeless corrupt human nature. Where sin abounds, grace superabounds! With God there are no hopeless persons!

God has elected to save all, Jesus has died for all, the Holy Spirit convicts all, the gift of saving faith is offered to all - these facts speak of the "grace" of God. Each person must acknowledge God's election of the human race to salvation. Each must respond to the convicting and convincing work of the Holy Spirit, and must welcome (without pride or despair) the saving power of Christ into his life personally. The perfect will of God - the salvation of all mankind - must be received as the positive will of the individual - personal salvation!

III. FRUIT OF CONVERSION (v.2, 3)

When one acknowledges the direct call of God to conversion (as seen in the universal electing purpose of God and the individual convicting and convincing ministry of the Holy Spirit), and when one positively responds to God's saving initiatives by welcoming the message of salvation into his personal life - the result is wonderful! The result or fruit of salvation is threefold, according to verse 3: (a) work produced by faith, (b) labor prompted by love, (c) endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

A. Conversion results in the "Work of Faith".

A saving faith is a working faith. We are not saved by good works, but we are saved to do good works. (Note Ephesians 2:8-10, especially verse 10). We are created to do good works. The work of faith is the work that is done because of our trust in God. It is faith in the unseen God and confidence in the eternal purposes of God which motivates a believer to work. The motivation for work comes from faith in the integrity of God. True believers work, not for the glory of men, not for the personal gains of money or power, not because of the fear of men - but because God has commanded them to work and the work of God is more important than all the works of men (however much the latter may at times seem more "real" than the former). As a believer, are you investing your life and time and talents in the work of the eternal and invisible kingdom of God?

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"Only one life, t'will soon be past,  
Only what's done for Christ will last!"

B. Conversion results in the labor of love.

The labor of love is labor performed with joy and patience because it is motivated by love. The labor of love is the response of the converted soul who has been "caught up" with the grace of God.

"Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were a present far to small,  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all!"

He who believes God truly begins to love God intensely. Love for God is the result of faith in God. If one does not believe what God says about Himself (namely that God unconditionally loves sinners), then that person cannot become a believer. But he who believes in Christ as Saviour is the one who comes to love Christ as Lord! "Out of faith rises love. No man can love God unless he believes that God loves him." (Maclaren; volume 15; page 158) Belief in the unconditional love of God is the stimulus for the labor of love. "The work of faith will never be done unless it is the toil of love." (Ibid; page 162)

C. Conversion results in the steadfastness of hope.

Faith in God produces work for God. Love for God upwardly inspires labors of love outwardly. But what keeps a Christian going and growing and working and laboring and enduring, amidst all the tests and trials, amidst all the changes and chances, amidst all the advances and reverses? One result of conversion is "endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ." Notes Barclay, "A man can endure anything so long as he has hope, for then he is walking not to the night, but to the dawn." Hope is what drives one on to greater work for God, for hope is centered on God, and with God there are no hopeless situations. With or without visible or quick results, the man who has placed his faith in God and who has fallen in love with God, is the man who believes "the best is yet to be" (i.e., he is a hope-filled man). Faith in God's self-revealed character gives birth to love for God, and hope enables one to endure in his work for God. Hope is based on the Resurrection which teaches that after the darkest night comes the brightest day! Hope is based on belief in the Transforming Power of God which says that God can redeem any experience, that he can make something good out of any bad experience, that God will always give us another new start.

The cultivation of hope, as in the case of the young persecuted converts at Thessalonica, is vitally important. Hope defies the darkness of the present and declares that the future is as bright as the promises of God! Hope stimulates believers to endure, for hope points to a final and victorious destiny. Hope is based on

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the belief that God is Sovereign and that "though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is ruler yet!" Hope is based on the belief that history, with all of its seeming events of chaos, is leading to a God-ordained goal, that God will have the final say in human events, that God has the power to make everything that happens to fit into a pattern for good to those that love the Lord (Romans 8:28). Hope is based on faith in a God of purpose, and hope is nurtured by love for a God who personally cares for every human being! Hope is a state of mind that sees God in everything, and hope is a result of believing that God cares tenderly for all.

To the extent that one maintains his faith in a God whose purposes are not arbitrary, and to the extent that one cultivates his personal love for the Saviour, to that same extent will his hope burn brightly! It is easier to endure the trials of life when one believes in a God of loving purpose who will not allow His children to "shed needless tears" here on earth, and who will not allow his faithful children to go unrewarded hereafter! "In the direct proportion in which we are taking into our hearts Christ and His truth, and letting our hearts go out in love towards Him and communion with Him, will the glories beyond brighten and consolidate and magnify themselves in our eyes. The hope of the Christian man is but the inference from his present faith, and the joy and sweetness of his present love." (Ibid; page 159, 160)

IV. FULFILLMENT OF CONVERSION (v. 6-10)

We have noted so far that truly converted people (i.e., people who are grace-oriented and faith-filled) are people who become very fruitful and productive. Converted people are committed to be faithful in work, stimulated by love for God, and driven by hope in order to endure.

We must further note (according to the latter half of chapter one of I Thessalonians) that such followers of the Lord are undaunted by suffering, and that they are bold and effective in their witness of the Good News to people far and wide.

Every Christian is "born to reproduce". The fulfillment of one's conversion is not found in one's own personal salvation. One who is converted must seek to bring others to Christ in order that they may be converted. There is no such thing as a "solitary religion". No one is meant to go to heaven alone! Every believer must find others to take to heaven with him. A non-witnessing Christian is a contradiction in terms. No Christian can afford the luxury of indulging himself in the enjoyment of his own salvation without making earnest effort to bring the message of salvation to other people. We are saved to tell others.

What Jesus said about Himself and His own ministry to the lost people of His own day, we must also say about ourselves as we seek to be witnessing and healing Christians in our day:

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom

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for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (Luke 4:18, 19)

If witnessing to others is the mandate for every believer, then let us look at three things regarding witnessing: (a) The Basis of witnessing, (b) Boldness in witnessing, (c) Benefits in witnessing.

A. Look at the Basis of Witnessing (v.6-7).

To be an effective witness to others, one must, of course, first personally receive the message of salvation into his own life. Of the Thessalonians it is noted that they "welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit" (v.6). Don't try to witness to others if you have not personally accepted Christ. You must be a Christian before you can witness to Christian truth. A true witness is one who knows God firsthand - personally and intimately. Have you welcomed the message of Christ into your personal life?

To be an effective witness you must model Christianity as a result of imitation of Christ first and of Christ's mature leaders secondly. What you are is more important than what you say. Your lifestyle must be modeled after Christ and after Christ's mature servants. Your verbal witness for Christ must be backed by your life witness. What you are speaks so loudly that people may not even hear what you say. This is not to minimize the importance of verbalizing your faith, but it is to say that the cultivation of Christ-like character is the basis for an effective witness to a world of lost people. The cultivation of strong character is partly accomplished through enduring persecution and suffering for Jesus. It was so in the case of the Thessalonian believers. "You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit." (v.6) Learning to experience the joy of the Lord amidst persecution or suffering is to provide God an opportunity positively to impact an unsaved world with the Gospel message, and it is further to provide onlooking fellow saints with a stimulus to strengthen their own witness. ("And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia." [v. 7])

B. Look at the Boldness in Witnessing (v.8-9a).

"The Lord's message rang out from you" is a phrase that describes the powerful and bold witness of the Thessalonian believers. No shyness or timidity or haziness or hesitancy in their witness, but instead a clear, penetrating, appealing witness that greatly affected many!

"Verse 8 speaks of the faith of the Thessalonians sounding forth like a trumpet; the word could also mean crashing out like a roll of thunder. There is something tremendous about the sheer defiance of early Christianity. When all prudence and all common-sense would have dictated a way of life that would have escaped notice,

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and so avoided danger and persecution, the Christians defied their dangers and blazoned forth their faith. They were never ashamed to show whose they were and whom they sought to serve." (Barclay's Thessalonians; page 218)

Persecution could not stop the lips or change the looks or destroy the lives of these new emboldened believers! In the early days of the church, when Peter and John were told by the authorities that they could not talk about Jesus on the streets of Jerusalem, these two emboldened disciples said, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you (rulers) rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." (Acts 4:19-20)

The purpose for which we are personally converted is not fulfilled until we make witnessing to the unsaved a way of life! Every believer is called to witness! Notes Ogilvie, "All the techniques of evangelism, devised with mass meetings and programs, will never substitute for the one-to-one influence on others which the radically converted Christian exerts. It is every Christian's birthright to be a reproducer."

C. Look at the Benefits of Witnessing (v. 9b-10).

What God did for the Thessalonian people who were converted, God can do for anyone! The benefits of witnessing are seen in the changed lives of those who respond to the Gospel message.

(1) The Thessalonians exercised true repentance. They turned from idols. When sinners receive our witness today, they will repent of their evil ways and turn away from serving false gods, such as the god of sensual pleasure or the god of materialism or the god of scientism, or the god of religion, or a variety of other gods.

(2) The Thessalonians exercised saving faith. They turned to the true God. If repentance is turning from false gods, faith is turning to the true God. One of the great joys in witnessing is to see people come to know and enjoy the true God - the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob! A personal relationship with God!

(3) The Thessalonians, following their initial conversion to God, began to convert their daily life-style. They turned to serve a living and true God. A life of loving service is the life to which every new convert is called. Every Christian is a minister.

(4) The Thessalonians, following their initial conversion to God, learned to persevere in their newfound faith, even amidst the challenges of hardships and persecutions. (Note the Parable of the four soils, Matthew 13:1-23). Seeing new believers sink the roots of their newfound faith into the soil of God's love, resulting in a stability and endurance and steadfastness in the Christian faith, was a truly satisfying experience for Paul. Learning to wait patiently for the return of the resurrected Saviour and not growing weary in well-doing while waiting, is part of the challenge of Christian growth.

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(5) The Thessalonians learned to keep their hope alive, for they looked forward to the return of Christ who would deliver them from "the wrath to come". The future was not dark for these waiting Christians, but it was filled with the brightness of God's love which would rescue them from God's judgment and wrath. When we witness, we too can expect some people to find forgiveness of their past sins, excitement in the development of a life of loving service for the Savior, and security in their anticipation of the coming of Christ to Earth again. Helping people to deal effectively with the past, present, and future - wonderful benefits in witnessing!

**CONCLUSION:**

Have you turned from your idols (false gods) to serve a living Savior? Are you living for Christ today, persevering in the faith regardless of life's challenges or persecutions, and are you looking forward to the return of Christ who will deliver you from the judgment and the wrath to come?

If you are not truly converted, I am asking you today to bow your head and pray this prayer silently:

"O God, I confess that I cannot save myself and that only you can save me from my sins. I thank you for sending Jesus to die for my sins. I believe that you love me, and that you want to live within me. I surrender my life to you. Be my personal Saviour, starting today, and help me to live for you the rest of my life. In Jesus' name. Amen."

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Q U E S T I O N S

1. What events compose the background that inspired the writing of the letters of I Thessalonians? (Note Acts 17:1-15; I Thessalonians 3:1, 2, 4; 2:17)
2. What is meant by William Barclay's statement: "Thessalonica was a test case."
3. If "grace" (according to I Thessalonians 1:1) is the basis of conversion, how can "grace" be described and defined?
4. If "humility" is the proper response of man to the grace of God, then how would you describe the characteristics of "humility"?
5. What is the evidence that the nature of God has been reproduced in the heart of a repentant sinner?
6. What is the difference between the world's concept of "peace" and the Christian's understanding of "peace"?
7. Considering I Thessalonians 1:4, do you believe that God arbitrarily chose (predestined) to save some persons for heaven and to condemn other persons to hell? Why or why not?
8. Describe what is meant by the following statement: "'Grace' is objective and universal, while 'peace' is subjective and personal."
9. Describe what is meant by the statement: "Conversion is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit."
10. From your study of the Bible (including I Thessalonians 1) give your answers to the following questions:
  - (a) Does God want to save all persons, or only some persons?
  - (b) Did Christ die for all persons, or for only a limited number of persons?
  - (c) Does the Holy Spirit call all persons to repentance, or does He call only selected persons to repentance?
  - (d) Does the Holy Spirit offer the gift of saving faith to all, or does the Spirit offer that gift to only select people?
11. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Conversion is the result of the work of God, initiated by the love of God, offered by the Spirit of God, and received in faith by the repentant sinner."

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12. How would you counsel persons who feel they are so good that they do not need to be converted? How would you counsel persons who feel that they are too bad to be forgiven?
13. What is meant by the following statement: "A saving faith is a working faith."? Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "We are not saved by good works, but we are saved to do good works." (Note Ephesians 2:8-10; James 2:14-26)
14. Why can it be said that "love for God is the result of faith in God"? (Note I Thessalonians 1:3)
15. What keeps a Christian going and growing and working and laboring and enduring, amidst all the tests and trials, amidst all the changes and chances, amidst all the advances and reverses of life? (Note I Thessalonians 1:3)
16. Upon what God-revealed realities and truths is hope based?
17. Share from your personal life how you have kept your hope alive, in the midst of circumstances that have tempted you to despair and in the midst of events which have seemingly defied your faith in God's goodness.
18. Tell with what degree of conviction you agree with the following statement: "To the extent that one maintains his faith in a God whose purposes are not arbitrary, and to the extent that one cultivates his personal love for the Saviour, to that same extent will his hope burn brightly!"
19. Give your interpretation of the following statement: "Every Christian is 'born to reproduce'". Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "A non-witnessing Christian is a contradiction in terms".
20. In terms of effective witnessing to the world of unsaved people, what is the relationship between "being" and "doing", between "acting" and "speaking"?
21. How does a believer's reaction to persecution and to suffering affect his witness to nonbelievers? (Note I Thessalonians 1:6)
22. In contrast to many modern-day Christians who tend to be shy, lazy, and hesitant in their "witness" for Christ, how can the witness of the Thessalonian believers (in the midst of persecution) be described? (Note I Thessalonians 1:8-9) (Note Acts 4:1-31)
23. What positive responses and changes can we anticipate in the lives of those people who receive the Good News (Gospel) which we declare unto them? (Note I Thessalonians 1:9-10)

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24. How does accepting the Good News (Gospel) of Christ enable people effectively to cope with the special problems of the Past, Present, and Future?
25. What are some of the "false gods" from which people today must turn, "to serve the living and true God"? (I Thessalonians 1:9)

Chapter 2

**The Marks**

**Of A Spiritual Leader**

I Thessalonians 2:1-20

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The Marks Of A Spiritual Leader

O U T L I N E

SCRIPTURE: I Thessalonians 2:1-20

TEXT: "You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed." (I Thessalonians 2:10)

INTRODUCTION: Who are spiritual leaders? Anyone who leads others! You may be the best Christian someone knows. Someone may be following your example and, if this is so, this fact makes you a spiritual leader.

PROPOSITION: What are the marks of a spiritual leader? A leader is one who cultivates a godly character, is one who manifests practical love in his attempts spiritually to nurture other believers, and is one who experiences great joy (in spite of great challenges) because of his observation of God's transforming power wrought in human lives and amidst frustrating circumstances!

I. THE CHARACTER OF THE LEADER

- A. Man Of Courageous Love (v. 1-2)
- B. Man Of Truth (v. 3a)
- C. Man Of Purity (v. 3b)
- D. Man Of Integrity (v. 3b-6)

II. THE CONDUCT OF THE LEADER (v. 7-12)

- A. Personable Love (v. 7-8)
- B. Diligent Work (v. 9)
- C. Gospel Preaching (v. 9)
- D. Exemplary Lifestyle (v. 10)
- E. Disciplined Instruction (v. 11-12)

III. THE CONSOLATION OF THE LEADER (v. 13-20)

- A. Young Christians Who Seriously Accept The Transforming Word Of God Into Their Lives (v. 13)
- B. Young Christians Who Bear Persecution Courageously And Triumphantly (v. 14-16)
- C. Victory Over Satan Whose Obstacles Have Temporarily Separated Believers From One Another (v. 17, 18)
- D. The Ultimate Reward Of Having Lasting Spiritual Fruit (In The Form Of Transformed Lives) When Facing Christ When He Comes (v. 19-20)

CONCLUSION:

A spiritual leader is one whose personal character is godly, one whose practical behavior is patterned after Christ, and one whose life is filled with great consolation because of his ultimate victory over Satan and because of the lasting godly character which he observes in his converts!

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C H A P T E R   T W O

SCRIPTURE: I Thessalonians 2:1-20

TEXT: "You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed." (I Thessalonians 2:10)

INTRODUCTION: Who are spiritual leaders? Anyone who leads others! This includes parents of children, teachers of students, Christian Growth Group leaders, "Timothy" leaders, preachers - anyone who is seeking to influence another person to take the way of Christ! You may be the best Christian someone knows. Someone may be following your example and, if this is so, this fact makes you a spiritual leader.

PROPOSITION: What are the marks of a spiritual leader? A leader is one who cultivates a godly character, is one who manifests practical love in his attempts spiritually to nurture other believers, and is one who experiences great joy (in spite of great challenges) because of his observation of God's transforming power wrought in human lives and amidst frustrating circumstances!

In looking at the marks of a spiritual leader, we must look at (1) The Character of a spiritual leader, (2) The Conduct of a spiritual leader, (3) The Consolation of a spiritual leader.

I. THE CHARACTER OF THE LEADER

Paul the apostle was a godly man - a man who learned to blend and to balance the Christian virtues. He was a man of confidence without becoming egotistical and proud; he was a man of humility without wallowing in humiliation and self-depreciation and despair. Without sacrificing his humility, Paul arose to his own defense against the unfair and the untruthful accusations launched against him! Paul was a man of love and tenderness, and, while love is never vindictive, love does take the stance of honest defense against dishonest accusations!

In describing his character as an apostle of Christ, Paul is also defending himself against the unfair accusations and slanders which Paul's opponents at Thessalonica hurled at him.

A. Man Of Courageous Love (v. 1-2)

"There were, no doubt, those in Thessalonica who said that this man Paul had a police record, that he was nothing less than a criminal who was on the run from justice, and that obviously no one could listen to a man like that." (Barclay's I Thessalonians; page 219)

Paul defends himself against this malicious slander by declaring that his imprisonment at Philippi for the sake of Christ did not

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deter him from coming to Thessalonica to preach the Gospel there, even though his preaching at Thessalonica stirred up great opposition. (Note v. 1-2)

Paul is saying that, instead of being looked upon suspiciously as a man with a police record, he should be looked upon as a man of unusual courage and like a man who was undaunted by suffering and not embittered by unjust persecution.

"After Philippi Paul did not need a long period to be healed of the rejection. Instead he strode over the mountains and began all over again in Thessalonica. He did not project onto the Thessalonians the bruises of a dejected spirit. Not for a moment did he take out on the Thessalonians what the officials of Philippi had done to him. He was able to close one chapter and begin the next. Shaking the dust off his feet, he pressed on. That's not easy. So often we allow our minds to brood over previous slights and oversights, hurts and diminished hopes. A protective membrane is formed over our hearts so we will never be bothered by rejection again. And when we are, the membrane thickens until we become incapable of warmth and love." (Ogilvie; Life As It Was Meant To Be; page 41, 42)

B. Man Of Truth (v. 3a)

There were those at Thessalonica who were accusing Paul of being out of his head, slandering him as a man who was teaching false ideas. Paul defends himself: "For the appeal we make does not spring from error." (v. 3a)

Paul communicated the objective truth of God's self-revealed Word, not the subjective notions of man-originated ideas and opinions. It was the "Good News" of God Himself, not the mere "good views" of human opinion. Every spiritual leader must be most careful to declare "Thus saith the Lord", not "This is my opinion or feelings." A spiritual leader must preach the Bible, for the Bible alone contains the record of God's self-revealed nature. A spiritual leader must be most careful not to lead people astray. One of the signs of the last times is the increase of false teachers whose communication of erroneous ideas and notions will result in deceiving and in misleading many. A spiritual leader is careful to communicate the simple and clear teachings of the Bible!

C. Man Of Purity (v. 3b)

"It was said that Paul's preaching sprang from impure motives. The word that is used for impurity (akatharsia) often has to do with sexual impurity and depravity. There was one Christian custom which the heathen often and deliberately misinterpreted; that was the kiss of peace. (I Thessalonians 5:26). When the Christians spoke of the Love Feast, when they talked of the kiss of peace, it was not difficult for an evil mind to read into these

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phrases that which was never there. The trouble in life so often is that a mind itself nasty will see nastiness everywhere." (Barclay's Thessalonians; page 220)

A spiritual leader must be committed to absolute moral purity. (I heard of one preacher who was asked to head up an anti-pornography campaign in a certain city. When he sought to organize a campaign among the ministers of the city, he found that some ministers chose not to be involved. This organizing minister felt that there were some ministers whose personal life was not totally and morally pure, and therefore they felt a certain conviction regarding their own lack of moral purity.)

No one can be effectively used of God as a spiritual leader whose personal life is not morally pure. There have been some professing spiritual leaders who have flirted with sin and who have allowed lust to survive in their hearts. Some have allowed themselves to view questionable movies or television programs. Some have allowed themselves, in the "name of moral enlightenment", to look at pictures in pornographic magazines which have had morally polluting effects on their minds. Others have not been totally discrete when they have counselled persons of the opposite sex.

Paul declared that he had no impure motives - and every spiritual leader today must equally be careful to remain pure in his mind and in his motives and desires!

D. Man Of Integrity (v. 3b-6)

There were those critics who charged Paul with trickery. "It was charged that Paul's preaching was guilefully aimed at deluding others." (Barclay)

Declared Paul: "We are not trying to deceive or trick anyone."

A spiritual leader must be a man of strictest integrity - a man who never exploits or deceives or misrepresents or tricks anyone. He must not "pull the wool over people's eyes", or use methods which are questionable, or use "high pressure tactics to get results", or misrepresent his cause or program. A spiritual leader must be most open, transparent, truthful, and innocent in his motives. It is true that a leader must be diplomatic and wise and discerning, but he must always be honest. Jesus said, "Be wise as serpents, but harmless as doves." He must be a man who "says what he means and means what he says". He must be "above reproach", "avoiding the very appearance of evil", a man who is known even to "outsiders" and "non-Christians" as a man of honesty. It is possible, as in the case of Paul, that nonbelievers will slander the good character of an honest spiritual leader, but a spiritual leader must so live that there is nothing in his life that can give a basis for evil reports!

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If one mark of integrity is guilelessness (i.e., no trickery), another mark of integrity is no flattery. There were critics who said, "Paul, you preach to flatter people in order to get personal financial gain." Paul defended himself: "We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts. You know we never used flattery... Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you." (v. 5,9)

A spiritual leader must give sincere compliments to people for the sake of encouragement, but he must never brag on others with the expectation that he will get something in return from the one he compliments, whether it be money or whether it be a compliment in return.

Wrote David (in the Psalms): "May the Lord cut off all flattering lips and every boastful tongue that says, 'We will triumph with our tongues; we own our lips - who is our master?'" (Psalms 12:3,4)

People who flatter others for the purpose of selfish material gain are guilty of being greedy. A man of integrity is a man who keeps himself from greed. Wrote Paul, in defense of his character, "Nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed - God is our witness." (v. 5) As an apostle, Paul had a right to receive a salary, but he refused to take a salary from the Church. Instead, he worked "night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you." (v. 9)

A spiritual leader must never exploit his office or his calling for financial benefit. Receiving an adequate salary, if he is in "full-time" Christian work, is not a sin - for Jesus said that a "laborer is worthy of his hire". But a spiritual leader must never become a lover of money and a lover of luxury and pleasure. He must commit himself to a simple lifestyle, learning to enjoy the simple and innocent pleasures of life. He must repudiate the way of materialism, always remembering that "life does not consist in the abundance of things which a man possesses". He must be liberal and generous - never greedy or grasping!

To summarize, a spiritual leader must be a man of courageous love, a man of truth, a man of moral purity, and a man of strictest integrity. Integrity means that there is no guile, no trickery, no flattery, no greed.

II. THE CONDUCT OF THE LEADER (v. 7-12)

A godly character will manifest itself in godly behavior. What one does is the result of what one is. "Being" issues forth in "Doing". One's character gives birth to one's conduct. The conduct of Paul is an example to every spiritual leader today. Note the following "profile" of godly conduct as it is expressed in the context of the Christian fellowship.

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A. Personable Love (v. 7-8)

Sacrificial, gentle love - love like that of a nursing mother for her small child - is the kind of love which everyone needs to receive. We all grow through positive and loving affirmations, far more than we do through criticism and harsh correction. A spiritual leader is not afraid to give loving "strokes" to his spiritual children - to compliment them sincerely and to love them openly and affectionately. Paul was not a cold professional, "dishing out" advice and harshly correcting his parishioners. Rather, he was a tenderhearted and affectionate lover (like a nursing mother), speaking tenderly to his "children" in the faith. Paul "got on their level", like a mother stooping down to talk to her small toddler on the "eye-level" of her children. A spiritual leader must be empathetic, patient, compassionate, and understanding of the young Christians with whom he is working - not in a "condescending" or humiliating way but in a genuinely caring way. Can you, as a spiritual leader, think and feel as a young Christian thinks and feels, and are you willing gently to lead the young believer into the deeper dimensions of the Christian faith?

The love of a spiritual leader manifests itself not only in the clear teaching which he shares with the new believer, but through the personal sharing of his life with the new believer. Personal and vulnerable involvement with the new believer goes far beyond the mere dispensing of Christian ideas and concepts. Just as a nursing mother gives the infant her very self (in the form of nourishing milk), so the spiritual leader gives of his very self to the new believer - his time, his understanding, his honest sharing, his prayers, his personal love.

B. Diligent Work (v. 9)

In terms of godly conduct, the spiritual leader is to give himself to the performance of his daily and routine tasks of work in the spirit of diligence. Personable and loving involvement with new believers is to be coupled with diligent and conscientious labors of daily work. The hands that comforted the newborn believers at Thessalonica, were the same hands that were calloused from the daily labor of making tents for a living. A spiritual leader is not afraid of working hard, and he knows that it is important to use his God-given skills to make an adequate living.

In his second letter to this same Church, Paul writes in II Thessalonians 3:7-10 - "For you well know that you ought to follow our example: you never saw us loafing; we never accepted food from anyone without buying it; we worked hard day and night for the money we needed to live on, in order that we would not be a burden to any of you. It wasn't that we didn't have the right to ask you to feed us, but we wanted to show you, firsthand, how you should work for your living. Even while we were still there with you we gave you this rule: 'He who does not work shall not eat.'" (Living Bible)

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"'Drones in the congregational hive', someone has called them! Perhaps we are entitled to whatever comfort there is in the fact that this is not a twentieth-century phenomenon. The industrious Christians of the first century had to live with it and, so far as possible, correct it.

"One doesn't have to be a 'supercharged engine' of a person, one has only to be normally energetic, to discover how really taxing it is to get on with loafers and dawdlers. It is easy to imagine the scorn with which a producer like Henry Ward Beecher handled the case of a student who wrote him a letter, asking for an 'easy berth'. Beecher replied: 'Young man, you cannot be an editor; do not try the law; do not think of the ministry; let alone all ships and merchandise; abhor politics; don't practice medicine; be not a farmer, a soldier, or a sailor; don't study; don't think. None of these are easy. Oh, my son, you have come into a hard world. I know of only one easy place in it, and that is in the grave!'" (Prayer and Life's Highest; Rees; page 117)

C. Gospel Preaching (v. 9)

It is true that Paul worked hard night and day that he might provide for himself a financial means of supporting himself, in order that he might not have to be financially dependent upon the Thessalonian Church. But, Paul's so-called secular employment was only a means to an end for his main focus - namely, to preach the Gospel. While he worked with his hands, Paul was verbally witnessing and sharing and teaching. A Christian employee must give an honest day's work to his employer and he must not steal time from his employer to do something so good as even witnessing. But the Christian employee, without sacrificing the time which he must spend in his employment, will have opportunities to witness to his fellow employees - both in word and in lifestyle.

While the secular job itself can be a place effectively and naturally to witness, it must also be said that the Christian employee sees his job as a means of making money in order to give more time in direct Christian service and witnessing and teaching and preaching. Paul worked with his hands to make tents in order that his financial needs would be met, so that in turn he would have opportunity to preach the Gospel.

Without minimizing the importance of your job, do you see your employment as a "means to an end"? (Parenthetically, it can be said at this point that there are some Christians who have a goal of being financially independent by the time they are 50 or 55 years old, so that they can spend the rest of their lives in "full-time" Christian service.)

What is one of the main goals of the Christian leader in terms of conduct and activity? To preach the gospel of Christ. Is this your goal?

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D. Exemplary Lifestyle (v. 10)

How should the Christian leader conduct himself? According to verse 10, he should be holy, righteous, and blameless. Holiness means separation from outward sinful practices, and separation from inward sinful attitudes and desires. Outward and inward purity! The Christian leader does not flirt with sin! He does not see how close to the "world" he can live, and still be considered a Christian. He seeks to minister in the world and seeks to befriend sinners, without at the same time compromising Christian standards and becoming ensnared in evil practices. He takes seriously the Lord's command to live a holy life, separate from worldliness: "Therefore, come out from them and be separate. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." (II Corinthians 6:17-18)

E. Disciplined Instruction (v. 11-12)

If Christian leaders should apply the tender touch of gentleness (as a nursing mother applies to her children), they should also exercise the firm discipline and leadership of an understanding father. "Some fatherly toughness must be coupled with our gentleness to precipitate growth among comfortable church members." (Ogilvie; Life As It Was Meant To Be; page 49)

Tenderness and toughness are two complimentary expressions of caring love, within the context of a Christian fellowship. All tenderness without discipline leads to sentimentality and moral softness. All discipline without tenderness leads to legalism and rigidity and moral hardness. There needs to be the tenderness of the nursing mother combined with the discipline of the exhorting father, if growth is to be solid and lasting in the lives of those whom the Christian leader nurtures.

Discipline involves the activity of exhorting, that is, making strong appeals and entreaties to believers to help them see the importance of envisioning themselves as the kind of persons Christ wants them to be.

But, combined with exhortation must be the activity of encouraging. "Once the goal of maturity is clarified, people need personal help and inspiration to define and take the next steps." (Ogilvie; page 49) It is one thing to tell others what they ought to be and do; it is another thing to help them to realize the clearly defined new goals for Christian growth. "Love is catching the pulse beat of people's stage of growth and helping them to move beyond the satisfaction of where they are." (Ogilvie; page 49)

Part of the disciplining responsibility of the Christian leader is the activity of "urging" the growing believers to "live lives worthy of God" (v. 12). No one is saved by good works, but no one can claim with any certainty to be saved without the evidence of

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good works in his life! The disciple-maker must urge those whom he is disciplining to live in such a way that they will never cause the Holy Spirit embarrassment because of the way they live!

III. THE CONSOLATION OF THE LEADER (v. 13-20)

To summarize thus far: The godly character of a Christian leader (courageous love, truthfulness, purity, integrity) manifests itself in godly behavior (personable love, diligent work, effective witnessing through Gospel preaching, exemplary lifestyle, and effective discipleship instruction and training).

Such a godly man who engages in godlike activities will not be without human opposition (as we have noted), and he will not be without spiritual conflict from Satan (as we will note), but he can take great consolation because of the life of ultimate victory which God assures to him!

In what facts does the Christian leader take great consolation?

A. Young Christians Who Seriously Accept The Transforming Word Of God Into Their Lives (v. 13)

Paul was the messenger, but the message itself was from God. Great was the joy of Paul when he saw the changed lives of those who accepted wholeheartedly the transforming message of the Gospel. There is no greater joy than the joy which the Christian leader experiences when he sees people listen carefully to accept wholeheartedly the message which he shares with sinners who soon become saints, because of the God-wrought changes which the Word of God produces in their lives! To see bad men become good men is the essence of the soul-winner's joy and excitement!

B. Young Christians Who Bear Persecution Courageously And Triumphantly (v. 14-16)

Paul was not oblivious to the sufferings and persecutions which the young Christians had to experience when they first welcomed the Good News into their lives. Paul and his fellow Christians in Judea had earlier experienced similar-type sufferings, so Paul was no stranger to persecution for the sake of the Gospel.

Note the sins of the Jews as recorded in this passage: (1) Killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets - "A man may refuse to listen to the message of Jesus Christ but he cannot eliminate it from the structure of the universe." (Barclay) (2) Persecuted the Christians ("Drove us out") - refused to let others hear the message; (3) "They displease God" - they did not seek God's Word, but they sought to follow their own ideas; (4) "They oppose all men" - they looked down on all others - pride and snobbery based on racial exclusivity, feeling they were specially chosen for privilege rather than chosen for service and responsibility; (5) "Hindered from preaching to the Gentiles in order for them to be saved" - feeling that they as Jews were alone the object of God's special love and attention and favor.

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A Christian leader must help new believers to realistically face the fact that godless people will almost certainly reject and resist and persecute those who are Christians. The disciple-maker must sympathetically inform the new believer that, while many will listen to his witness and accept his Christ, there will be others who probably will violently react to his newfound faith! Paul encouraged the new suffering believers to recognize the glory in their sufferings and told them that, because they were suffering for Christ, they were a part of the company of Christ's elite ones! He told them that they were among the "company of the committed ones" - a part of the company of the original followers of Christ in the Churches in Judea (where the Christian movement began!)

Anyone who suffers for Christ should be told at least two things - that there is great glory in suffering for Christ, for the one who suffers is a part of the succession of Christ's elite ones, and that those who persecute Christians are in the process of facing the very judgment of God. Concerning the stubborn persecutors of the Christians, Paul wrote, "All these years they have been adding to the full record of their sins and finally the wrath of God has fallen upon them." (v. 16 Phillips)

C. Victory Over Satan Whose Obstacles Have Temporarily Separated Believers From One Another (v. 17, 18)

The tone of v. 17-18 is not one of consolation but one of frustrated desire because of Satanic opposition. The more godly the Christian leader is in his character and the more fervent he is in his Christian service and witnessing, the more opposition he may find from Satan! There are times when the Christian leader, as in the case of Paul, finds himself frustrated because of the hurdles which Satan has obstructed! Paul faced the reality of the spiritual battle in which he found himself. Nevertheless, the Christian leader can find consolation in the fact that, though Satan is strong, God is stronger yet. "Though wrong seems oft so strong, God is ruler yet!" The saving purposes of God are stronger than the destroying schemes of Satan! God will always come to the rescue of the believer. The message of Jesus Christ cannot be eliminated from the structure of the universe! Satan may stop the believer temporarily and hinder the progress of the Gospel momentarily, but Satan cannot destroy the Church of Christ! Satan is a strong foe which we must realistically cope with, but Satan is a defeated foe which we must triumphantly declare! Jesus said, "I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it!"

D. The Ultimate Reward Of Having Lasting Spiritual Fruit (In The Form Of Transformed Lives) When Facing Christ When He Comes (v. 19-20)

Listen to the way the Living Bible gives these verses: "For what is it we live for, that gives us hope and joy and is our proud

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reward and crown? It is you! Yes, you will bring us much joy as we stand together before our Lord Jesus Christ when he comes back again. For you are our trophy and joy."

Notes Barclay, "The glory of any teacher lies in his students; and should the day come when they have left him far behind, the glory is still greater. A man's greatest glory lies in those whom he has set or helped on the path to Christ." (Barclay's Thessalonians; page 193)

CONCLUSION:

A spiritual leader is one whose personal character is godly, one whose practical behavior is patterned after Christ, and one whose life is filled with great consolation because of his ultimate victory over Satan and because of the lasting godly character which he observes in his converts!

In summary, let us ask these questions:

(1) Are you cultivating the qualities of a godlike character - a character that is marked by courageous love, truthfulness, moral purity, and strict integrity?

(2) Are the activities of your daily life patterned after the lifestyle of Christ who went about doing good? Do you practice personable love in human relationships, sharing not only the Gospel of Christ but sharing your very self with others? Do you work diligently, witness effectively, live consistently, and urge other believers, in turn, to live a life that is worthy of God?

(3) Do you experience consolation and joy as a Christian leader - joy because young Christians whom you have won to Christ are increasingly being transformed, joy because young Christians whom you are disciplining are triumphantly enduring persecution, joy because of the anticipation you feel because you know that Satan's temporary blockage of spiritual progress will soon be removed, and joy because of the ultimate reward which will be yours when the growing believers whom you have nurtured will some day stand whole and complete before the Lord at His Second Coming?

Great is the godly character of the spiritual leader!

Great is the practical love in human relationships which the leader practices!

Great is the present and anticipated joy as a result of the Christian leader being right and living righteously (character and behavior).

Can you say, along with Paul, "You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous, and blameless we were among you who believed." (I Thessalonians 2:10)

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Q U E S T I O N S

1. Why was Paul's action in coming to Thessalonica proof of his courageous love for the Thessalonians? (Note Acts 16 and 17 and I Thessalonians 2:1-2)
2. When a Christian experiences rejection because of his faith, what is he tempted to do when he comes into the company of sympathetic friends? From a study of Acts 16 and 17, what lessons from Paul ought we (as believers) to learn, concerning "healthy" responses to new challenges, following recent "hurtful" past experiences?
3. When Paul declares that the appeal which he makes to the Thessalonians "does not spring from error" (v. 3), what defense is he making?
4. What does it mean for a Christian leader to model "moral purity" (v. 3) in his personal and public life, as a servant in the world and in the local church?
5. If "guilelessness" is one description of integrity, give descriptions and illustrations of a guileless person? (Note I Thessalonians 2:3)
6. If flattery is a mark of a person who lacks integrity, what is the motivation for a dishonest person to resort to flattery in his relationships with others? What is the difference between "flattery" and the offering of affirming compliments to one's friends and associates?
7. Illustrate how it is possible for a leader to use religion as a "mask" to cover up his greed. (I Thessalonians 2:5) Share specific ways in which a leader can guard against succumbing to the temptation of greed. If spiritual leaders must repudiate the way of materialism, then how can such leaders determine what is a legitimate salary and what is a luxurious (and illegitimate) salary? Does the amount of income that a minister receives indicate whether or not he is a greedy person? Why or why not? Has God called every spiritual leader to live "a simple life-style"? What are the characteristics of "a simple life-style"?
8. What are some of the characteristics and manifestations of personable love, as revealed in the actions and the attitudes of spiritual leaders, especially as seen in their treatment of younger believers? (Note I Thessalonians 2:7-8)
9. Why is diligence in daily work considered to be one of the most important characteristics in the life of the spiritual leader? (Note I Thessalonians 2:9; II Thessalonians 3:7-11; Proverbs 6:6; 10:5; 12:11; 13:4; 20:4; 21:25; Romans 12:11)

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10. From the example of Paul who worked (made tents) in order that he might be financially independent, should lay persons (with "secular" employment) see their jobs as primarily a "means to an end" (to financially provide) so that they can spend more time in preaching and in teaching and in evangelizing, etc? Why or why not? (Note I Thessalonians 2:9)
11. What does it mean for a spiritual leader to live a "holy" life-style in the midst of a corrupt society? (I Thessalonians 2:10)
12. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Some fatherly toughness must be coupled with our gentleness to precipitate growth among comfortable church members." (Note I Thessalonians 2:11-12)
13. Why is it so important for leaders, who are trying to "shepherd the flock of God", properly to blend "tenderness" and "toughness" in the expressions of their caring love towards people? (Note I Thessalonians 2:11-12)
14. In his disciplined leadership of the congregation, why is it important for the spiritual leader both to exhort and to encourage the people whom he shepherds, and how would you distinguish between these two important functions of the leaders? (Note I Thessalonians 2:11-12)
15. Give Scriptural evidence which "proves" the truthfulness of the following statement: "No one is saved by good works, but no one can claim with any certainty to be saved without the evidence of good works in his life."
16. As a witness and soul-winner, tell to what extent you agree with the following statement: "There is no greater joy than the joy which the Christian leader experiences when he sees people listen carefully to and accept wholeheartedly the message which he shares with sinners who soon become saints, because of the God-wrought changes which the Word of God produces in their lives!"
17. What should a spiritual leader communicate to new believers, in terms of anticipated persecution, and what two things can a spiritual leader say to a young believer who is presently experiencing suffering, because of his faith in Christ? (Note I Thessalonians 2:14-16)
18. What declared truths in God's Word (Bible) can bring great consolation to an earnest believer, who feels strong pressure from the "world" and heavy opposition from Satan? (Note I Thessalonians 2:17-18)
19. For Paul, what reward for his diligent labor and faithful service did he most anticipate, at the Second Coming of Christ? (I Thessalonians 2:19-20)

Chapter 3

Learning

To Be A Good Encourager!

I Thessalonians 3:1-13

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Learning To Be A Good Encourager

O U T L I N E

SCRIPTURE: I Thessalonians 3:1-13

TEXT: "For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord." (v. 8)

INTRODUCTION: "Is the way of Christianity the way of pain or the way of pleasure?" Compared to the way of sin, the way of Christianity is the way of pleasure! The Bible says, "The way of the transgressor is hard!" Notes E. Stanley Jones, "The idea that the Christian way is hard is all wrong. His yoke is easy and his burden is light, for his yoke is your yearning and his burden is your blessing. When you find him, you find yourself. The laws of your being are the laws of the Way. The Kingdom of Heaven, the Way, is within you and is the thing for which you were made; and therefore, when you find him, you find yourself. There is more joy to the square inch in being his than there is to the square mile in the outside world of rebellion." (The Divine Yes; page 49,50)

PROPOSITION: The way of Christianity is the way of joy and happiness, but, in living the Christian life, there are times of challenge and struggles - times that call for a renewal of courage and strength. Fellow Christians are called to encourage each other during these times of pressure and problems.

I. THERE IS NEED FOR COURAGE (v. 1-5)

II. THERE IS ALSO THE MINISTRY OF ENCOURAGEMENT (v. 6-13).

1. Paul had great affection and love for his converts.
2. Paul felt a certain anxiety and concern for his converts.
3. Paul established a personal contact with his new converts.
4. Paul rejoiced in the positive qualities which his new converts manifested.
5. Paul personally identified with the sufferings and the struggles of his new converts.
6. Paul gladly acknowledged that he was indebted to his new converts who brought great joy to Paul's life (v. 9).
7. Paul prayed earnestly, night and day, for his new converts.
8. Paul recognized the weaknesses in the lives of his new converts and sought to perfect that which was lacking in the faith of the new converts.

CONCLUSION:

Courage is needed if the Christian life is to be lived successfully. Every believer must seek to stimulate the faith of others.

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Learning To Be A Good Encourager.

C H A P T E R     T H R E E

SCRIPTURE: I THESSALONIANS 3:1-13

TEXT: "For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord." (v. 8)

INTRODUCTION: Is the Christian way the way of pleasure or the way of pain? There are those who would say that the way of Christianity is the way of pain, of sacrifice, of denunciation, of sorrow! After all, Jesus said, "If any man will be my disciple he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me!" Cross-bearing is not a pleasurable experience. Denying one's own self-centered pleasures and learning to obey the Master instead, is not always a pleasurable experience. Following Christ, even when it seems to be unpopular, may not appear to be exciting.

It can't be denied that there are hardships in the Christian life! Think of Jesus! He was misunderstood, misrepresented, slandered, persecuted, forsaken. He had no place to call his own. He became weary in body and heavy in spirit. Finally denied by one of his chosen twelve, and betrayed by another, He ended up on a cruel Roman cross where He not only suffered the physical agonies of crucifixion, but where He also suffered the agony of feeling denied by His Heavenly Father. He cried out from the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!" Yes, the Bible says that Jesus, the Son of God, "learned obedience by the things which He suffered." Jesus was "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." Jesus was no stranger to suffering.

And think of Paul the apostle - perhaps the greatest follower of Jesus. He too was no stranger to suffering! (Note II Corinthians 11:23-28)

Again I ask the question: "Is the way of Christianity the way of pain or the way of pleasure?" Compared to the way of sin, the way of Christianity is the way of pleasure! The Bible says, "The way of the transgressor is hard!" Notes E. Stanley Jones, "The idea that the Christian way is hard is all wrong. His yoke is easy and his burden is light, for his yoke is your yearning and his burden is your blessing. When you find him, you find yourself. The laws of your being are the laws of the Way. The Kingdom of Heaven, the Way, is within you and is the thing for which you were made; and therefore, when you find him, you find yourself. There is more joy to the square inch in being his than there is to the square mile in the outside world of rebellion." (The Divine Yes; page 49,50)

Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30)

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The way of Christ is "easy" compared to the way of Satan! Why? For, to go the way of sin is to go against the "grain of reality". You are made by God and for God, so when you take the way of God, you are taking the way of health and sanity and reality! To go against God, is to go against yourself! The way of God is the way of joy and fulfillment and true contentment. Why? Because Christ's yoke is man's yearning, and Christ's burden is man's blessing! As the heart is made for love, as the lungs are made for air, as the stomach is made for food, as the eyes are made for beauty - so your spirit is made for God. Man is restless until he rests in God. God is his "native home". To find God is to find yourself.

Testifies E. Stanley Jones, "Life to me has not been a struggle. It has been, and is, a Song. The struggle has been only when I have departed from His Way. Only when I have jumped the rails of his Way and have bumped along the ties of my own self-will, tearing myself and my situation to pieces, have I had a struggle, a struggle to get back on the rails, to get back on the Way to live - his will. When I am in his will, life is not a struggle; it is a Song." (A Song of Ascents; page 18)

There is a "high cost" in serving Christ, as we have briefly noted earlier, but there is a "higher cost" in not serving Christ! There is a cross to bear, but the Christ of the cross walks beside the believer every step of the way! God gives the believer all things richly to enjoy. There are pleasures forevermore in serving Christ! Jesus came in order that man might have life and might have it more abundantly. He came to earth, not to subtract but to add, not to destroy but to save, not to condemn but to forgive! The last word of Christianity is not denunciation but affirmation, not sacrifice but salvation, not sorrow over sins but joy over redemption. The joy of the Lord is our strength. The joy of the Lord is unspeakable and full of glory!

So, how would you answer the question: "Is the way of Christianity the way of pain or the way of pleasure?"

I would have to answer that it is both. It can't be denied that there is pain, hardship, perplexities, problems, and even persecutions in living the Christian life. Anyone who serves as a missionary in a pagan land will testify that life is not always easy. But, it must also be affirmed that the way of Christianity is the way of pleasure and joy and satisfaction and contentment and fulfillment! The soldiers of the cross may at times be battered, but they are not defeated. They are gloriously happy, and radiant.

**PROPOSITION:** The way of Christianity is the way of joy and happiness, but, in living the Christian life, there are times of challenge and struggles - times that call for a renewal of courage and strength. Fellow Christians are called to encourage each other during these times of pressure and problems.

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I. THERE IS NEED FOR COURAGE (v. 1-5)

In discussing the question of pain and pleasure in the Christian life, we must now look closely at the Thessalonian Christians, as described in Paul's letter which we are studying. These new believers were feeling both the pleasures and the pains of the Christian life. In spite of the persecutions, afflictions, and adversities which they were experiencing, they were filled with joy because of sins forgiven. They had welcomed the Gospel message and had turned from their idols to serve the living God. They witnessed to their new found faith with great boldness - like a trumpet sounding forth. They gladly imitated the life-style of godliness as they observed it in the lives of Paul and Silas. They were filled with confidence and assurance as they waited patiently for the return of the Saviour from heaven. They had no fear of oncoming judgment, for they knew that Christ had rescued them from God's coming wrath. Yes - these believers had a right to be filled with joy. Christianity brought great pleasure to their lives!

However, it must be acknowledged that Christianity also brought pain and sacrifice and persecution to the Thessalonian believers. Recall that Paul himself had suffered greatly for the cause of Christ, that he had been imprisoned at Philippi, that he had been forced to leave Thessalonica by night because of angry Jews, that he had been forced to leave Berea because of agitated crowds (Acts 16,17). Paul knew what it was to be persecuted for Christ!

After Paul had to leave the newly converted Thessalonians, he wondered if their faith was great enough to keep them true to Christ, amidst the persecution which they had to suffer. How thrilled Paul was when Timothy returned with a report that the Thessalonian believers had indeed remained steadfast amidst their great sufferings. (Note I Thessalonians 3:1-8)

Just as in the case of the young Thessalonian Christians, there is always need for courage in the face of obstacles and troubles and pressures and persecutions. When all seems to be going well in life - when life is comfortable, when friends are close by, when fruits from our labors are abounding, when the praise of people around us is lavishly offered - it seems that there is no pain, but only pleasure, in the Christian life. But when the storm clouds gather - when health fails, when finances are tight, when friends leave, when the visible results from our earnest efforts are little or none, when the tongues of slanderers and persecutors wag freely, when the devil plots to discourage us - it is then that courage is needed as never before!

As in the case of the Thessalonians, the faith of all believers does need to be strengthened. There is a recurring temptation to lose heart, to abandon the struggle, to become discouraged, to lose confidence, to check out on our duty, to "throw in the towel"! There are times when believers wonder if it's worth the strain. The Christian life is a long, drawn-out battle, and therefore the believer is subject to the temptation to grow weary,

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to retreat, and even to quit! "The temptation to give up while we are still in the battle is constantly before us." (Ogilvie; Life As It Was Meant To Be; page 56) In many of Paul's letters, he urges the young Christians to persevere in their faith, in spite of the fact that the way sometimes gets rough and steep!

There is need for courage in living the Christian life, both during the times of mundane routine and also during the times of pressure and problems and persecutions. Amidst the routine, when progress is painstakingly slow and when the "in-between" times are so long before the particular project we are engaged in is finally consummated! Amidst the crisis, when life seems to be coming apart under the pressure of seemingly uncontrollable adverse circumstances or under the pressure of maliciously conceived plots and plans of evil men and vicious demons!

There is the need for courage! To live the Christian life (which sometimes has its pains and struggles as well as its pleasures), you must acknowledge your need for courage!

II. THERE IS ALSO THE MINISTRY OF ENCOURAGEMENT (v. 6-13)

Believers (especially new believers) need to become established in the Faith. It is possible to become fainthearted when believers are going through trials and temptations and troubles. It is possible for Satan to discourage believers, causing them to give up their faith altogether (v. 5). Paul knew that if the persecuted believers gave up their faith - "threw in the towel" - that his work among the Thessalonians would all be "in vain", useless, wasted, lost! Paul sought, therefore, to be a good encourager. What are the characteristics of a good encourager, as exemplified in the life of Paul?

1. Paul had great affection and love for his converts. What is the basis for the ministry of encouragement? It is deep love for the people whom we have led to Christ. If you are to be effective as an encourager of another, you must have a deep love for that one. There is a cost in being an encourager. To encourage another, you must have a personal relationship with another. To develop a deep relationship with another involves time, effort, humility, vulnerability, sympathy, sacrifice.

2. Paul felt a certain anxiety and concern for his converts. "For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter might have tempted you and our efforts might have been useless." (v. 5)

Like Paul, if you are an encourager of another Christian - especially a young believer - you must possess a deep and heartfelt concern for the spiritual welfare of another. You must be aware of the tricks and strategies of Satan who is seeking to discourage the young believer and who is plotting to destroy the very faith of the young believer. Anyone who really cares for another will

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carry a burden for that person. Do you really care, are you really concerned, is your mind preoccupied with the needs of the new believers whom you are seeking to encourage and to strengthen?

3. Paul established a personal contact with his new converts. It is true that Paul could not himself go to the Thessalonian believers to check on them personally, but Paul sent Timothy as his special representative to visit with and to encourage his new converts. Paul was not only inwardly concerned for the spiritual welfare of his new converts; Paul outwardly and practically expressed his love and concern for the new believers through the physical presence of Timothy.

One who is a good encourager takes the time to actually go to another believer to spend time with him and to encourage him. Your presence is vitally important. Do you spend time with new converts? Do you give outward expression to your inner feelings of concern for others? It is good to feel concern, but your feelings of love for others must be expressed in practical actions. Someone said, "Impression without expression leads to depression." It has also been said,

"A bell is not a bell until you ring it,  
A song is not a song until you sing it,  
Love is not love until you give it away."

Take time every week, amidst your busy schedule, to go to another believer - especially to a younger believer - and spend some time with that fellow believer, praying together, reading the Bible together, praising God together, and simply giving a listening ear to the new Christian. Be an encourager by simply offering your positive presence to another. To be an encourager, you must give of yourself to another. Everyone should visit other believers for the purpose of encouragement.

4. Paul rejoiced in the positive qualities which his new converts manifested. (Note verse 6) - "But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you."

Paul pointed out the positive qualities in the lives of his new converts: steadfastness in their faith in spite of severe persecutions, deep love in their lives which sought to express itself by desiring reunion with Paul, positive and pleasant memories which they cherished regarding Paul's ministry among them.

An encourager, like Paul, always focuses on the positive qualities in the new converts with whom he is working.

Paul was sincere in his words of appreciation for his new converts, and he was liberal and uninhibited in his expression of praise for the positive qualities which he saw manifested in the lives of the young Christians.

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If you are to be a good encourager, you must not be a negative or a critical person. You must not be oblivious to the weaknesses and the faults in the lives of the new believers (as we will note in verse 10), but you, nevertheless, must focus on the positive qualities. Tell new believers how much you appreciate their growth in faith and their expressions of love and affection. Tell them how much you appreciate their courage in the midst of adversities and persecutions and pressures. Let them know, as Paul let the young Thessalonian believers know, that they are a great encouragement to you and that you need their love and support and encouragement just as much as they need your support. Don't be afraid to be open and warm and personable and vulnerable - and above all, be humble and appreciative in the presence of new believers. Focus on their positive qualities!

5. Paul personally identified with the sufferings and the struggles of his new converts. Paul did not put himself on a pedestal, posing as a strong and invincible "champion of the faith", with a condescending attitude toward the young and weak believers of Thessalonica. No! Paul identified with the struggles of the new Christians, and looked at himself as a fellow struggler! Paul did not talk abstractly or theoretically about suffering to his new converts. Paul told his new converts that he fully understood what they were going through, for he himself (at the time he was writing to them) was going through suffering also. As noted in chapter two, Paul knew what it was to be slandered, abused, rejected, persecuted, misrepresented. He was even acquainted with actual physical abuse, having been imprisoned and beaten in the city of Philippi, just before he had arrived in Thessalonica.

Fellow strugglers who together suffer for the cause of Christ tend to communicate at a deep soul-level. They understand well, and they are a mutual encouragement to one another. Paul - the encourager - became Paul - the encouraged - when he beheld the courage with which the new believers suffered persecutions, similar to his own persecutions! "Therefore, brothers, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith. For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord." (v. 7,8)

As in the case of Paul, it is important that you, as an encourager, are willing to share your own sufferings with those that you are seeking to help. Don't focus on your own struggles, but, nevertheless, be vulnerable enough to share them. Mutual encouragement can be realized only when there is mutual sharing of sufferings and afflictions and struggles. You, like Paul, will be greatly encouraged and your own sufferings will become more bearable, when you observe the courageous way your new converts are bearing their burdens and courageously coping with their own troubles.

On countless occasions when I have worked with some young Christian who, at the time, was courageously facing some struggle in his own life, I have come back to my own home greatly encouraged, with a heart overflowing with gratitude for the new

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believer. I had gone to encourage the new believer, but ended up being the one who was encouraged! My own burdens seemed lighter. My own courage was stimulated. When seeing the faith and the love of the new believer growing - in spite of problems and pressures which he was facing - I came away greatly encouraged. I felt like Paul, when he wrote, "This has cheered us, my brothers, in all the miseries and troubles we ourselves are going through. To know that you are standing fast in the Lord is indeed a breath of life to us." (3:7,8 Phillips)

6. Paul gladly acknowledged that he was indebted to his new converts who brought great joy to Paul's life (v. 9). "How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you?" (v. 9) Paul was not aloof from his new converts. He did not have a "holier-than-thou" attitude. He did not feel superior, self-reliant, or self-sufficient, or independent. Paul was glad to acknowledge that his own joy in the Lord came from the fact that his new converts were faring well in their spiritual lives. Paul was glad to acknowledge his own personal indebtedness to his new converts.

Do you, like Paul, find that your joy abounds when you learn that your new converts are growing in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus?

7. Paul prayed earnestly, night and day, for his new converts. Notes Lloyd Ogilvie, "Courage is fear which has said its prayers. Paul and the Thessalonians had fear in common. And so do we. If we are not attempting something which creates the human reaction of fear we are probably not living life as it was meant to be lived. Fear in the soul-stretching challenges drives us to prayer. Eddie Rickenbacker knew what he was talking about when he said that courage is doing what you're afraid to do. There is no courage unless you're scared and are driven to your knees. Thomas Fuller, English divine and author (1608-1661), said, 'Fear can keep a man out of danger, but courage can support him in it.' The psalmist discovered the Lord's antidote to fear when he heard Him say in the depth of his soul, 'Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me' (Psalms 50:15 KJV). Like all of us, he wanted to escape life's challenges; 'Oh that I had wings like a dove! For then would I fly away, and be at rest' (Psalms 55:6 KJV). But honest praying had not allowed such a flight from reality and responsibility. Prayer is not an escape but an encounter. Nehemiah discovered that when his frightened friends encouraged him to check out from the endless conflict and discouragement of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. His response should be a memorized motto for us: 'Should a man like me flee? And could one such as I go into the temple to save his life?' (Nehemiah 6:11). Carlyle said that life begins with the quiet estimate of ourselves that will not let us play the coward. And that quiet estimate of our fear and the Lord's power is the essence of authentic prayer." (Life As It Was Meant To Be; page 59, 60)

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An encourager is one who is honest enough to acknowledge his own fears and who is realistic enough to be aware of the fears of his new converts - and as a result, prays earnestly "night and day" for the new believers. You cannot be a true encourager of others without being a "prayer warrior" in their behalf!

8. Paul recognized the weaknesses in the lives of his new converts and sought to perfect that which was lacking in the faith of the new converts. Paul wanted to see his converts, face to face, in order "to mend" (NEB) what was lacking in their faith (v. 10). He wanted to see his new believers sanctified and made holy and blameless (v. 13). He wanted to see them grow in love for their fellow believers and for all persons (v. 12). He wanted them to live lives which were pleasing to God in every way (4:1). Even though they lived in the midst of a godless and lust-filled society, he wanted them to remain pure and clean, learning to control their bodily desires, never allowing their bodies to fall victims to lust (4:4,5 Phillips). Paul wanted these justified believers to become fully sanctified believers.

If you are an encourager of new believers, one of your responsibilities is to lead your new converts into a life of holiness and purity and deeper love. Outward separation from sinning must be followed by total inward separation from sin. The work of faith which was begun in conversion must be perfected in sanctification. The new believer must be encouraged to make a full and unconditional commitment of his life to Jesus, not only as Saviour, but as Lord and Master. He must be encouraged to maintain moral purity in all of his relationships. He must be encouraged to grow in his love for the brethren. He must be encouraged to develop a godly life-style, practically manifested through honest daily labors.

CONCLUSION:

Courage is needed if the Christian life is to be lived successfully. Every believer must seek to stimulate the faith of others. Chapter Three teaches us certain fundamental facts regarding Faith.

- (1) Faith must be established (v. 2).
- (2) Faith of the young believer can be destroyed by the Devil's powers, resulting in the laborer's work being rendered useless (v. 5).
- (3) Faith can enable one to have courage to go through any problem (v. 6,7).
- (4) Faith can be enhanced and reinforced through the encouraging presence of fellow believers (v. 2,10). A good encourager (a) prays for others, (b) goes to others and spends time with them, (c) encourages others during tribulations through words of praise and affirmation, (d) gives positive reports regarding the steadfastness of young Christians who are struggling.

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(5) The faith of others is enhanced when one identifies with the problems and the perplexities of others (v. 4,7).

(6) Faith needs to be perfected (v. 10), resulting in the abounding love towards fellow believers (v. 12,13).

Will you commit yourself to be a good encourager of others? Ask God to enable you to be a minister of encouragement!

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Q U E S T I O N S

1. How would you answer a person - a person who is an honest inquirer into the nature of Christianity - the following question: "Is the way of Christianity the way of pain or the way of pleasure?"
2. Give your interpretation of the following statement by E. Stanley Jones: "When you find him (Christ), you find yourself."
3. In the midst of pressures and persecutions, what facts regarding God and salvation brought great joy to the hearts of the Thessalonian believers, and how did the Thessalonian believers manifest (by actions and attitudes) their new-found spiritual joy?
4. As recorded in Acts 16 and 17, what events took place that demonstrated Paul's loyalty to Christ?
5. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The temptation to give up while we are still in the battle is constantly before us." What specifically are some of the "battles" that Christians face, which challenge their courage and which call for perseverance?
6. According to I Thessalonians 3:6, what is the basis for the ministry of encouragement?
7. Is it "right" for a disciple (i.e., one who is leading and teaching a new believer) to feel "anxious" for the young Christian he is discipling? Why or why not? (Note I Thessalonians 3:5)
8. In terms of time, effort, prayer, and presence, what is the "high cost" involved in being an effective encourager to fellow believers? (Note I Thessalonians 3:6-13)
9. In his attempt to encourage the persecuted Thessalonian believers, what were some of the positive qualities in the lives of these believers which Paul focused on? (Note I Thessalonians 3:6) Is it possible for him to be a "good encourager" and, at the same time, be critical in attitudes and "perfectionist" in expectations? Why or why not?
10. List some of the positive qualities (in terms of actions and attitudes) that must be evident in the life of a person who seeks to work with young believers.
11. Why is it important for the encourager (i.e., the one who is giving encouragement to others) to be willing to be the encouraged (i.e., the one who is receiving encouragement from others)?

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12. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement:  
"Mutual encouragement can be realized only when there is mutual sharing of sufferings and afflictions and struggles."
13. To what extent should more mature Christians express their "indebtedness" to young Christians? (Note I Thessalonians 3:9) Why is it so wrong for older Christians to feel "superior" or "self-reliant" or "self-sufficient" or "independent" in the presence of younger believers?
14. Do you, like Paul, find that your joy abounds when you learn that your new converts are growing in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus?
15. Give your interpretation of the following statement: "Courage is fear which has said its prayers."
16. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement:  
"If we are not attempting something which creates the human reaction of fear we are probably not living life as it was meant to be lived."
17. Share from your own personal life an experience which demonstrates the truth of the following statement: "Fear in the soul-stretching challenges drives us to prayer."
18. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement:  
"You cannot be a true encourager of others without being a 'prayer warrior' on their behalf."
19. From the context of I Thessalonians 3:10-4:3, what specific areas in the lives of the Thessalonian believers needed to be perfected or "mended"? (Note I Thessalonians 3:10)



Chapter 4

Living

The Life Of Holiness

I Thessalonians 3:12-4:12

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Living The Life Of Holiness

O U T L I N E

SCRIPTURE: I THESSALONIANS 3:12-4:12

TEXT: "Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more." (I Thessalonians 4:1-2)

INTRODUCTION: In I Thessalonians 3:12-4:12, Paul states what the principle of holiness is, declares what the power of holiness does, and describes what the practice of holiness means.

PROPOSITION: The life of holiness is a life of love, a life which results in a victorious standing before God in the present and in a fearless acceptance by God in the future. It is a love-filled life which is practically expressed in one's daily life in his home, in the Church, and on his job.

I. THE PRINCIPLE OF HOLINESS - Overflowing Love (3:12)

- A. A Life Of Holiness Is A Life Of Love
- B. Growth In Holiness Is Growth In Love

II. THE POWER OF HOLINESS (3:13)

- A. Blameless Standing Before God At The Present
- B. Fearless Acceptance By God At Christ's Coming.

III. THE PRACTICE OF HOLINESS (4:1-12)

- A. General Exhortations To Holy Living (4:1-2)
- B. Specific Ethics of Holy Living (4:3-12)
  - 1. In The Home - Moral Purity (4:3-8)
  - 2. In The Christian Fellowship (Church) - Growing Love (4:9-10)
  - 3. On The Job - Diligent Labor (4:11, 12)

CONCLUSION: Are you pursuing holiness of heart and life? Is more love for God and for your fellowmen your lifetime goal?

Faith in God is practical - very practical!

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Living The Life Of Holiness

C H A P T E R F O U R

SCRIPTURE: I THESSALONIANS 3:12-4:12

TEXT: "Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more." (I Thessalonians 4:1-2)

INTRODUCTION: "Holiness" is a word that unfortunately scares many people! What comes to your mind when you hear the word "holiness"? Is it a picture of legalism - a life of do's and don't's? Is it a picture of a lonely saint in a monastery, closed away from all other humans, nurturing his personal spiritual life? Is it a picture of a person who is joyless, straining to do right, and duty-bound in his attempt to make himself worthy before God? What comes to your mind when you hear the word "holiness"? Is it a picture of a withdrawn and introverted and critical person who feels he is too good to rub shoulders with common sinners - something like the Pharisees who were the "holier-than-thou" type people, who "look down their nose" on others?

If "holiness" brings any of these pictures to your mind, then you have a wrong concept of holiness!

In I Thessalonians 3:12-4:12, Paul states what the principle of holiness is, declares what the power of holiness does, and describes what the practice of holiness means.

PROPOSITION: The life of holiness is a life of love, a life which results in a victorious standing before God in the present and in a fearless acceptance by God in the future. It is a love-filled life which is practically expressed in one's daily life in his home, in the Church, and on his job.

I. THE PRINCIPLE OF HOLINESS - Overflowing Love (3:12)

Writes Paul, "May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you." (3:12)

A. A Life Of Holiness Is A Life Of Love

Notes Sangster, "The heart of holiness is supernatural love - and love is a gift. Love is the key to holiness." (Daily Readings; page 53)

Jesus said, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if you have love one for another." This love, which is the very principle and essence of holiness, originates in God Himself. Romans 5:5 says that God's type of love is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. It is God's gift to the humble soul; it is not man's proud accomplishment!

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The proof that one is a true Christian is seen when the believer is truly loving his fellow men. A Christian is called to love his fellow believers first. Wrote John, "We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, 'I love God', yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen." (I John 4:19-21 NIV)

It is not only fellow Christians that believers are called to love, however. It is also nonbelievers - and even one's enemies - that Christians are commanded to love. Said Jesus, "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:43-45a)

Notes John Wesley, "There is nothing higher in religion; there is, in effect, nothing else; if you look for anything but more love, you are looking wide of the mark, you are getting out of the royal way. And when you are asking others, 'Have you received this or that blessing?' if you mean anything but more love, you mean wrong; you are leading them out of the way and putting them upon a false scent." Another time Wesley noted, "Entire sanctification, or Christian perfection is neither more nor less than pure love - love expelling sin and governing both the heart and life of a child of God." (Quoted in A Contemporary Wesleyan Theology; Volume 1; page 534.)

B. Growth In Holiness Is Growth In Love

It is not only the presence of love that is important in the believer's life, but it is growth in love that is all-important! This love, of which we have been speaking, "is God's own gift to totally committed children of His, who, renouncing self-pleasing and men-pleasing, are imbued with a passionate eagerness to please Him (God) in all things." (Prayer and Life's Highest; page 61; Paul Rees)

The love of God which is initially shed abroad in the heart of the believer by the Holy Spirit is the same love which can abound more and more in the heart of the believer. Notes J.A. Wood, "Perfection in quality does not exclude increase in quantity. Beyond entire sanctification there is no increase in purity, as that which is pure cannot be more than pure; but there may be unlimited increase in expansion and quantity. After love is made perfect, it may abound more and yet more. Holiness in the entirely sanctified soul is exclusive and is perfect in kind or in quality, but is limited in degree or quantity. The capacities of the soul are expansive and progressive, and holiness in measure can increase corresponding to increasing capacity. Faith, love, humility, and patience, may be perfect in kind, and yet increase in volume and power, or in measure harmonizing with increasing capacity. A tree may be perfectly sound, healthy, and vigorous in it's branches, leaves, and fruit, and yet year by year increase perpetually it's capacity and fruitfulness." (Perfect Love, page 29)

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II. THE POWER OF HOLINESS (3:13)

Paul continues, "May he give you inner strength that you may be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones." (3:13)

The essence of holiness is love. Love is a gift which God gives to the sincere soul who surrenders all to Christ. This imparted love grows steadily as the believer walks in faith and obedience, and as he learns to exercise this love within his human relationships - with both believers and with nonbelievers.

A. Blameless Standing Before God At The Present

This God-imparted love is powerful, for this love enables a believer presently to stand before God without guilt and without condemnation, and this love also enables a believer to face the future without fear when "Jesus comes with all his holy ones." (3:13)

The man who is made perfect in love has no alloy in his love for God. He is "blameless" before God, i.e., he is without blemish or pollution or stain. His love is unmixed and pure. His love is fixed on God alone. There is no room in his heart for any less affection than affection for God alone. His whole heart is the home for God. God occupies every room. There is a constant preference for God, even in times when God's leadership is difficult to discern or to follow. What does it mean to be "blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father" (verse 13)? It means that one loves God with all of his heart, his soul, his strength, and his mind. To love God in this way is to love Him, despite the cost in personal sacrifice or loss. The "blameless and holy one" has a supreme preference for God at all times. He is not double-minded, trying to serve the interests of both God and sin at the same time. Love that is perfect is love that prefers God at all times - in times of loss or gain, sorrow or joy, success or failure, sickness or health.

The one who loves God wholeheartedly is the one who gains inner strength to successfully live the Christian life, moment by moment. A love-filled man is in a right standing with God, and he has confidence that he is truly born again. Wrote John, "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love." (I John 4:7-8 NIV)

B. Fearless Acceptance By God At Christ's Coming.

The believer who practices love is the believer who has no fear of facing God in the end! The one whose love is increasing and overflowing for his fellowmen is the one who has no reason to be terrorized when Christ comes back to earth with his holy angels to judge the world of evil men!

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He who loves God deeply and who believes that God loves him unconditionally and sacrificially, is the one who is guaranteed a safe entry into heaven following physical death! The one who is deeply in love with God has no reason for terrorizing fear in the future. Wrote John, "We need have no fear of someone who loves us perfectly; his perfect love for us eliminates all dread of what he might do to us. If we are afraid, it is for fear of what he might do to us, and shows that we are not fully convinced that he really loves us. So you see, our love for him comes as a result of his loving us first." (4:18,19 Living Bible)

III. THE PRACTICE OF HOLINESS (4:1-12)

We have seen what the principle of holiness is. It is overflowing love to each other. We have noted what the power of holiness accomplishes - a blameless standing before God at the present, and a fearless acceptance by God in the future "when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones." (3:13)

Now we must look at Paul's description of a holy life - the practice of holiness. (4:1-12)

A. General Exhortations To Holy Living (4:1-2)

Before Paul turns specifically to a description of the ethics of a holy life-style (4:3-12), Paul gives a general exhortation to the young Thessalonian believers to live a holy life. "Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. You know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus." (4:1-2)

There is a life-style that is pleasing to God, and there is a life-style that is displeasing to God. Make no mistake about this: there is a right way and there is a wrong way to live; there is a high road that leads to heaven and there is a low road that leads to hell; there is a Christ-centered life-style and there is a self-centered life-style; there is the way of the flesh and there is the way of the spirit; there is a God-pleasing way of life and there is a Satan-dominated way of life.

It was Paul's responsibility - and it is the responsibility of every spiritual leader today - to instruct those who wish to become Christians and those who have just become Christians "how to live in order to please God." (v.1) Are you, as a leader, in the process of helping to initiate others in the ways of holy living? Are you teaching others - by example and by precept - what it means to follow Christ, what it means to shun evil, what is involved in doing the works of righteousness and mercy and love?

Paul was a good instructor in the ways of holy living, for his new converts at Thessalonica had received his instructions and they were (at the time he wrote to them) practicing holy living. Not perfectly and not for a long period of time, but nevertheless, authentically they were living for Christ! These young believers

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recognized that Paul's instructions to them were given with no less authority than the very authority of the Lord Jesus. "You know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus." (v.2)

When we are instructing young believers, we must be most careful not to give them merely our own ideas or opinions or notions or personal convictions, based on our own human experience and views. We must point young converts to God's revealed truth. We must carefully interpret and apply God's eternal truths to the personal lives of the believers whom we are instructing and nurturing and guiding. Our instructions for holy living must have the backing of nothing less and nothing other than the authority of Jesus Christ Himself.

It is important not to impose our personal convictions upon the lives of young believers. We must always make a distinction in our teaching ministry between our personal opinions and interpretations and convictions and experience on one hand, and the simple, direct teachings of God's eternal Word on the other hand.

The non-negotiable truths of God's Word are to be presented, by the disciple-maker, to the new Christian, with the authority that God Himself grants. However, the personally interpreted convictions of the disciple-maker must be tolerantly offered to the new believer for his careful consideration, without the pressure of dogmatism or coercion.

Unfortunately, there have been some sincere Christian teachers who have, in the "name of holiness", instructed some new believers to do certain things and not to do some other things - to dress in a certain way, to adopt a certain life-style or to develop a certain manner of speaking or of acting - all of which were more the ways of the disciple-maker than necessarily the ways of God. There is a place for flexibility and tolerance, and, as teachers and spiritual leaders, we must always distinguish between "Thus saith the Lord" and "This is my personal interpretation and personal standards and convictions." We must not tamper with God's eternal Word, but, on the other hand, we must not dogmatically impose our own personal opinions upon others. We must leave room for differences of convictions among sincere Christians.

Notes Barclay, "The church is an empire in which all kinds of opinions and all kinds of theologies can find a place. We have a tendency to brand as a heretic anyone who does not think as we do. John Wesley was the greatest example of tolerance in the world. 'We think', he said, 'and we let think.' 'I have no more right,' he said, 'to object to a man for holding a different opinion from mine than I have to differ with a man because he wears a wig and I wear my own hair.' Wesley had one greeting, 'Is thy heart as my heart? Then give me thy hand!' It is good for a man to have assurance that he is right, but that is no reason why he should have the conviction that everyone else is wrong." (Barclay's Mark; page 110, 111)

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Getting back to Paul (in I Thessalonians 4:1-2), Paul's clearly presented and gladly accepted instructions resulted in the Thessalonian believers living a holy life-style. Paul now exhorts them to continue to grow in their love for God and for others - to live this holy life "more and more". "Their love for one another and for all men, and their obedience to God, should become even more dedicated, more detailed, deeper. More spiritual victories must be won. They must become ever more sensitive to the demands of the divine will." (Ronald Ward)

Before one looks specifically at the areas which are involved in the practice of the life of holiness (4:3-12), he must first have the right attitude regarding the holy life-style. It is a life of God-pleasing, a life that is lived by God-given instructions, a life that has unlimited possibilities for growth in love for God and for one's fellowmen.

When one understands the unlimited possibilities of growth in holiness, and after one makes a general commitment to "Christianize" his life-style in his pursuit of holiness, then it is relatively easy to make specific applications of God's general instructions for holy living.

B. Specific Ethics of Holy Living (4:3-12)

1. In The Home - Moral Purity (4:3-8)

Holy living encompasses all of life, but perhaps the best place to begin in a consideration of the practical life-style of holiness is the home, and specifically in the area of moral purity.

In an age where immorality was rampant and where women were treated as things to own and as objects to enjoy sexually, Paul focused on the standards of moral purity as an essential characteristic of a holy life-style.

"Immorality was a way of life in Thessalonica. Women were held in low esteem and the family had little permanence." (Ogilvie; Life As It Was Meant To Be; page 74)

A life of holiness is always a life of moral purity. "Echoing his Master, Paul elevated women, admonished sexual purity, taught the sacredness of marriage, and encouraged new reverence for the family. The Christians were to be distinctly different, Christ-guided, holy people." (Ogilvie; Ibid; page 74, 75)

(a) A life of moral purity means that one is to avoid sexual immorality. (Note I Thessalonians 4:3) This means that sex is to be reserved for marriage, and for marriage only. There is to be no heterosexual sex before marriage or outside of marriage. There is, of course, to be no homosexual relationships at any time.

"Holiness affects the body as well as the mind or soul. This derives from the Christian doctrine of personality. Man is not a soul living in a body - so that what happens to the body is of no

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consequence; man is an animated body. Body and soul form a unity." (Ronald Ward; Commentary; page 95)

Says Millard Sall, Christian psychologist, "The modern 'free love' philosophy that states that 'any act is all right as long as it doesn't hurt anyone else' is false. Immoral acts always hurt someone else besides hurting the person who commits them, although he might not recognize it at the time. A perfect example is that of Sally and Mike:

'We love each other; we want to express that love sexually; nobody else is being hurt, so why shouldn't we go ahead?' said a young man of nineteen to his girl friend. A few months later Sally came to my office broken and confused. She said that Mike and she had engaged in sex relations and at the time she could not see how anybody could be hurt. She had thought that the idea had just been a carry-over from her Puritan past. 'Now' she said, 'I am beginning to see it differently. As soon as Mike got what he wanted, he no longer seemed to be interested in marrying me. I also began to become confused as to my feeling about him. Did I really love him for himself or were we just using each other? Another thing that bothers me now is whether I could trust Mike to be faithful to me after we were married. I never thought I would be guilty about this, but now that I have done it I can see I really am. I'm terribly upset.'

The effect of these acts may not show up immediately, but the disintegration of the person's self-image and character occur eventually." (Faith, Psychology and Christian Maturity; page 43)

God created sex to be enjoyed within the sacred confines of marriage, not to be abused outside of marriage. Sex is a mighty dynamo - either to create endlessly or to destroy totally. We must allow the Creator of our urges to control and to cleanse those drives.

(b) A life of moral purity means that a husband controls his own body and that he honors the body of his wife - not as an object of lust but as an expression of her God-given self which is to be cherished, not exploited. I Thessalonians 4:4, 5 is translated differently by different translators. Here is the NIV translation: "that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God." This means (according to this translation) that the husband is not to allow his sexual drives to gain control of his reason - even within the context of marriage - and that he is to be a love-filled man instead of a lust-filled man when he is involved in the sexual act with his wife. There is no prohibition of strong sexual drives and desires in these verses; there is, however, a strong prohibition against allowing sexual drives to obscure reason. It is possible for the desires of the body to overcome the reasons of the mind - and when this happens, the wife can become an object to be selfishly used rather than a subject to be enjoyed and loved and cherished.

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"Scholars have been divided as to whether it here means the husband's 'body' or his 'wife'." (Ronald Ward; page 96) Perhaps the better translation is as follows: "Each of you men should know how to take a wife in a holy and honorable way, not with a lustful desire, like the heathen who do not know God." (Today's English Version). The heathen of Paul's day considered women as objects of pleasure to be used and abused at will. "Demosthenes expressed the belief of many: 'We keep prostitutes for pleasure; we keep mistresses for the day-to-day needs of the body; we keep wives for the begetting of children and for the faithful guardianship of our home.'" (Ogilvie; Life As It Was Meant To Be; page 74)

Within the context of marriage, the Christian husband is not to abuse his wife sexually. "Paul was suggesting that in marital cohabitation the husband must constantly woo his wife and in a manner which honors her and does not treat her as the object of mere lust." (Ronald Ward; page 96) The husband must think as much - if not more - about his wife's sexual needs as he does of his own needs. He must never forget that, just as he is to control his own body, so he is also, at the same time, to honor his wife by treating her tenderly and by recognizing that her body is a "vessel" which belongs first to God and only secondarily to him as the husband.

It is true, according to I Corinthians 7:3-5, that the Christian husband and wife each has mutual rights - sexually - but these rights must always be exercised with mutual respect for each other and with proper restraints. These "rights" must be exercised with the restraint which love at times requires, rather than with the uncontrolled compulsion which lust always demands!

(c) A life of moral purity means that an individual maintains purity of mind and purity of relationships in regards to persons of the opposite sex. Adulterous relationships are strictly prohibited! Note I Thessalonians 4:6 Living Bible. "And this also is God's will: that you never cheat in this matter by taking another man's wife, because the Lord will punish you terribly for this, as we have solemnly told you before."

In an age that declares that the Ten Commandments are irrelevant and outdated, we need to hear again the message of God's Word, "Thou shalt not commit adultery!" Paul wrote in I Corinthians 6:18-20 - "Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body."

How does the Lord punish the adulterer? In many ways! Sin pays its own wages, as evidenced, among other ways, by the devastating physical affects which a promiscuous life-style has on the human body. Notice the various ways in which the adulterer is punished, according to Proverbs 5. (Read this in the Living Bible.)

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(d) A life of moral purity means obedience to God's rules for holy living which brings honor to the Holy Spirit who lives within you. (v. 7-8)

The God who has given the Holy Spirit to live within the hearts of all true believers is the God who has called us to live holy lives! The Holy Spirit has come to produce a holy people. What is the motivation to live a holy and a pure life? A desire to please God and a longing to honor the Holy Spirit. Every word we speak, every thought we think, every attitude we express, every desire we feel, every decision we make - all of these things must bring honor to the Holy Spirit! Wrote Paul to the Ephesians, "Now your attitudes and thoughts must all be constantly changing for the better. Yes, you must be a new and different person, holy and good. Clothe yourself with this new nature." (Ephesians 4:23-24 Living Bible) We must not cause the Holy Spirit embarrassment by the way we live!

To reject this call to a holy life is not to reject the call of men, but it is to reject the very call of God! A holy life is not an option for a Christian! It is a divine requirement! The rules for holy living are God-established rules, not man-originated rules. The God who made man is the God who prescribes rules for man's moral and spiritual health and welfare. To obey God's rules is to enjoy health and wholeness and sanity and happiness! None of God's rules for holy living are unreasonable. To obey God's rules is to fulfill one's own best interests - for man is made by God and for God. The way of obedience is the way of freedom and fulfillment! The way of disobedience - doing that which is right in your own eyes, with no regard for God's established moral order - is the way of moral disaster and spiritual destruction. Let no one take lightly the rules for holy living, for to reject these rules is to reject God Himself!

In summarizing the ethics of holy living, as these apply in the home, we can say that moral purity means (1) avoidance of all sexual immorality (v. 3), (2) choosing a wife in holiness, not in lust (v. 4-5), (3) never taking another man's wife (adultery), for God will terribly punish the one who disobeys this God-given rule (v. 6), (4) obeying God's rules for holy living, and thus honoring the Holy Spirit who lives within you (v. 7, 8).

2. In The Christian Fellowship (Church) - Growing Love (4:9-10)

Paul continues to make specific applications of the ethics of holy living, next within the context of the Christian fellowship (or the Church). "But concerning the pure brotherly love that there should be among God's people. I don't need to say very much, I'm sure! For God himself is teaching you to love one another. Indeed, your love is already strong toward all the Christian brothers throughout your whole nation. Even so, dear friends, we beg you to love them more and more." (v. 9-10 Living Bible)

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Growth in holiness means growth in upward adoration towards God, growth in inward humility towards yourself, and growth in outward love for your fellowmen.

Paul prayed for the Ephesian Christians that they might grow more and more in their capacity of love. "And I pray that Christ will be more and more at home in your hearts, living within you as you trust in Him. May your roots go down deep into the soil of God's marvelous love." (Ephesians 3:17 Living Bible) There is opportunity for unlimited growth in love toward our fellowmen, as reflected in the following exhortation by William Law: "Let every day be a day of humility; condescend to all the weaknesses and infirmities of your fellow-creatures, cover their frailties, love their excellencies, encourage their virtues, relieve their wants, rejoice in their prosperities, compassionate their distress, receive their friendship, overlook their unkindness, forgive their malice, be a servant of servants, and condescend to do the lowest offices to the lowest of mankind."

You can experience heart purity immediately at the time you surrender your all to Christ, in faith, but you can only experience life maturity to the extent that you grow daily in your capacity to love. Remember, there is no greater joy known to mankind than the "joy of becoming" - the joy of becoming more loving and lovable, and thus becoming more Christ-like!

3. On The Job - Diligent Labor (4:11, 12)

The life of holiness is a life of abounding love, lived out in the practical areas of the home, in the church, and on the job. I Thessalonians 4:11-12 talks about the practical manifestations of holiness in one's daily life.

(a) Practical holiness means leading a quiet life (v. 11). Leading a quiet life does not mean withdrawing passively from life's activities and duties or from association with people. Christians are to be aggressive in striving to reach God-honoring goals and Christians are to be totally involved in their ministry to hurting people. Jesus actively went about doing good while he ministered on earth. Leading a quiet life means leading a life which is free from needless distractions which keep a believer from fulfilling his God-given goals or mission in life. Believers are to be free from needless busy work and from the clutter of meaningless activities, activities which drain them from productive service in God's vineyard. Also, leading a quiet life means freedom from a bad conscience, caused by deliberate wrongdoing. To have a clear conscience, as a result of living carefully and prayerfully and obediently, is to have a conscience that allows a believer to live a restful and quiet life.

Freedom from clutter, freedom from a bad conscience. Third, living a quiet life means minding your own business. The man who lives a quiet life is a man who does not "butt into other people's business" with a desire to control others or with a desire to gossip about others. A man who lives a quiet life is a man who

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minds his own business and who preoccupies his time and thoughts in the performance of his own God-given tasks. He is not a busybody or an idler who meddles in other people's affairs. There were some lazy, gossiping-type people - professing Christians - at Thessalonica. Note what Paul says in II Thessalonians 3:11-12. "We hear that some of you are living in laziness, refusing to work, and wasting your time in gossiping. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ we appeal to such people - we command them - to quiet down, get to work, and earn their own living." (Living Bible)

(b) Practical holiness means living an exemplary life-style before unbelievers - a life of diligent labor. What is one of the best advertisements for Christianity? A host of godly people who work diligently on their jobs, working as to the Lord and not simply to please their employers. Wrote Paul to the day-laborers in the Ephesian Church (most of whom were slaves serving a master): "Slaves, obey your masters; be eager to give them your very best. Serve them as you would Christ. Don't work hard only when your master is watching and then shirk when he isn't looking; work hard and with gladness all the time, as though working for Christ, doing the will of God with all your hearts." (Ephesians 6:6, 7 Living Bible)

In our modern-day age when people are wanting higher pay, shorter work weeks, increased benefits, and easier demands - it is imperative that Christians take seriously God's call to diligent labor on a daily basis on the job. Notes William Barclay, "Work must be done in the memory that God's eye is on them and it must be done to please God. The conviction of the Christian workman is that every single piece of work he produces must be good enough to show to God. The problem that the world has always faced, and that the world is facing acutely today, is not basically an economic problem at all; it is a religious problem. We will never make men good workmen by increasing pay, or bettering conditions, or heightening rewards. It is quite true that it is a Christian duty to see to these things; but they in themselves will never produce good work. Still less will we produce good work by intensifying threats and increasing oversight and multiplying punishments and penalties. The only secret of good workmanship is that it is done for God. It is only when a man is taking all his work and showing it to God that work can be good." (Barclay's Ephesians; page 214, 215)

The Christian workman should be the best workman of all. To give your employer a good day's work and to do your work well is to give God an opportunity to witness to the non-Christians around you. To work well is to witness effectively to non-Christian employers and fellow employees. A life of holiness means a life of diligent labor, living an exemplary life-style before nonbelievers. "Whereas the readers had been earlier urged to walk in a manner worthy of God, they were now reminded of the impression that the same walk would make on non-Christians." (Ronald Ward; page 102) Wrote Paul to the Romans, "Be decent and

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true in everything you do so that all can approve your behavior." (Romans 13:13, Living Bible) Read I Thessalonians 3:6-10 in the Living Bible.

(c) Practical holiness means finding and maintaining a sturdy financial independence. A life of holiness is a life that commands the respect of nonbelievers. It is a life that avoids laziness and which is involved in diligent labors of the hands and of the mind. Due to diligent labors, a life of holiness many times leads eventually to a life of financial prosperity. Don't misunderstand what is being said. We are not saying that living a holy life will always make one a rich person monetarily. There are many holy, yet financially poor, persons in the world - especially in what are called "Third World" countries. However, diligent labor is meant to produce financial freedom - freedom from the bondage of indebtedness and from the bondage of luxury alike. Financial independence means that you do "not need to depend on others for enough money to pay your bills." (I Thessalonians 4:12b LB)

A life of holiness is a life that is committed to diligent work, to a simple life-style, to generous giving to the genuinely needy and poor people in the world, and to a life of personal financial freedom from indebtedness. A holy life-style is characterized by neither a self-imposed poverty nor a life of selfish luxury. It is neither a life of giving all away nor is it a life of keeping all for one's own selfish indulgence. It means adequately providing for one's own family's needs, living simply, and giving generously.

CONCLUSION: We have looked at the life of holiness, as described in I Thessalonians 3:12-4:12. Let us quickly summarize what we have studied in this portion of Scripture.

- I. The Principle of Holiness - Overflowing love for each other (3:12)
- II. The Power of Holiness (3:13)
  - A. Blameless standing before God at the present,
  - B. Fearless acceptance by God at Christ's coming.
- III. The Practice of Holiness
  - A. General Exhortations to Holy Living (4:1-2)
  - B. Specific Ethics of Holy Living (4:3-12)
    - 1. In the Home (4:3-8) - Moral Purity
      - a. Avoid Sexual Immorality (v. 3)
      - b. Choose a Wife In Holiness, not in lust (v.4-5)
      - c. Never take another man's wife, for God will terribly punish the one who disobeys this God-given rule (v. 6)
      - d. Obey God's rules for holy living, and honor the Holy Spirit who lives within you (v. 7-8)

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2. In The Church (Christian Fellowship) - Growing Love (v. 9-10)
  - a. Established Principle (v. 9)
  - b. Established Practice (v. 10)
  - c. Unlimited Potential (v. 10)
  
3. On The Job - Diligent Labor (v. 11-12)
  - a. Lead a quiet life (v. 11)
  - b. Mind your own business (v. 11)
  - c. Exemplary life-style before unbelievers (v. 12)
  - d. Dependence on nobody (v. 12)

Are you pursuing holiness of heart and life? Is more love for God and for your fellowmen your lifetime goal?

Faith in God is practical - very practical!

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Q U E S T I O N S

1. What comes to your mind when you hear the word "holiness"?
2. What evidence from the Bible can you cite to demonstrate that the essence (or principle) of holiness is "love"?
3. What is your response to the following quotation from John Wesley: "Entire sanctification, or Christian perfection, is neither more nor less than pure love - love excelling sin and governing both the heart and life of a child of God"? From whence does this love come, and how can this special love best be described and defined? As they relate to love, describe the difference between heart purity and growing maturity?
4. In terms of moral excellence and spiritual maturity, what does it mean for a believer to be "blameless" before God?
5. To what extent do you identify with the following statement: "The one who loves God wholeheartedly is the one who gains inner strength to successfully live the Christian life, moment by moment"? (Note John 15:1-17)
6. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "He who loves God deeply and believes that God loves him unconditionally and sacrificially, is the one who is guaranteed a safe entry into heaven following physical death"? Is it possible to have a genuine faith in God without a corresponding practical love for one's fellowman? Why or why not: (Note I John 4:19-21; James 2:14-19)
7. In terms of the life of faith - the life of love in human relationship - how specifically do you believe a believer will practically express such faith? How would you describe the life-style that is pleasing to God? What does it mean, practically, to "shun evil", to be involved in doing the works of righteousness and mercy and love?
8. Does a Christian leader, who is attempting to instruct and to train young believers, have a right to be so bold as to claim "the authority of the Lord Jesus" (I Thessalonians 4:2) in what he says and in what he does in his disciple-making endeavors? Why or why not? What is meant by the statement: "Beware of 'authoritarianism' in Christian leaders"?
9. Is there a danger in Christian leaders imposing their own personal convictions upon the lives of young believers, with a failure to make a distinction in their teaching ministry between mere personal opinions and interpretations and experiences on one hand, and the simple and direct teachings of God's eternal Word on the other hand? Can you give an illustration of a sincere Christian imposing his personal convictions upon a young believer, with the result of needlessly (and unBiblically) threatening the personal spiritual liberty and freedom of that young believer? Can you

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give illustrations of non-negotiable truths of God's Word which must be strongly presented to new believers, in contrast to personally interpreted and debatable convictions which the disciple-maker must be careful not to impose upon others?

10. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement by William Barclay: "We have a tendency to brand as a heretic anyone who does not think as we do." When is "tolerance" a virtue and when is it a fault, in defending ideas and in dealing with others who disagree with you?
11. What specifically can believers, who take the advice of I Thessalonians 4:1, do to become more sensitive to the demands of the divine will?
12. What is your response to the following description of a "holy life-style"! "A holy life-style is a life of God-pleasing, a life that has unlimited possibilities for growth in love for God and for one's fellowmen."
13. According to I Thessalonians 4:3-8, what should be the attitude of the person of faith regarding sex and sexual expression?
14. What are two different ways of interpreting I Thessalonians 4:4, 5? What does I Corinthians 7:3-5 teach regarding the sexual life of a Christian couple?
15. According to I Thessalonians 4:6 and I Corinthians 6:18-20, how serious is physical adultery? What did Jesus teach in the "Sermon on the Mount" regarding adultery (Note Matthew 5:27, 28)? How does the Lord punish the adulterer (Read Proverbs 5 in the Living Bible)?
16. According to I Thessalonians 4:7, 8 what is the motivation to live a holy and a pure life?
17. With what degree of conviction do you agree with the following statements: "The God who made man is the God who prescribes rules for man's moral and spiritual health and welfare. To obey God's rules is to enjoy health and wholeness and sanity and happiness"? Can there be any true "freedom" without moral restraints and without obedience to God's laws?
18. According to I Thessalonians 4:9-10, how is faith practically expressed within the context of the Christian Fellowship (church)?
19. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "You can experience heart purity immediately at the time you surrender your all to Christ, in faith, but you can only experience life maturity to the extent that you grow daily in your capacity to love."

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20. Does living a "quiet life", according to I Thessalonians 4:11, mean withdrawing passively from life's activities and duties and associations with people, and becoming a person of solitude who meditates "day and night" upon "spiritual matters"? Why or why not? What, to you, does it mean "to lead a quiet life" (I Thessalonians 4:11)?
21. Do you believe, according to I Thessalonians 4:11b, that one of the best "advertisements" for Christianity is a host of godly people who work diligently on their daily jobs, working as to the Lord and not simply to please their employers? (Note Ephesians 6:7, 8; II Thessalonians 3:6-15) Is the daily "work place" probably the best place to demonstrate before a critical world that the Christian faith is both genuine and practical? Do you believe that the Christian workman should be the best workman of all? Why?
22. Why is it important for a person of faith to find and to maintain a sturdy financial independence (Note I Thessalonians 4:12)? Is it "praiseworthy" for a person, in the name of "faith", to "go out on a limb", to take financial risks to demonstrate to the world that God is a "miracle-working" God? When is it right for a believer personally or for a church corporately to go into financial debt "to advance the cause of the Kingdom of God"? Is waiting for God to supply the finances before one launches into a new "faith ministry", an indication of a "lack of faith", or is it an indication of a "wise and patient restraint"?
23. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "A life of holiness is a life that is committed to diligent work, to a simple life-style, to generous giving to the genuinely needy and poor people in the world, and to a life of personal financial freedom from indebtedness."
24. Is more love for God and for your fellowmen your lifetime goal? What specifically are you doing to help make the fulfillment of this goal a daily reality in your life?

Chapter 5

Hope

In An Age Of Despair!

I Thessalonians 4:12-5:11

I THESSALONIANS  
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O U T L I N E

SCRIPTURE: I THESSALONIANS 4:13-5:11

INTRODUCTION: How should a Christian look at death? Paul gives us an answer in the book of Thessalonians (Read I Thessalonians 4:13-18 in the Living Bible).

PROPOSITION: Man is hopeless and helpless unless he has faith in God! A man who has faith in God is a man who enjoys wonderful blessings - both in life and in death!

I. BASIS OF OUR NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD (4:14 and 5:10)

II. BENEFITS OF OUR NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD (4:13-5:5)

- A. It enables us to face death without fear and to experience sorrow without excessive grief.
- B. It gives us confidence that our loved ones are with Jesus following their physical death.
- C. It prepares us to meet Christ confidently if He should come before physical death.
- D. It protects us against sudden destruction which unbelievers will experience when Christ shall come again (5:1-5).

III. MAINTENANCE OF OUR NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD (5:6-5:9)

- A. Alert Rather Than Asleep (5:6)
- B. Self-Controlled Rather Than Drunk (5:7) (5:8)
- C. Faith Rather Than Unbelief (5:8)
- D. Love Rather Than Indifference (5:8)
- E. Hope Rather Than Fear (5:8)

CONCLUSION: What is the purpose for which Paul writes the verses which we have studied today? The purpose is Encouragement. "Therefore encourage each other with these words." (4:18) "Therefore, encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing." (5:11)

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C H A P T E R F I V E

SUBJECT: HOPE IN AN AGE OF DESPAIR!

SCRIPTURE: I THESSALONIANS 4:13-5:11

INTRODUCTION: Said one person, "Death is the most democratic institution on Earth. It comes to all men regardless of color, education, wealth, or rank. It allows no discrimination, tolerates no exceptions. The mortality rate of mankind is the same the world over: one death per person." (Fred Kuehner)

Death is the common denominator of all men. None can escape the reality of death. The Bible says, "It is appointed unto all men once to die." (Hebrews 9:27)

"Death is the one certain fact. Philip of Macedon had a slave to whom he gave a standing order. The man was to come in to the King every morning of his life, no matter what the King was doing, and to say to him in a loud voice: 'Philip, remember that thou must die.'...Death is the only prediction which we can make about human history with absolute certainty." (Christian Doctrine; Whale; page 172)

"There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death." (Ecclesiastes 8:8)

"For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." (James 4:14)

"As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more." (Psalm 103:15,16)

"When as a child, I laughed and wept,  
Time crept;  
When as a youth, I dreamed and talked,  
Time walked;  
When I became a full grown man,  
Time ran;  
When older still I daily grew,  
Time flew;  
Soon I shall find in travelling on,  
Time gone." (Author unknown)

"Either we despair, or we believe. There is no middle course, no razor-edge of noncommittal on which to balance precariously." (Whale; page 178) The man who has no faith in God is likely to say the same thing as the man of the world, who said regarding death: 'The wise man is remembered no longer than the fool, for, as the passing days multiply, all will be forgotten. Alas, wise man and fool die the same death!' So I came to hate life, since everything that was done here under the sun was a trouble to me;

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for all is emptiness and chasing the wind." (Ecclesiastes 2:16-18)

We are living in an age of despair and futility, an age that has largely lost hope in the future. Listen to what some of our modern-day commentators have said about the future.

Brief and powerless is man's life. On him and all his race the slow, sure doom falls pitiless and dark. Blind to good and evil, reckless of destruction, omnipotent matter rolls on its relentless way." (Bertrand Russell)

"Current indications are that the world is bent on going to hell in a hand cart, and that is probably what it will do." (Gordon Rattray Taylor)

"You are the orphans in an age of no tomorrows." (Joan Baez)

"Today even the survival of humanity is a utopian hope." (Norman O. Brown)

How should a Christian look at death? Paul gives us an answer in the book of Thessalonians (Read I Thessalonians 4:13-18 in the Living Bible).

**PROPOSITION:** Man is hopeless and helpless unless he has faith in God! A man who has faith in God is a man who enjoys wonderful blessings - both in life and in death!

A new relationship with God is the answer for despair in an age of futility! The benefits of a relationship with God are great: (1) It enables us to face death without fear and to enjoy comfort during times of grief (4:13). (2) It gives us confidence that we will be with Jesus following our physical death (4:14). (3) It prepares us to meet Christ confidently if He should come back to Earth before our physical death (4:16-18). (4) It protects us against sudden destruction which unbelievers will experience when Christ shall come again (5:1-5).

There are not only blessings to be enjoyed because of our personal relationship with God, but there are conditions to be met in order to maintain our personal relationship with God. (1) We must remain alert rather than sleep (5:6). (2) We must be self-controlled rather than drunk (5:7). (3) We must exercise faith rather than to succumb to unbelief (5:8). (4) We must exercise love rather than become indifferent (5:8). (5) We must maintain hope rather than succumb to fear (5:8).

The Basis of our new relationship with God is Christ (4:14 and 5:10) - His death and resurrection.

The Benefits of our new relationship with God is confidence as we face the future and the inevitability of physical death (4:13-5:5).

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The Maintenance of our new relationship with God is dependent upon our watchfulness and our faithfulness (5:6-5:9).

I. BASIS OF OUR NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD (4:14 AND 5:10)

"We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who sleep in him." (4:14)

"He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him." (5:10)

Without the death and resurrection of Jesus, there is no hope for meaningful survival after physical death. Jesus' death made atonement for my sins. Jesus' death was substitutionary - i.e., but Jesus took my penalty for me! Because Jesus died for me (taking the penalty for my sins), I do not need to die for my sins. As a just God, God will not punish twice for one crime. My crime deserves the death penalty. Christ took my punishment for me, therefore, God will not punish me for my own sins - if I accept what Christ has done in my place! The innocent one (Christ) has died for the guilty one (me), therefore God (the Judge) will forgive me of my sins and treat me as if I had never sinned (justification). The enmity between myself and God is removed because of what Christ has done for me. Fellowship with God is restored to me because of Christ's substitutionary death!

Not only is the death of Christ the basis of one's new relationship with God. The resurrection is also the basis of that new relationship with God. The substitutionary death of Christ is necessary to satisfy the justice of God and to form the basis for my right standing before God. However, it is the resurrection of Christ that is necessary to demonstrate the power of God over death (the chief enemy of Satan against mankind). Because Christ arose from the dead, all of those who place their faith in Christ have surrendered to the powerful Christ. Those who have placed their faith in the deathless Christ will not be overcome by death. Yes, the body of Christians must die, but not even physical death can keep the believer from living forever with Christ in a new and more glorious body!

"Only he who believes in God wins the victory over despair. Only the infinite mercy of the eternal Love, incarnate, suffering, dying, rising from the dead, is big enough for the tragedy of human existence." (Whale; page 178) The Christian with strong faith in God knows that death does not end it all, but that the perishability of death will someday be swallowed up in the imperishability of eternal life. With the Apostle Paul, the true Christian declares: "This perishable being must be clothed with the imperishable, and what is mortal must be clothed with immortality. And when our mortality has been clothed with immortality, then the saying of the Scripture will come true: 'Death is swallowed up: victory is won!' 'O Death, where is your victory? O Death, where is your sting?' The sting of death is

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sin; and sin gains its power from the law; but, God be praised, he gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (I Corinthians 15:53-57)

Dr. Norman Vincent Peale tells of his feelings after his mother's death. This is what he says: "I remember when my dear mother died in a little town in upstate New York. We took her body back to Ohio for burial. On the journey we had to change trains at Buffalo. I was walking down the platform and saw on a truck the shadowy outlines of a box. I walked over, almost fearing to read what was there. It said, 'Remains of Anna Peale'. That was rather a crude statement, and it might have struck me as repulsive. But the more I thought about it, the more it carried a glorious message to me: what was in that box was merely a physical form that I loved and my brothers loved and my father loved and many people loved. But my mother herself was not there. And when I walked out of the cemetery, having left her body there, these words from the Gospel of Luke rang through my mind: 'Why seek ye the living among the dead?' When our loved ones leave us, we lay away their physical bodies, no longer needed, like coats that are worn out. But at the time of death the person is released into a heavenly body."

The Bible teaches that the earthly body will decay and return to dust. However, the Bible also teaches that the real person will never die. The spirit of the person never dies. The personality of a person will survive eternally. The personality or the real you, cannot be destroyed. The Bible teaches that the believer in Christ will receive a new body which is not susceptible to pain or to death.

II. BENEFITS OF OUR NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD (4:13-5:5)

If the Basis of our new relationship with God is Christ - His death and resurrection - then the Benefits of our new relationship with God is Confidence as we face the future and the inevitability of physical death. Our relationship with God gives us confidence in many different areas.

A. It enables us to face death without fear and to experience sorrow without excessive grief. Wrote Paul, "Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who sleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope." (4:13) "The (Thessalonian) church had obviously been sorrowing because hope had mistakenly been abandoned for recently deceased members, who, it was thought, had by their death lost the blessings of the Second Advent. On the contrary, they would be with the Lord no less than those who survived until his coming." (Commentary; Ronald Ward)

Our grief may be great but it is bearable and our hope is sustained during the time we lose loved ones; we know that our Christian loved ones who have died are not forgotten, but that they are now with the Lord and that they will be with the Lord when He comes to earth again at the Second Coming.

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How great and how terrible is the grief of those who have no hope of ever seeing their loved ones again! "In face of death the pagan world stood in despair. They met it with grim resignation and bleak hopelessness. Aeschylus wrote, 'Once a man dies there is no resurrection.' Theocritus wrote, 'There is hope for those who are alive, but those who have died are without hope.' Catullus wrote, 'When once our brief light sets, there is one perpetual night through which we must sleep.' On their tomb stones grim epitaphs were carved. 'I was not; I became; I am not; I care not.'" (Barclay's Thessalonians; page 203)

Not only is the grief of Christians (due to the loss of loved ones in death) alleviated because of faith in Christ, but the fear of Christians (as they face their own inevitable death) is eliminated! One old dear saint, just this past week, told me that she had no fear whatever of dying. She knows her time to die will not be too long, but she faces the future with joy and confidence because of her loving relationship with her Saviour. She lives alone and is mostly confined to a wheel chair, but she said that, whether she is alone or with family members when she dies, she has no fear of death!

B. It gives us confidence that our loved ones are with Jesus following their physical death. "We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who sleep in him." (4:14)

C. It prepares us to meet Christ confidently if He should come before physical death. (Read I Thessalonians 4:16-18) Those who have already gone to heaven, following their physical death, will come back with Jesus to gather the remaining Christians to be with Christ and the heavenly saints. This sometimes is called "The Rapture". The departed saints and the living saints will all be together with Christ "in the air". Like a giant magnet, Christ will snatch all the living saints out of the world to be with Him and with all the heavenly saints! This will be done quickly - in the "twinkling of an eye"! The language of the verses is dramatic and poetic and is intended to convey the power and the beauty of the Rapture; the passage does not give all the details of the great event. The important thing to remember is this: the heavenly saints and the saints still living on earth when Jesus comes will all be together with Christ! Having a loving relationship with Christ assures you of a place with Christ in heaven, immediately following your physical death. (This passage does not teach "Soul Sleep".) Also, having a loving relationship with Christ assures you of a blessed rapture, in the event that you are still physically alive when Jesus comes back to earth.

D. It protects us against sudden destruction which unbelievers will experience when Christ shall come again. (5:1-5) At a time when ungodly men are complacent, self-reliant, and naively optimistic that their world is getting better and better - i.e., during a time when people are saying that all is "peace and safety" - it is then that Christ shall suddenly and shockingly return! He will come as a Judge to judge the evil of godless men.

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He will come with a "rod of iron" to vindicate His righteous cause. He will heap destruction upon the world, and godless men will fall into the hands of an angry God! It will be a most awesome and fearful day for unbelieving souls who have long mocked the blessed Christ!

But, while the coming of Christ for the unbeliever will be unexpected and shocking (like a thief at night, with all the accompanying terror that this picture evokes), the coming of Christ will not be shocking for the believer. It will be like the sudden birth pangs of a pregnant woman, but just as the birth pangs introduce something wonderful into the world - a new born baby - so the sudden coming of Christ will introduce for the believer a most glorious experience - the eternal union of all believers with their blessed Lord!

For the believer, the coming of the Lord is like sudden birth pangs of a pregnant woman, which birth pangs simply introduce something wonderful - new life in the form of a baby. The result is gain and happiness!

Both the coming of a thief and the coming of birth pangs are quick - but the outcome of each is very different. The coming of Jesus for the unbeliever spells loss and destruction! The coming of Jesus for the believer spells gain and glorious joy! Protection against sudden destruction when Jesus comes is a wonderful benefit in being a Christian!

III. MAINTENANCE OF OUR NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD (5:6-5:9)

There are blessings to be enjoyed because one is a true believer: (1) fearlessness in the face of death and comfort in the times of sorrow, (2) assurance that one will be with Jesus following physical death, (3) confidence that one will be able to welcome Jesus if Jesus should come to earth the Second time while the believer is still living on earth when Jesus comes, (4) protection against that sudden destruction which nonbelievers will experience when Christ suddenly comes back to earth.

Fearlessness, assurance, confidence, protection - these are all benefits from having a personal relationship with God. If such a personal relationship offers such wonderful blessings, then how can one maintain a vital relationship with God? If there are blessings to be enjoyed, there are also conditions to be met. What are the conditions to be met in order to maintain an up-to-date relationship with God?

A. Alert Rather Than Asleep (5:6)

"So then, let us not be like others who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled." (5:6) "To sleep means to be morally and spiritually insensitive. The sleeper does not hear the fire alarm, and is thus helpless in the face of danger." (Ronald Ward)

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Jesus warned believers to be watchful and prayerful: "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Being alert means that one is sensitive to God's will because he is knowledgeable of God's Word. One who is awake, rather than asleep, is aware of reality - reality as seen through the eyes of Christ and felt through the feelings of Christ and understood through the mind of Christ. Such keen awareness of reality is known, not only through a serious reading of God's Word but also through extended praying. Practicing the presence of Christ through quiet meditation results in one hearing the "still small voice of God". E. Stanley Jones, for years, took time in the early morning to sit quietly in the presence of God, listening for specific instructions from the Lord. He called the special Quiet Time his "Listening Post". Do you have a time each day, away from the "hustle and bustle" of life, when you get alone with God to study His Word and to listen for His voice? It probably will not be an audible voice, but God speaks through His Word to your conscience!

B. Self-Controlled Rather Than Drunk (5:7) (5:8)

"For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night." (5:7) In verse 6 we are commanded to be self-controlled, in contrast to being like a drunk man (v. 7). "But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled." We are to be self-controlled, disciplined, goal-oriented, men of destiny and direction and purpose. We are not to be like self-indulgent, undisciplined, lazy drunks who are possessed with inebriated imaginations, slaves to lower appetites, unpredictable in behavior, irresponsible and inactive! Rather, we are to be ready for action, in touch with reality, sober and serious-minded, responsible, reliable, creative, and productive. The price of freedom and fearlessness is eternal vigilance and self-imposed discipline. This means being a steward of our finances, of our time, and of our talents - using them all for God's glory rather than for selfish indulgence. One of the costs in maintaining a vital relationship with God is self-control!

C. Faith Rather Than Unbelief (5:8)

One of the pieces of Christian armor is faith. Faith in what Christ has done for us in the past - on the Cross - which makes possible the forgiveness of all past sins. Faith means believing in the person of Jesus Christ. Faith means believing in the providence of God - that God is in control of nature with its acts and in control of history with its events. Faith means believing that God has everything under control, that, though the wrong seems oft so strong God is Ruler yet! Faith means believing that God uses all things - good or bad - to serve the purposes of those who love Him! Faith means believing that God will someday "balance the books", punishing all evil workers who refuse to repent and rewarding all good people who continue to serve Christ.

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If one is to maintain his relationship with God, he must keep his faith in God alive! Wrote the writer of Hebrews: "Do not let this happy trust in the Lord die away, no matter what happens. Remember your reward! You need to keep on patiently doing God's will if you want him to do for you all that he has promised. His coming will not be delayed much longer. And those whose faith has made them good in God's sight must live by faith, trusting him in everything. Otherwise, if they shrink back, God will have no pleasure in them." (Hebrew 10:35-38 Living Bible)

D. Love Rather Than Indifference (5:8)

Another part of the armor of the Christian life that prepares us to face the oncoming wrath of God when the "Day of the Lord" comes, is love. The opposite of love is not hate. The opposite of love is indifference. Love means a supreme preference for God. Love means obedience to God's commands. Love means a practical compassion for our fellowmen. Love means giving a listening ear, lending a helping hand, offering a shoulder for people to cry upon! Love is going down to where people are, rejoicing with their successes and weeping because of their failures. Love spells involvement with people and is the opposite of indifference which spells isolation from people. Love means building "bridges" rather than "walls". It is far too easy to grow indifferent, first in our relationship with God and consequently in our relationship with our fellowmen. We dare not grow lukewarm in our love for God, for a lukewarm Christian is a revulsion to God. (Note Revelations 3:16: "So, because you are lukewarm - neither hot nor cold - I am about to spit you out of my mouth.") We dare not grow cold in our regard for our fellowmen, for a loveless Christian is a contradiction in terms. Our love for God is proven by our love for the brethren. "If anyone says 'I love God', but keeps on hating his brother, he is a liar; for if he doesn't love his brother who is there in front of him, how can he love God whom he has never seen? And God himself has said that one must love not only God, but his brother too." (I John 4:20-21 Living Bible)

E. Hope Rather Than Fear (5:8)

Faith and love constitute the Christian's breastplate. Hope is the Christian's helmet. "All dimensions of time are secured: faith in what Christ did (past), love from what He does (present), hope for what He will do (future)." (Ogilvie; Life As It Was Meant To Be; page 86)

If we have faith in God that our past sins are forgiven because of what Christ did for us on the cross, and if we have love for God presently because of the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts day by day, then we have a basis for hope as we face an unknown future - a future that includes our personal day of accountability before God when we shall meet him through physical death or at the time of the Rapture (when Jesus shall come to earth again). Our hope is a "sure anchor of the soul", holding us steady amidst the storms of life which seek to steal away our confidence. Repeatedly the Bible warns us against unbelief and exhorts us to "keep

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the faith". Repeatedly the Bible warns us against indifference and complacency and exhorts us to "let love abound". Repeatedly the Bible warns us against fear and exhorts us to keep our hope and confidence alive.

Faith, love, hope - this is the armor of the Christian which he must keep intact as a safeguard against the impending destruction (I Thessalonian 5:3) that is coming upon the heads of unbelievers when Jesus comes again!

CONCLUSION: What is the purpose for which Paul writes the verses which we have studied today? The purpose is Encouragement. "Therefore encourage each other with these words." (4:18) "Therefore, encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing." (5:11)

Our church is full of encouraging-type people. Now, in light of our Scripture today, continue to encourage each other. Encourage each other regarding what?

Encourage each other to remember that Christ's death provides an atonement for all sin and that Christ's resurrection demonstrates power over man's chiefest enemy which is death and hell!

Encourage each other to remain alert to spiritual reality and not to be lulled asleep by the world's attractions. Encourage each other to remain self-controlled and disciplined and serious-minded in living the Christian life, rather than becoming self-indulgent and uncontrolled like a drunken man. Encourage each other to keep on the armor of the Christian life which is faith and love and hope.

Remember, when fellow Christians are encouraged to remember the conditions that must be met in order to live a vital Christian life, then these same Christians have a right to be encouraged to remember the blessings which are due to them because of their faithfulness. Help your fellow Christians to remember the blessings and benefits which are theirs as faithful followers of Christ: Comfort during grief, confidence in the face of death, assurance of eternal life hereafter, readiness in the event that Christ should come during their lifetime, protection against the wrath of God when that wrath shall be poured out upon the world of unregenerate mankind! Be encouraged and be an encourager!

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Q U E S T I O N S

1. What is the "common denominator", the one certain inevitability that is facing every person on earth?
2. Cite Scriptures that indicate both the brevity and the swiftness of physical life.
3. What statements in the book of Ecclesiastes vividly describe the attitude of the person who has no faith in God? (Note Ecclesiastes 2:16-18)
4. Share statements that you have heard or that you have read which reflect modern-day cynicism and despair.
5. According to I Thessalonians 4:13-5:8, what are some of the wonderful benefits that one enjoys because of his personal relationship with God? What conditions must one meet, as a believer, in order to enjoy the benefits of God's blessings?
6. According to I Thessalonians 4:14 and I Thessalonians 5:10, what is the basis of one's new relationship with God?
7. As it relates to the death of Christ, how can the concept of "justification" be explained?
8. Why is the resurrection of Christ the basis for one's hope for eternal life and heavenly existence?
9. Following physical death, what can the true believer in Christ expect and anticipate? (Note I Corinthians 15:53-57)
10. In contrast to "pagans" who experience sorrow, what promises from God's Word (Bible) should believers claim (as a source of comfort) during times when they experience grief and sorrow because of the death of their loved ones? (Note I Thessalonians 4:13-14)
11. Is it an evidence of a lack of faith for a believer to experience fear, as he faces the inevitability of his own physical death? Why or why not?
12. Describe and define what is meant by the "Rapture". (Note I Thessalonians 4:16-17)
13. Share Scriptures which seem to indicate that believers do not experience "Soul Sleep" following physical death, but that they enter immediately into the very presence of Christ after death. (Note Luke 23:39-43; Philipians 1:21; II Timothy 4:7-8; Acts 7:59-60)
14. What are some of the conditions that will prevail upon the earth at the time when Christ shall return the Second Time? (I Thessalonians 5:1-5)

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15. What pictures does Paul employ to describe the suddenness of Christ's return and judgment, and what is the significance of these pictures, to both believers and to nonbelievers? (Note I Thessalonians 5:1-3)
16. According to I Thessalonians 5:6, what concretely does it mean for a believer to be "alert", rather than asleep?
17. In maintaining a vital relationship with God, why is it so important for you, as a believer, to have a daily "Quiet Time" - a "Listening Post"?
18. By way of contrast, what picture does Paul employ to emphasize the importance of self-control, as an indispensable quality for a victorious Christian life? (Note I Thessalonians 5:7, 8) How would you describe a self-controlled Christian?
19. In view of the threats of evil, and in view of the trials of life, what does it mean concretely to "put on faith as a breastplate"? (Note I Thessalonians 5:8)
20. If "hate" is not the opposite of "love", then what attitude is the antithesis of "love"?
21. What actions and attitudes in the life of a believer indicate that he is a person who is "on fire with God's love", that he has on the "breastplate" of protection against the impending day of God's judgment? (Note I Thessalonians 5:8-9; I John 4:20-21; James 2:5-9, 14-17)
22. What is the relationship between "faith", "love", and "hope" as these three words relate to the believer's security in Christ (as noted in I Thessalonians 5:8)?
23. What negative attitudes can rob the believer of his "faith", "love", and "hope" against which the Bible repeatedly warns believers?
24. What is the primary purpose for which Paul writes I Thessalonians 4:13-5:11? (Note I Thessalonians 4:18 and I Thessalonians 5:11)
25. What specific truths from the Bible should fellow believers share with one another, in order that no one becomes discouraged in living the Christian life?



Chapter 6

**Becoming**

**A Mature Church Member**

I Thessalonians 5:12-15

I THESSALONIANS  
Becoming A Mature Church Member

O U T L I N E

SCRIPTURE: I THESSALONIANS 5:12-14

INTRODUCTION: If I were to ask you to list the qualities of a good church member, what would they be? What qualities in your life make you a good church member?

PROPOSITION: In writing to the Thessalonian church, Paul emphasizes the importance of having a respectful attitude toward spiritual leaders and of having a cooperative and supportive attitude towards fellow members of the congregation, especially towards the faltering members of the congregation.

I. THE RELATIONSHIP TO LEADERS (v. 12-13)

II. THE RELATIONSHIP TO FELLOW MEMBERS (v. 14-15) (especially to the faltering)

- A. Warn the Idle
- B. Encourage The Timid
- C. Help The Weak
- D. Be Patient With Everyone
- E. Seek No Revenge But Be Kind

CONCLUSION: An attitude of submission to spiritual leaders and love for fellow members within the church will result in cooperative action and compassionate service. Practicing these attitudes will make you a good church member!

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Becoming A Mature Church Member

C H A P T E R   S I X

SCRIPTURE:    I THESSALONIANS 5:12-14

INTRODUCTION:    If I were to ask you to list the qualities of a good church member, what would they be?    What qualities in your life make you a good church member?

If I were to ask a football player - an average high school athlete who plays on the football team - what qualities he feels are necessary to be a good football player, what do you think that high school athlete would say?    I believe he would say at least two things.    I think he would say that a good football player must (1) respect and obey his coach, (2) support and encourage and help his fellow teammates and cooperate with them in seeking to win the game.    Respect for the leadership and support of the fellow members - these are the basic qualities that make a good football player and - as we look at our subject today - also make a good church member!

PROPOSITION:    In writing to the Thessalonian church, Paul emphasizes the importance of having a respectful attitude toward spiritual leaders and of having a cooperative and supportive attitude towards fellow members of the congregation, especially towards the faltering members of the congregation.

I.    THE RELATIONSHIP TO LEADERS (v. 12-13)

What should your attitude be towards church leaders?    Your attitude should be one of respect.    We are living in an age where disrespect for authority has been in vogue.    Disrespect for governmental authorities, school authorities, parental authorities, and even church authority.    Too many times the church has been looked upon as an institution rather than as a warm fellowship of caring persons, all of whom are responsible for the nurture and welfare of each other.    Indeed, the church is an institution, i.e., an organization with programs, procedures, structure, officers, buildings and finances.    However, simply because the church is an organization does not mean that it cannot also be a fellowship.    As a fellowship, there is mutual care one for another.    As a God-ordained organization, there are God-given leaders who are responsible for leading God's people, for shepherding the flock of God.    Concerning these spiritual leaders in the Church, Paul says to the general congregation: "Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you.    Hold them in highest regard in love because of their work.    Live in peace with each other."    (I Thessalonians 5:12, 13)

It is interesting how the Living Bible paraphrases these verses: "Dear brothers, honor the officers of your church who work hard among you and warn you against all that is wrong.    Think highly of them and give them your wholehearted love because they are straining to help you.    And remember, no quarreling among yourselves."    (Living Bible)

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"It is not a question of personal prestige; it is the task which makes a man great and it is the service he is doing which is his badge of honour." (Barclay's Thessalonians; page 206)

Paul is calling the congregation at Thessalonica to live in peace with one another, with no quarreling or disharmony or divisions or disorder. All working for each, and each working for all! Agreeing to disagree agreeably! Registering complaints ethically! Seeking to come to a consensus on issues and concerns! Being adaptable and flexible! The congregation loving the leadership, praying for the leadership, cooperating with the leadership, accepting the advice of the leaders, working faithfully with the leadership.

A house divided against itself cannot stand, but a house - i.e., a church - where leaders and followers are all working together under the lordship of Christ is a place where peace prevails and where growth results.

Writes Bishop Bastian concerning the congregation's attitude toward the minister: "You need not be fawning or sentimental to your leader, but you can project goodwill toward him...Every church has at least one person who feels compelled to resist leadership either passively or actively. Don't let yourself be that person. You do not have to agree with every plan or project your minister proposes. But whenever you can, work with him, not against him. He'll feel your support." (Belonging! Adventures in Church Membership; page 193)

The author of the book of Hebrews writes, "Remember your leaders who have taught you the Word of God. Think of all the good that has come from their lives, and try to trust the Lord as they do." (Hebrews 13:7 Living Bible)

When I reflect back over my life, I can't help but be filled with gratitude for the many godly pastors and church leaders who have deeply influenced my life. The pastors whom I knew as a child and youth and college student were great examples to me. These pastors instructed and counseled me. They prayed with me. They patiently answered my questions. They were forbearing with me during my immaturity. They gently rebuked or corrected me when I needed it. They encouraged me when I was discouraged, comforted me during my sorrows, befriended me during my loneliness, shared my joys and sorrows alike, and even on occasion confided in me. I have always highly regarded and cherished those many pastors, superintendents, and Sunday School teachers who have molded and shaped my life. I am deeply indebted to them and I have sought to imitate their faith. I deeply respect them because of their hard work, because they have many times "gone out of their way" to help me spiritually. Even though they were not without their faults and failings, these leaders commend my deepest respect and my wholehearted love!

Note what the author of the book of Hebrews writes: "Obey your spiritual leaders and be willing to do what they say. For their work is to watch over your souls, and God will judge them on how

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well they do this. Give them reason to report joyfully about you to the Lord and not with sorrow, for then you will suffer for it too." (Hebrews 13:17 Living Bible)

Obedience to spiritual leaders within a local church is of utmost importance! Who are the spiritual leaders within a church? There are many. Spiritual leaders include not only the full-time pastors, but spiritual leaders also include all the elected and appointed officers within a local church - people like Sunday School teachers, Christian Growth Group leaders, "Timothy" leaders, Music leaders, trustees and stewards, and several others. As followers, we are to submit to our leaders. Submission does not mean that we can never question their ideas or decisions, but it does mean that we respect their authority and that we are faithful and supportive of their leadership. It means that we will respectfully cooperate in class if we are a Sunday School student. It means that we will register complaints carefully and ethically and only to those persons who are directly involved. It means that we will gladly use our influence and our time and our talents to help reach the goals of the local church. It means that we will work for a consensus in the decision-making process if at all possible, but when a unanimous decision cannot be reached we will support the majority decision (whether or not we were personally in favor of the decision). It means we will pray for the leadership and be loyal to that leadership and to the fellow members of the church of which we are part. It means we will work for the total growth of the church, influencing the unsaved and the unchurched whom we know to become a part of our church. It means in summary, that we will deeply love and highly esteem the God-ordained leadership in the church!

II. THE RELATIONSHIP TO FELLOW MEMBERS (v. 14-15) (especially to the faltering)

A. Warn the Idle

"Like troops who are not in battle order or like ships in disarray, church members who are not 'at their post' (i.e., 'on the job') give a bad impression to unbelievers, especially if they are constantly looking for handouts." (Ronald Ward; Commentary on Thessalonians; page 114)

Every Christian must be involved in work, both professional work for pay and volunteer work in the local church. Notes Stott: "Those who are trying to develop a Christian mind on work, however, turn first to creation. The Fall turned some labour into drudgery (the ground was cursed, and cultivation became possible only by toil and sweat), but work itself is a consequence of our creation in God's image. God himself is represented in Genesis 1 as a worker. Day by day, or stage by stage, his creative plan unfolded. Moreover, when he saw what he had made, he pronounced it 'good'. He enjoyed perfect job-satisfaction. His final act of creation, before resting on the seventh day, was to create human beings, and in doing so to make them workers too. He gave them some of his own dominion over the earth and told them to

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exercise their creative gifts in subduing it. So from the beginning men and women have been privileged stewards of God, commissioned to guard and develop the environment on his behalf." (Involvement; Volume II; page 22; John Stott)

What is work? "Work is the expenditure of energy (manual or mental or both) in the service of others, which brings fulfillment to the worker, benefit to the community, and glory to God." (Ibid; page 31)

Someone said "An idle mind is the devil's workshop." A believer is to concentrate on his work, using his God-given gifts to creatively labor on his job and to creatively serve in his church. Work is not a curse; it is a God-given blessing. The Scriptures condemn laziness and slothfulness. "Take a lesson from the ants, you lazy fellow. Learn from their ways and be wise! For though they have no king to make them work, yet they labor hard all summer, gathering food for the winter. But you - all you do is sleep. When will you wake up? 'Let me sleep a little longer!' Sure just a little more! And as you sleep poverty creeps upon you like a robber and destroys you; want attacks you in full armor." (Proverbs 6:6-11, Living Bible)

The person who intentionally is lazy, refusing to work, is considered to be worse than a heathen! "But anyone who won't care for his own relatives when they need help, especially those living in his own family, has no right to say he is a Christian. Such a person is worse than the heathen." (I Timothy 5:8, Living Bible)

The Church at Thessalonica had some lazy persons in it, and Paul had to exercise "tough love" in the counsel which he gave regarding such indolent persons. "Now here is a command, dear brothers, given in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ by his authority. Stay away from any Christian who spends his days in laziness and does not follow the ideal of hard work we set up for you. For you well know that you ought to follow our example: you never saw us loafing; we never accepted food from anyone without buying it; we worked hard day and night for money we needed to live on, in order that we would not be a burden to any of you. It wasn't that we didn't have the right to ask you to feed us, but we wanted to show you, firsthand, how you should work for your living. Even while we were still there with you we gave you this rule: 'He who does not work shall not eat.' Yet we hear that some of you are living in laziness, refusing to work, and wasting your time in gossiping. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ we appeal to such people - we command them - to quiet down, get to work, and earn their own living. And to the rest of you I say; dear brothers, never be tired of doing right." (II Thessalonians 3:6-13, Living Bible)

Christians are not to be lazy on the job, and also believers are not to be lazy within the local church! A lazy Christian in the church is one who is unpredictable in his church attendance, who is sporadic in his giving of tithes and offerings, who is a spectator rather than a participant in service. Every believer ought to tithe! Every believer ought to be regular in his

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attendance of all the services - Sunday morning worship, Sunday School, Sunday evening celebration, midweek Christian Growth Groups. Every believer ought to be involved in the enthusiastic performance of some job within the local church! Every believer ought to be actively involved in outreach - witnessing to unbelievers and discipling new converts! An uninvolved Christian in a local church - a "pew warmer" as someone called them - can so easily become critical and sour in his spirit. When one is sitting on the "sidelines" as a spectator at a football game, it is so much easier to criticize the coach and the players, but when one becomes a player on the field - becoming a participant rather than a mere spectator - then one appreciates the challenge of the game. It is hard to criticize the team when you are a member of the team, cooperating with your fellow players in getting the ball across the goal line. Those who are most involved in service within a local church are those who are least critical and most contented! Discover and use your spiritual gifts to serve God in your local church. Don't ever be a lazy Christian! Everyone - children, youth, adults - can do something within the local Church.

"Why is it," said a rich man to his minister, "that people call me stingy when everyone knows that when I die I'm leaving everything to this church?"

"Let me tell you the story of the pig and the cow," said the minister. "The pig was unpopular and the cow was beloved. This puzzled the pig. 'People speak warmly of your gentle nature and your soulful eyes,' the pig said to the cow. 'They think you're generous because each day you give them milk and cream. But what about me? I give them everything I have. I give bacon and ham. I provide bristles for brushes. They even pickle my feet! Yet no one likes me. Why is that?'"

"Do you know what the cow answered?" said the minister. "She said, 'Perhaps it's because I give while I'm still living.'"

Active Christians tend to be happy Christians. Get active for the Lord!

Notes William Barclay, "The word used for 'lazy' originally described a soldier who had left the ranks. The phrase really means, 'Warn the quitters'." Uninvolvement in a church is usually the prelude to quitting a church! It is important that you warn fellow Christians who are tempted to abandon their faith. Those tempted to quit must see the serious consequences of quitting. Said Jesus, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God." (Luke 9:62) "But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him." (Hebrew 10:38) You are your "brother's keeper". It is your responsibility to help guard your fellow Christians against backsliding. There are times when every Christian is tempted to give up, to despair, to quit. It is then that an encouraging word, a fervent prayer, a gentle warning can make the difference. When your fellow Christian brother or sister

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is tempted to abandon the struggle, encourage him to "hold on" and to trust the Lord. Share with him this verse: "And let us not get tired of doing what is right, for after a while we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don't get discouraged and give up." (Galatians 6:9 Living Bible)

B. Encourage The Timid

The "timid" are those who are fearful - afraid to face life and afraid that the worst in life will happen to them. Every person at times becomes fearful, but there are certain persons "whose souls are small. In every community there is the fainthearted brother who instinctively fears the worst but in every community there should be Christians who, being brave, help others to be brave..." (Barclay's Thessalonians; page 207)

Fear is a terrorizing and paralyzing enemy. Help release people - fellow believers - from their fears. Encourage them to cast all their cares and fears upon the Lord, for the Lord cares for them. Encourage them to face the future - one day at a time - with courage and with confidence in the Lord. Remind them that God is in charge of life - with both its joys and its sorrows, its successes and its failures, its losses and its gains - and that God will take care of them. Take your timorous brother by his hand and help him to deepen his faith in God and to increase his confidence in himself!

C. Help The Weak

Helping the weak means "clinging to the weak". Notes Barclay, "'Cling to the weak' is a lovely piece of advice. Instead of letting the weak brother drift away and finally vanish altogether, the Christian community should make a deliberate attempt to grapple him to the Church in such a way that he cannot escape. It should forge bonds of fellowship and persuasion to hold on to the man who is likely to stray away." (Barclay's Thessalonians; page 207)

The weak need your help in every way - physically, mentally, morally, and spiritually. Think of creative ways in which you can help a fellow Christian who is weak. If he is having a hard time developing a habit of regular church attendance, then you may need to call him on Saturday night or pick him up in your car on Sunday morning or sit with him in Church. If he is lonely, you may need to spend more time informally associating with him. If he is experiencing financial loss through unemployment, you may need to give him money and groceries. If he is confused in his thinking, you may need to take time to go to him and explain simply and clearly the sound Biblical doctrines regarding God, Man, Sin, and Jesus Christ. Each of us is responsible to help the weak within the Church of Jesus Christ.

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D. Be Patient With Everyone

Patience with people is not a quality that is easily developed. How easy it is - especially if you are impulsive or fast-moving or quick-thinking by nature - to grow impatient with people who are slow learners or who are slow thinkers or who are slow movers! You must take your "cue" from God. God is longsuffering, i.e., He suffers long with sinners and saints alike. "But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." (II Peter 3:8, 9)

Christians are not only to be patient with sinners, but Christians are also to be patient with fellow believers. The Christian must cultivate the fruit of patience in his life if he is to work effectively with people. The believer need not lose hope or faith in people, for he knows that God is constantly working to perfect His good work of grace in people's lives. Because all believers are merely "Christians in the making", progressively changing to become more like Christ, the man of God can be patient with those with whom he lives and works. "Be patient, God is not finished with me yet" is a good motto for all believers to personalize.

Every shepherd of the flock of God is to practice patience with his people and persistence in his love, being faithful to the sheep during times of sickness as well as during times of health, during times of danger as well as during times of safety. He never grows tired in caring for his sheep, for he is patiently and lovingly dedicated to his sheep (John 10:12-13). Because Christ believes in the Church, and because Christ has declared that the Church will endure and grow (in spite of problems within and without), the Christian leader can remain patient with people and can work without despair to build the Kingdom of God.

To be patient with people means to like people, to make allowances for people's faults (Ephesians 4:2-3), to be tenderhearted and forgiving (Ephesians 4:31-32), and to patiently believe in imperfect people.

E. Seek No Revenge But Be Kind

"Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else." (v. 15)

Wrote Paul to the Romans, "Never pay back evil for evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honest clear through....Dear friends, never avenge yourselves. Leave that to God, for he has said that he will repay those who deserve it." (Romans 12:16-18 Living Bible)

There is no place for bitterness or resentment or hostility within the "family of God". Wrote Paul to the Ephesians, "Quarreling, harsh words, and dislike of others should have no place in your

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lives. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God has forgiven you because you belong to Christ." (Ephesians 4:31, 32 Living Bible)

If misunderstandings should arise between fellow believers within a local church, there is to be quick confession, complete forgiveness, and total reconciliation. Kindness in the treatment of one another is the distinguishing characteristic of a true Christian fellowship.

CONCLUSION: What should be the attitude towards hardworking Christian leaders? Deepest respect and highest esteem - not veneration or idolization or blind submission, but sincere love and wholehearted cooperation and a spirit of teamwork.

What should be the attitude towards the faltering within a Christian fellowship? (a) Warn the idle, i.e., encourage them to resist the temptation to be lazy in work or to be quitters on the job. (b) Encourage the timid who are fearful to face the future and who tend to think of the worst instead of the best. By example and by precept, teach the timid and fearful to be brave and courageous, putting their full trust in God as they face life's challenges. (c) Help the weak who tend to drift out of the Christian fellowship. "Forge bonds of fellowship and persuasion to hold on to the man who is likely to stray away." (Barclay) (d) Be patient with everyone, allowing people time to grow, to learn, and to change. (e) Seek no revenge but instead be kind to all and forgiving of all.

An attitude of submission to spiritual leaders and love for fellow members within the church will result in cooperative action and compassionate service. Practicing these attitudes will make you a good church member!

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Q U E S T I O N S

1. If you were asked to list the qualities of a good church member, what top five qualities would head your list?
2. In the midst of a secular society where disrespect for authority seems to be in vogue, what should be a believer's basic attitude towards church leaders?
3. Should a local church be seen as an organization or as an organism (fellowship), or both? Why?
4. Why is quarreling among fellow members in a local church strictly forbidden by Paul, as recorded in I Thessalonians 5:13? Is it possible to register disagreement within a local church, without, at the same time, causing division and disunity and quarreling? Why or why not?
5. What actions and attitudes, in both the lives of leaders and followers within a local church, must be evident if the unity of the church is to be maintained?
6. Concerning controversial issues within a local church, is it always necessary for all church leaders and officers (and members) to come to a "consensus" before a decision is made and a new action is initiated? Why or why not?
7. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "A house divided against itself cannot stand, but a house - i.e., a church - where leaders and followers are all working together under the lordship of Christ is a place where peace prevails and where growth results."
8. To what extent do church leaders have a responsibility to "model the faith", and to what extent do followers (lay persons) in a local church have a responsibility to imitate the faith of the church leaders (pastors)? (Note Hebrews 13:7)
9. Should church leaders seek to hide their own personal weaknesses (and sins) from the view of church members, in order that respect and confidence in leadership may be maintained in the local church setting? Why or why not? To what extent should a pastor be vulnerable before "his flock"?
10. If submission to church leaders is of utmost importance, in order that unity may be maintained, then what, concretely speaking, does "submission" mean within the context of the local congregation?
11. Is "work" a blessing or a curse to Man, a result of the "Fall" of man or a consequence of man's creation in God's image? (Note Genesis 2:15; 3:17-19; I Thessalonians 5:14; II Thessalonians 3:6-12)

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12. From a Biblical viewpoint as it relates to others, yourself, and to God, how would you define and describe "work"?
13. From both the Old Testament and New Testament, share representative Scriptures which condemn laziness and slothfulness. (Proverbs 6:6-11; 13:4; 15:19; 18:9; 19:24; 20:4; 21:25; 24:30; I Timothy 5:8)
14. In terms of work and service, how is "diligence" manifested in the actions and the attitudes of lay persons within a local congregation?
15. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Those who are most involved in service within a local church are those who are least critical and most contented."
16. From your own observations and experience, do you believe the following statement reveals the reason for numerical attrition within many local churches: "Uninvolvement in a church is usually the prelude to quitting a church."
17. From your understanding of the Bible's exhortations to perseverance in the Christian faith, how serious do you consider the withdrawal of a member's presence and participation from a local congregation? (Note Matthew 13:20-22; Luke 9:62; Hebrews 10:25, 38; II Timothy 2:12; 4:10)
18. What responsibility do fellow believers have toward each other during times of discouragement, when the temptation to be a "quitter" is strong? (Galatians 6:1, 2, 9; I Corinthians 15:58; I Thessalonians 5:14)
19. Concretely speaking, what can you say and do to encourage those fellow believers in your congregation who are "timid" or "fearful"? (Note I Thessalonians 5:14)
20. After considering the exhortations of I Thessalonians 5:14, tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement by William Barclay: "Instead of letting the weak brother drift away and finally vanish altogether, the Christian community should make a deliberate attempt to grapple him to the Church in such a way that he cannot escape."  
  
Without being coercive, what specifically can you do to help reinforce a weak brother in your congregation who presently is showing signs of "spiritual drifting" (backsliding)?
21. Why is it important for you - a local church leader - to be patient with fellow believers in your congregation, especially with those who seem to be so slow in making progress in their spiritual and intellectual growth? To whom can you look as your greatest model of patience with people? (Note II Peter 3:8, 9; John 10:11-13)

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22. If misunderstanding should arise between fellow believers within a local church, what actions should be taken to mend relationships and to restore unity to the congregation? (I Thessalonians 5:15; Romans 12:16-18; Ephesians 4:31-32; Philippians 4:2-3)
23. With what degree of conviction do you agree with the following statement: "Kindness in the treatment of one another is the distinguishing characteristic of a true Christian fellowship."



Chapter 7

**The Accents**

**Of A Holy Lifestyle**

I Thessalonians 5:16-22

I THESSALONIANS  
The Accents Of A Holy Life-style

O U T L I N E

SCRIPTURE: I THESSALONIANS 5:16-22

INTRODUCTION: How would you define the word "life-style"? "Life-style" describes the characteristic way a person acts and reacts in human relationships, and is the result of a person's attitudes and desires and values.

PROPOSITION: There are many ways to describe the distinctive life-style of a true Christian, but Paul ( in I Thessalonians 5:16-22) highlights some of the characteristics of a holy life-style. What are some of the accents of a holy life-style? Joy, prayer, gratitude, freedom in the Spirit, diligence for the Word of God, avoidance of every form of evil. A person who is seeking to develop a holy life-style will manifest these distinctive features in his life.

I. BE JOYFUL ALWAYS

- A. What Is Joy?
- B. From Whence Does Joy Come?

II. PRAY CONTINUALLY

- A. To pray continually assumes that you have regular times of conscious praying.
- B. To pray continually assumes that you practice "flash praying" throughout the day.
- C. Praying constantly also means allowing the Holy Spirit to take control of your subconscious mind.

III. GIVE THANKS IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES.

- A. When should you give thanks?
- B. Why can you give thanks in all circumstances?

IV. DO NOT PUT OUT THE SPIRIT'S FIRE

- A. Freedom to cleanse you from the dross in your life.
- B. Freedom to speak through you.
- C. Encourage the presence and creative work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of other believers.
- D. Freedom to be yourself in a public worship service.

V. DO NOT SCOFF AT PROPHETS, BUT TEST EVERYTHING THAT IS SAID

- A. The NIV says, "Do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything."
- B. Yes, a respect for preaching and for preachers who declare the Word is very important. However, while it is important for you to be teachable, you must never be gullible.

VI. AVOID EVERY KIND OF EVIL

- A. Romans 1:26-27 describes sin's physical perversion.
- B. Look at sin's mental perversion.
- C. Third, look at sin's spiritual perversion.
- D. Fourth, look at sin's social perversion.

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The Accents Of A Holy Life-style.

C H A P T E R        S E V E N

SCRIPTURE:    I THESSALONIANS 5:16-22

INTRODUCTION:    How would you define the word "life-style"? "Life-style" describes the characteristic way a person acts and reacts in human relationships, and is the result of a person's attitudes and desires and values.

We sometimes talk about a person having a materialistic life-style, i.e., a life-style that is dedicated to the accumulation of money and possessions. There are others of whom it is said, "He is committed to a simple life-style!" That is, he is committed to a life free from extravagance and waste. There are many different life-styles to which people are committed today. What you value as important will determine how you live and relate and plan.

The Bible spends much time describing and defining the life-style of a Christian, i.e., a life-style that is patterned after the life of Christ. The life of Christ was a life of holiness, i.e., a life separated from sin and separated unto God, and a life dedicated to caring for others.

PROPOSITION:    There are many ways to describe the distinctive life-style of a true Christian, but Paul ( in I Thessalonians 5:16-22) highlights some of the characteristics of a holy life-style. What are some of the accents of a holy life-style? Joy, prayer, gratitude, freedom in the Spirit, diligence for the Word of God, avoidance of every form of evil. A person who is seeking to develop a holy life-style will manifest these distinctive features in his life.

I.    BE JOYFUL ALWAYS

Here is a command given to Christians. It is not an option, it is an expectation. Christians are to be full of joy at all times. Notes William Sangster, "The fact that there is a cross at the heart of the Christian faith, and that following Christ involves some rigorous self-denials, does not alter - and cannot alter - this central truth: the fruit of the Spirit is joy....Tertullian said 'The Christian saint is hilarious'....The summons to rejoice is sounded no less than seventy times in the New Testament...Honest men at Pentecost thought that the apostles were drunk, and, whenever the living water has burst fresh from the rock again, the same exuberant gladness has been manifest." (Daily Readings; page 144)

"When Dr. Farmer, organist at Harrow, pleaded with the Salvationist drummer not to hit the drum so hard, the beaming bandsman replied: 'Lord bless you, sir, since I've been converted, I's so happy, I could burst the blooming drum'."

We must ask ourselves certain basic questions concerning this pointed command.

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A. What Is Joy?

Joy is a gift given to the believer by the Holy Spirit. It is not dependent upon one's environment, but is independent of circumstances. Happiness is that state of mind produced as a result of good and pleasing circumstances, and therefore happiness is dependent upon good happenings. Joy is a perpetual state of being, a sense of well-being, dependent only upon one's relationship to God. A believer cannot always be happy, but a believer can and should always be filled with joy. Joy in spite of difficult circumstances, if it cannot be because of enjoyable circumstances!

B. From Whence Does Joy Come? Joy comes by the realization of what God has done for one in the past, from recognizing what God is doing for one in the present, and from affirming by faith what God is going to do for one in the future. To know that your past sins are cast into the "sea of God's forgetfulness" never to be remembered against you again, ought to give you a sense of great relief and unspeakable joy. Also, to know that God is constantly working inside of you presently to perfect you and to make you increasingly more like Christ, ought to fill you with excitement and joy. And further, to have an awareness that you serve a God who cares for you intimately, who meets your daily needs abundantly, and who is preparing you daily for your final eternal home in heaven, is to have an awareness that should cause you to stand on tiptoe with great joy!

II. PRAY CONTINUALLY

What does it mean to pray continually? "The essence of it is to have heart and mind filled with the consciousness of God's presence, and to have the habit of referring everything to Him, in the moment when we are doing it, or when it meets us." (MaClaren; Expositions of Scripture; Volume 15; page 231)

A. To pray continually assumes that you have regular times of conscious praying - called by some the devotional hour or the "Quiet Time".

"But why pray every day? Because the Spirit-filled person can lose his relationship even as one can lose a human friendship - by avoiding his friend. Friendship with God is lost by ignoring Him. The subtle problem is just this: Friendship is lost a day at a time, and because it is lost no faster than that, we can slowly but surely be blinded to our loss of God. Therefore, prayer must be daily." (Alive To God Through Prayer; page 23)

B. To pray continually assumes that you have not only regular blocks of time to pray each day, but that you practice "flash praying" throughout the day.

"Flash prayers" are those quick, silent prayers throughout the day, petitioning God to help you during a difficult time, or asking God to give you wisdom as you counsel another, or quickly

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crying out to God during a hard trial or a subtle temptation. Praying constantly includes praying for others while you are working or driving or shopping or walking or jogging. It means learning to turn to God in praise and adoration and thanksgiving all throughout the day - blanketing your daily life with prayer. There are many small "chinks" of time during each day that could be easily wasted. But the man who is learning to pray constantly is the man who is using these otherwise wasted times to pray - while you are showering or putting up your hair (if you are a woman) or waiting for a traffic light to turn green, or waiting for someone to meet you for an appointment in a restaurant, or a thousand other times. Fill the "blank" times with prayer. If you have a job that involves a lot of driving, spend some of your driving time talking to God - praising Him for His goodness and interceding for lost friends and loved ones!

C. Praying constantly also means allowing the Holy Spirit to take control of your subconscious mind, in order that He may cleanse your instincts and desires and drives and affections.

Keeping your subconscious mind surrendered to the Holy Spirit allows the Spirit to implant new and fresh ideas into your mind - ideas that will influence your attitudes and your desires and your decisions. Because the Spirit has control of your subconscious mind, the Lord can implant ideas in your mind even while you are sleeping! In this deeper sense, you are praying even while you are sleeping. For what is prayer? Prayer is not only verbal and conscious communication with God, but prayer is also nonverbal and subconscious communion with God. Prayer is listening as much as it is talking, and prayer is passive receptivity as much as it is active initiation and request-making. So, prayer involves both the extended and short periods of conscious communication with God, and also prayer involves the continual passive and subconscious surrender of our minds to the Holy Spirit. Thus, whether we are on our knees or working in the shop, or whether we are awake or asleep - we can be praying without ceasing!

III. GIVE THANKS IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES

Writes Paul, "Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." If it is God's will that you should be joyful always, and that you should pray constantly, it is further God's will that you should give thanks in all circumstances.

God's will is a perfect will and it is a positive will, as shown by the fact that God's will has been lovingly revealed through the life of Jesus Christ. God's will is not unreasonable or capricious or hurtful. God wills nothing for human beings but what will benefit them. God commands us to be joyful and prayerful and thankful, for God knows that the way of joy and prayer and gratitude is the way of health and wholeness and holiness. The right thing morally is always the healthy thing physically and mentally and emotionally. The "joy of the Lord" is

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our strength. The way of prayer is the way of power. Being outwardly grateful to God and to others brings inner growth to the grateful person. So, the commands of God - to rejoice, to pray, to be grateful - turn out to be the demands of human nature. God's will is not contradictory to man's needs. Man needs to rejoice! Man needs to pray! Man needs to express gratitude!

But it is important to note: What God commands and what my human nature demands, God supplies. God supplies grace to man to enable him to rejoice always, to pray constantly, and to give thanks in all circumstances!

A. When should you give thanks?

At all times! We must admit this is not easy. Our tolerance level for inconveniences or troubles or pain is very low. When the toilet is overflowing, when the kids are crying, when your employer lays you off your job, when you lose a loved one - it is during adversity and hardship that it is difficult to express gratitude to God and to others.

B. Why can you give thanks in all circumstances?

You can and should give thanks to God for all those events and circumstances and persons that have brought great and obvious pleasure to you. So many times we fail to express gratitude to those around us to whom we are deeply indebted. Do you remember the story of the ten lepers who came to Jesus for healing? (Read Luke 17:11-19) How many times we have taken God's goodness or the goodness of another for granted! We have forgotten or neglected to express gratitude and thanksgiving. We have forgotten to say "thank you". We have failed to write that note of thanks to a friend. Almost weekly (especially on Monday mornings) I think of people who have been such a source of blessing to me on Sunday (during Sunday School or worship or during an informal visit) and I feel like I would like to drop a letter of thanks to them. But I have so often failed to give outward expression to my inner feelings of gratitude.

Let us practice gratitude in our daily lives - verbalizing thanks, writing notes of gratitude, expressing appreciation to the mailman or to the garage mechanic or to the doctor or even to the dentist. (Ha!) (Illustration of Bob and Myrt Bailey having a goal of making waitresses happy by expressing gratitude to them - great opportunity to witness.) Let's learn to give others "warm fuzzies", not "prickly pears"! Learn to fill someone's "cup" each day. People grow through affirmation, not through criticism. Let body language and smiles communicate gratitude.

But being thankful in all circumstances includes those circumstances that are not pleasant or pleasurable. How can we thank God for loss or pain or heartache or failures or disappointments or frustrations? During difficult times, we are to exercise our will to say "Thank you" to God, even when tragic circumstances defy our reason and when they break our hearts. Our response to

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God is to be guided, not by the good feelings of our emotions or by the stimulating thoughts of our minds, but by the positive volition of our will. We can will to thank God for life, even when life's circumstances are bringing hurt to our hearts and confusion to our minds. When my brother lost his fifteen year old daughter in a tragic accident a few years ago, needless to say, his heart was broken and his mind was confused, but he nevertheless continued to exercise a positive gratitude to His God. When he called to tell me on that dreadful Friday night about his daughter's death, he said something like this, "God has taken one of his dear children home to heaven tonight. Sharla died tonight!" After returning home from Denver, where his daughter's body was left temporarily in a morgue, he gathered his family together for prayer, and he declared to them, "God makes no mistakes!" That statement, made in an hour of unbelievable sorrow and confusion, was a statement made by a heartbroken but an unembittered father. This example, from the life of my brother, is one of the greatest examples of what it means to be grateful to God regardless of life's tragic events. Said Job, after he had lost all, "Though God slays me, yet will I serve Him!" Remaining faithful and unembittered, regardless of life's losses, is the greatest proof that one has learned to "give thanks in all circumstances".

Why can you give thanks during even difficult circumstances? Because, even though God is not the author of sorrow, God can use sorrowful experiences to build Christian character. God is sovereign and is thus in charge of all of life's circumstances. Wrote Paul, "And we know that all that happens to us is working for our good if we love God and are fitting into his plans." (Romans 8:28 Living Bible) Remember, God is all-knowing (He knows what is best for you); God is all-loving (He wants what is best for you); God is all-powerful (He is able to give what is best for you). We are the clay and God is the Potter, and God knows how to shape and to mold our lives in such a way that we will become more like Christ! So, we can even thank God for the tears of life, for God will not allow the believer to shed any needless tears. Many times God can better be seen and known through our tears than in our laughter.

You can thank God even for trials and for troubles, for it is these difficult times that often cause people to draw closer to God. All sunshine with no rain causes deserts. All prosperity and no problems can result in people forgetting God. Wrote the Psalmist, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word." (Psalms 119:67)

In his excellent article "How To Handle Grief", Robert Crandall gives several suggestions in learning to cope with a great sorrow or loss (such as a death in the family). He suggests to the grieving person that it is important (or all right) (1) to express anguish, (2) to be angry against what has happened (but not to be angry towards God or others or yourself), (3) to acknowledge it, (4) to accept it, (5) to appreciate it. On this last point, he writes, "'Appreciate my grief?' you say. 'How can I do that?'

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Let's be clear: You are not to appreciate what has happened. Rather, you are to appreciate that you can come through the circumstance and the grief, a stronger, better person. Remember, God did not cause this to happen so that you'd be a stronger person; He made it possible for you to be a stronger person even though it did happen. Part of your appreciation will be toward friends, loved ones, and people in the church and community who supported you with their prayers, interest, and concern. Part of your appreciation will be for your family who assisted you through those times of grief when you were not yourself, and part will be toward your Heavenly Father whose love and steadfast concern held your faith and hope steady in days of darkness. There will come a time, believe me, if you're not there already, when you can look back and appreciate the grief." (A Faith To Grow By; page 84)

If it is hard for you to give thanks to God presently for the difficult trials which you are facing, just remember that, as you continue to trust God, your gratitude for the past problems will increase. In retrospect, you will thank God for every challenge of life. You will increasingly see the meaning of the past experiences and "their possible blessings, and the loving purposes which sent them....The mountains that, when you are close to them, are barren rock and cold snow, glow in the distance with royal purples. And so if we, from our standing point in God, will look back on our lives, losses will disclose themselves as gains, sorrows as harbingers of joy, conflict as a means of peace, the crooked things will be straight, and the rough places plain; and we may for every thing in the past give thanks, if only we 'pray without ceasing'." (MaClaren; Expositions; Volume 15; page 236)

IV. DO NOT PUT OUT THE SPIRIT'S FIRE

One mark of a holy life-style is to allow the Holy Spirit freedom.

A. Freedom to cleanse you from the dross in your life.

The Holy Spirit comes to consume the dross of sin and to purify the character of the Christian, enabling the believer to reflect the beauty of Christ's holiness.

B. Freedom to speak through you.

Christians are to be the mouthpieces of the Holy Spirit. When God wants you to "speak up" for Him, then do it! "Be ready to give an answer to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you." Don't smother the fire of the Holy Spirit in your heart. Be aglow with the Spirit! Allow the fire of the Holy Spirit to burn on the altar of your heart. Don't be afraid to witness or to testify for the Saviour. Even when it was costly to preach and to testify for the Lord, Jeremiah felt inwardly compelled to speak out for the Lord.

"If I say, I will not make mention of the Lord, or speak any more in His name, there is in my mind and heart as if it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with enduring and holding

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it in; I cannot contain it longer." (Jeremiah 20:9 Amplified)  
God will put the words in your mouth. Just open your mouth for  
Jesus and the Holy Spirit will give you the words to speak.

C. Encourage the presence and creative work of the Holy Spirit in  
the lives of other believers.

It is your responsibility to help fan the fires of enthusiasm in  
the lives of your fellow believers. Don't put out the fire of the  
Holy Spirit in the lives of other believers. There are some  
persons who, although they are professing Christians, are  
basically negative thinkers. They are small in their thinking,  
narrow in their perspective, and critical in their comments. They  
are the kind who say to others, "It can't be done! Come down to  
earth! Be realistic! Don't be visionary!" These people throw  
"cold water" on the enthusiasm of others. They discourage rather  
than encourage others to venture for God.

If a fellow believer talks to you about a new idea or a new  
project or a new venture, be open-minded. Give him a listening  
ear. Be open to his ideas. Some of the big dreams of others may  
be the results of their entertaining "illusions of grandeur", but  
on the other hand, some of the big dreams of others may be the  
result of the work of the Holy Spirit. Reserve judgement. Listen  
to others. Encourage them further to seek God. Be teachable.  
Pray for them. Don't despise the visions of others. Give an  
encouraging word. Help people to realize their visions. Remem-  
ber, big things always have small beginnings. Be open to new  
possibilities. Never forget the "magic of thinking big". Don't  
squench the creative spirit in other people. Help fan the  
creative flames of innovative ideas, wrought by the Holy Spirit,  
in the lives of others. "Do not put out the Spirit's fire".

D. Freedom to be yourself in a public worship service.

Be free in the Spirit as you worship. King David was. (Read II  
Samuel 6:16-23) Don't misunderstand what freedom of the Spirit  
in worship is, however. Freedom of the Spirit in worship is not  
freedom to indulge your own flesh or freedom to "do your own  
thing" without due respect for those around you. There have been  
times in some Churches' public worship services where the degree of  
spirituality has been judged by the degree of external emotional  
expression. There is nothing wrong with external, God-induced  
emotional expression, but there is much wrong with humanly-induced  
emotionalism - the kind of emotional expression which distracts  
and disturbs and causes confusion. Where the Spirit of the Lord  
is, there is order! There are some religious leaders who have  
been known to manipulate people's emotions and to exploit people's  
feelings to advance the cause of the leaders or the cause of the  
organization. Exploitation of people is always wrong - even reli-  
gious exploitation.

Feel free to express your God-induced and genuine feelings in  
worship - whether this means a spontaneous verbal testimony or a  
spontaneous "Amen" or an upraised hand, or a shout of praise, or

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hand clapping while a chorus is being sung; or whether this means simply basking quietly and contemplatively in God's presence and letting the tears of joy trickle down your cheeks. Be respectful of those around you, but always be "free in the Spirit", while you are worshipping. Whatever you do in public worship services, make sure it is genuine and orderly and Spirit-honoring. Let us be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's movings. On one hand, let us not be guilty of dead formalism which has no spirit of enthusiasm, and on the other hand, let us not be guilty of excessive emotionalism which has no spirit of reverence. Wrote Bishop B. T. Roberts: "We do not fear any of the manifestations of the Spirit of God. But let the emotions you manifest be an effect produced by the Divine Spirit. We may shout until shouting becomes a habit...There may be a formal noise as well as a formal silence. What we want is not noisy meetings, not still meetings - but the spirit of the living God in all our worshipping assemblies." (From Age to Age a Living Witness; Marston; page 332)

As an earnest Christian, you always should seek for at least three things: genuineness in your Christian experience, order in your public worship, and balance in your Biblical interpretation!!

The "fire" of the Holy Spirit is not "wild fire" - i.e., it does not lead to excesses and extremes and radical fanaticism! The "fire" of the Holy Spirit brings authenticity to your inner life, order to your public worship, and saneness to your mental processes. The fire of the Spirit enables you to feel authentically and to act appropriately, and to think rationally!

V. DO NOT SCOFF AT PROPHETS, BUT TEST EVERYTHING THAT IS SAID

A. The NIV says, "Do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything."

The Living Bible says, "Do not scoff at those who prophesy, but test everything that is said to be sure it is true, and if it is, then accept it." The New English Bible says, "Do not despise prophetic utterances, but bring them all to the test and then keep what is good in them."

Prophecy is primarily forth-telling the message of God, but prophecy may have, on occasions, some elements of foretelling involved in it. Prophecy is loosely synonymous with what today we would call preaching or proclamation of the Gospel message. Prophets of God or preachers of the Gospel are to be welcomed and respected. Declares Isaiah, "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'" (Isaiah 52:7 NIV)

There are those who scoff at preaching and at preachers. Never be among their lot, for those who despise God's message and God's messengers are only destroying their own souls and inviting the direct judgement of God. Evident in a man who is pursuing holiness is a great hunger for the truth, for the declaration of

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sound doctrine by God's anointed messengers. Growth in holiness can partly be measured by an increase in one's hunger for God's Word. Do you find delight in meditating on God's Word, day and night? Do you have an inquiring mind, a tender heart, and a thirsting spirit? Are you teachable in your attitudes, recognizing how little you know and how much more there is to be learned?

B. Yes, a respect for preaching and for preachers who declare the Word is very important. However, while it is important for you to be teachable, you must never be gullible.

Be discerning - cautious and careful to receive only the Word of God, not the mere opinions of men. It is not the good views of men but it is the Good News of God that saves and keeps your soul. Let everything you hear or listen to or read be tested by the standard of God's clearly declared and carefully interpreted Word - the Bible. Ask questions: "Does this teaching conform to the teaching of the entire Bible, rather than to only certain select texts or small portions of Scripture?" "Is this message faithful to the Bible teaching regarding Man, Sin, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, Salvation by God's Grace, etc.?"

It is important to be teachable, but never gullible, for there are many false teachers in the world today who are out to deceive people. Most of the cults today are full of people who were previously in other Churches, but because these people did not think for themselves they fell into the trap of false teachings. Wrote John, "Dearly loved friends, don't always believe everything you hear just because someone says it is a message from God: test it first to see if it really is. For there are many false teachers around, and the way to find out if their message is from the Holy Spirit is to ask: Does it really agree that Jesus Christ, God's Son, actually became man with a human body? If so, then the message is from God. If not, the message is not from God but from one who is against Christ, like the 'antichrist' you have heard about who is going to come, and his attitude of enmity against Christ is already abroad in the world." (I John 4:1-3 Living Bible)

Note again how the New English Bible translates this section: "Do not despise prophetic utterances, but bring them all to the test and then keep what is good in them." How do you apply this advice to yourself, when you are listening to a speaker on television or on a cassette tape? First listen carefully. Make sure you understand what he is saying. Then test his doctrines by the teachings of the Bible, (not just a portion of the Bible, but by the entire Bible). Then, accept from him what is Biblical. Reject (at least at this time) what is questionable. The things he says that result in bringing questions to your mind, may be Biblical or they may be false doctrines. But accept only that which you are sure is Biblically-based. Sincere preachers differently interpret secondary doctrines (such as the teachings regarding the future), and therefore it is rare to find a speaker that you will agree with totally. But if his central message is Christ (as understood from the simple teachings of the Bible),

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then accept his central message. Most speakers mix preaching and teaching. Preaching is the bare essentials regarding God, Christ and salvation. Teaching is the application of the basic doctrines to daily life, and thus in teaching there is apt to be much more human interpretation involved. Thus, in teaching, there are many "secondary" doctrines taught (i.e., those doctrines which equally sincere and godly teachers sometimes differently interpret and apply). As you listen to a speaker, check out his primary doctrine regarding Christ and salvation, and then "keep what is good" (NEB) in his secondary doctrinal teachings. Do not scoff at prophets (preachers), but nevertheless be sure to test everything that is said. Be teachable but never gullible!

VI. AVOID EVERY KIND OF EVIL

The perversions of evil are vividly described in various sections of Scripture, but the last half of Romans One is one of the most graphic sections.

A. Romans 1:26-27 describes sin's physical perversion.

Romans 1:24a says that sinful mankind "dishonor their own bodies between themselves". Romans 1:26-27 says "Their women turned against God's natural plan for them and indulged in sex sin with each other. And the men, instead of having a normal sex relationship with women, burned with lust for each other, men doing shameful things with other men and, as a result, getting paid within their own souls with the penalty they so richly deserved."

Homosexuality and other sexual perversions are clearly condemned in Scripture, regardless of the liberal teachings of some modern-day clergymen and social reformers. Such a practice is not only a physical perversion, but it reflects a moral degeneration.

Homosexual tendencies as well as overt homosexual practices doubtless reflect serious and complex personality problems that call for sympathetic treatment. But, while Christian compassion is called for in such treatment, Christian tolerance and acceptance of the practice is never called for. Perversion must never be normalized in the name of Christian tolerance and broad-mindedness. Sexual perversion, however it may be psychologically and sociologically explained, is always a manifestation of spiritual degeneration. The Christ who condemns such perversion is the Christ who can forgive and deliver the captive of such a practice.

Sin always pays its own penalty. People who defy the laws of God get "paid within their own souls with the penalty they so richly deserve" (v.27). Not only is homosexual practices condemned, but any sexual perversion is both condemned and costly in terms of consequences. Notes Howard Hoffman, MD, "Today's sexual permissiveness has paralleled a marked increase in all forms of venereal disease. There are more cases of syphilis and gonorrhoea each year

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than the combined number of all other reportable communicable diseases." (Pamphlet on venereal disease, published by Light and Life Press)

B. Look at sin's mental perversion.

It is a great mental perversion when men exchange the truth of God for a lie! Romans 1:25 says that sinful humanity chooses to believe lies rather than the Truth of God! "Instead of believing what they knew was the truth about God, they deliberately chose to believe lies." Today there is a torrent of false doctrines and false teachers. Another type of evil to be avoided.

C. Third, look at sin's spiritual perversion.

Men serve creation rather than the Creator! When man rejects the Creator, man, who is incurably religious, begins to serve the creation! "And then, instead of worshipping the glorious, ever-living God, they took wood and stone and made idols for themselves, carving them to look like mere birds and animals and snakes and puny men...So they prayed to the things God has made, but wouldn't obey the blessed God who made these things." (Romans 1:23, 25b Living Bible)

Many today are worshipping the things God has made, refusing to bow their knees to the God who made these things. For instance, God made money. Many worship the god of Materialism. God made sex to be enjoyed and used within marriage for procreation and recreation, but man has made a god out of sex. Many worship the god of Sensualism. God enabled man to discover and use the scientific method to create untold blessings and to give mankind unlimited conveniences, but man has bowed to the "sacred cow" of science. Many worship the god of Scientism. Worshipping creation rather than worshipping the Creator - this is evidence of man's spiritual perversion and is another great evil to be avoided.

D. Fourth, look at sin's social perversion.

Romans describes this as total breakdown of all peaceful human relationships. Romans 1:29-31 gives a long catalogue of social sins, describing sinful man's social degeneration! "Their lives became full of every kind of wickedness and sin, of greed and hate, envy, murder, fighting, lying, bitterness, and gossip. They were backbiters, haters of God, insolent, proud braggarts, always thinking of new ways of sinning and continually being disobedient to their parents. They tried to misunderstand, broke their promises, and were heartless - without pity." (Romans 1:29-31, Living Bible)

We have described evil in various forms - physical, mental, spiritual, and social - as described in Romans, chapter 1.

The life of holiness is the life of separation - separation from external sinning and separation from internal sin. The call to separation from sin is the call of God: "Therefore come out from

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them and be separate, Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." (II Corinthians 6:17, 18 NIV)

How can you avoid every form of evil? First, surrender your total life - outward actions and inner attitudes - to God Almighty. Allow the Holy Spirit to take control of your mind, your emotions, and your will. When temptation comes, immediately submit yourself to God and resist the devil. James 4:7 says, "So give yourselves humbly to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you." (Living Bible) Avoid those places and persons which tempt you to do wrong. Steer clear of the traps of temptation. Don't allow the devil to get a 'toe hold' in your life. If you can go around temptation, don't expect God to take you through temptation. Be careful what you listen to and look at. Absorb the positive - in reading and in listening and in viewing - and avoid the negative influences. Memorize and meditate upon the Word of God. Ask the Holy Spirit daily to cleanse your thought life. Fill your mind with God's thoughts. "Fix your thoughts on what is true and good and right. Think about things that are pure and lovely, and dwell on the fine good things in others. Think about all you can praise God for and be glad about." (Philippians 4:8 Living Bible)

**CONCLUSION:** How can a holy life-style be described? There are multiple features in the profile of a saint of God, but at least six features can be noted, as listed in I Thessalonians 5:16-22.

(1) A man who is seeking to develop a holy life-style will be learning to rejoice always, recognizing that joy is a gift of the Holy Spirit, the experience of which is not subject to the changes and the chances of external circumstances.

(2) A man who is seeking to develop a holy life-style will be learning to pray without ceasing. Praying constantly includes a regular block of time each day during which period concentrated and direct praying is done. It includes "praying on the hoof" throughout the day and it also means surrendering ones subconscious mind to the Holy Spirit, allowing the Holy Spirit the opportunity to commune with the human spirit at all times.

(3) A man who is seeking to develop a holy life-style will be learning to give thanks to God in all circumstances. Because God is sovereign and thus He is able to use all circumstances - good or bad - to profit His children, the Christian can thank God for even the difficult experiences. A Christian learns that his response of thanksgiving to God is guided, not by the good feelings of his emotions or by the stimulating thoughts of his mind, but by the exercise of a positive volition. In other words, a believer thanks God for all things whether or not he feels like thanking God, or whether or not he is presently having thoughts of gratitude. Even when the heart is broken and the mind is confused, he can thank God, for God is all-knowing, all-loving, and all-powerful. God never allows His children to shed needless

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tears. Thus, thanksgiving is an act of faith, not a mere expression of an emotion or of a thought. The thankful person expresses gratitude in spite of circumstances if it can't be because of circumstances.

(4) A man who is seeking to develop a holy life-style will be careful never to quench the Holy Spirit, i.e., he will be careful never to put out the Spirit's fire. He allows the Spirit freedom - freedom to cleanse his own life from sin, freedom to speak through him as a mouthpiece for God, freedom to express the love and joy of the Lord within the corporate setting of the local assembly of believers.

(5) A man who is seeking to develop a holy life-style will be careful never to scoff at prophets (preachers) or at prophecy (the Gospel message). He is a man in love with the truth and with those who declare the truth of God's Word. However, while he is most teachable and receptive, he is never gullible. He has learned to "test everything that is said to be sure it is true". (Living Bible) He is diligent to learn the Word, but he is also discerning to detect the error of false teachers.

(6) A man who is seeking to develop a holy life-style will be careful to avoid every kind of evil - physical evil, mental evil, spiritual evil, and social evil. He never flirts with sin and never compromises with the truth. He gladly submits to the Lord and strongly resists the devil. He avoids the obvious traps of temptation, and pursues good with all his being! Far from doing evil, he avoids evil of every kind and earnestly pursues holiness!

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Q U E S T I O N S

1. How would you define the word "life-style"? What are some of the typical "life-styles" which modern-day people commonly live today that are less than a "Christian life-style"? In general terms, how would you characterize a "Christian life-style"?
2. How can you explain the "paradox" of Christianity which calls a person to personal sacrifice and discipline and, at the same time, offers a person unspeakable joy and deep contentment?
3. How would you distinguish between "joy" and "happiness"?
4. From whence does "joy" come, and how does one's understanding of God's relationship to his past, present, and future enable one to rejoice exceedingly?
5. In essence, what does it mean to "pray continually"? (Note I Thessalonians 5:16)
6. Why is it important for a believer to pray daily?
7. Share effective ways in which you can daily practice "flash praying"?
8. Why is it so important for a believer to surrender the control of his subconscious mind to the Holy Spirit?
9. Why is it so important for a believer to rejoice always, and to pray unceasingly, and to give thanks continuously? (Note I Thessalonians 5:16-18) Where does a believer find strength and power to obey such high commands? Give your interpretation of the following statement: "What God commands and what my human nature demands, God supplies."
10. Why is ingratitude considered to be such a great sin? (Note Luke 17:11-19) Share creative ways in which you can practice expressing gratitude in your daily relationships.
11. How can one thank God for loss or pain or heartache or failures or disappointments or frustrations? Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Remaining faithful and unembittered, regardless of life's losses, is the greatest proof that one has learned to 'give thanks in all circumstances'".
12. Why can a believer give thanks during even difficult circumstances? (Note Romans 8:28) From your own personal life and experiences, can you identify with the following statement by David: "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word." (Psalms 119:67)

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13. What suggestions could you offer a person who is presently experiencing heartbreak and grief in his life? Is it possible for one actually to "appreciate" his grief? Why or why not?
14. Share various ways in which it is possible for a believer to "put out the Spirit's fire"?
15. Share various ways in which you have learned to be more sensitive to the work and the ministry of the Holy Spirit, both in your own life and in the lives of those with whom you have contact and relationship. Give examples of negative actions or attitudes that can result in "throwing cold water" on the enthusiasm of others.
16. In terms of emotional expression in public worship services, what does it mean to be "free in the Spirit"? What is meant by "dead formalism" and "excessive emotionalism", and why is it important to avoid both of these extremes within corporate worship services?
17. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statements: "The 'fire' of the Holy Spirit brings authenticity to your inner life, order to your public worship, and sanity to your mental processes. The fire of the Spirit enables you to feel authentically, and to act appropriately, and to think rationally."
18. How should one appropriately respond to ministers and to the messages they preach and teach? (Note I Thessalonians 5:20) Why is it important for a listener to a message to be teachable, but never gullible?
19. Sexually-speaking, what predominate form of physical perversion is noted in Romans 1:26-27, and what attitude should believers have towards those who have fallen into this perversion?
20. Illustrate ways in which modern-day persons are worshipping creation rather than the Creator - a manifestation of a great evil. (Note I Thessalonians 5:22; Romans 1:23, 25)
21. What practical steps can one take in order to avoid every form of evil? (I Thessalonians 5:22)



Chapter 8

**The Experience**

**Of "Entire Sanctification"**

I Thessalonians 5:16-22

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O U T L I N E

SCRIPTURE: I THESSALONIANS 5:23-24

INTRODUCTION: What was lacking in the faith of these new believers? The experience and reality of what might be called whole or entire or complete or full sanctification. Sanctification is the work of the Holy Spirit by which a believer is made holy through and through. Being sanctified completely or wholly is the same as being filled with the Holy Spirit. Being sanctified or filled with the Holy Spirit is a gift of God given to fully surrendered believers. Remember Jesus' words: "If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:13)

PROPOSITION: Every believer - as in the case of the Thessalonian believers - needs to be sanctified through and through. The God of peace, through the work of His Holy Spirit, is the Sanctifier. Inward cleansing and integration of the human personality is the purpose and plan of the Holy Spirit. The experience of entire sanctification is the will of God for every believer.

To better understand the importance and the meaning of entire sanctification, let us look at (1) The Source of Sanctification, (2) The Substance of Sanctification, and (3) The Surety of Sanctification.

I. SOURCE OF SANCTIFICATION - "The God of Peace"

II. SUBSTANCE OF SANCTIFICATION

A. Initial Sanctification

B. Entire Sanctification

C. Progressive Sanctification

III. SURETY OF SANCTIFICATION

CONCLUSION: It is God's will that you be sanctified or made holy through and through! How can you be sanctified in this deeper way? By making a complete and unconditional surrender of your spirit, soul, and body to the lordship of Christ. It is your responsibility to do the consecrating. It is God's part to do the sanctifying. As you surrender, surrender all! Let Christ have your all! Then, simply open your inner life to the fullness of God's Holy Spirit.

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C H A P T E R        E I G H T

SCRIPTURE:    I THESSALONIANS 5:23-24

INTRODUCTION:    Gifts are something which everyone enjoys receiving. A gift is something you can't earn or purchase, and it is something you don't necessarily deserve. Rather, a gift is an expression of love given to someone who is cherished and valued as a friend.

God is a God of grace, i.e., a God who enjoys giving gifts to His world. God has given an undeserving world the gift of His Son, Jesus. Jesus is God's gift to mankind - the greatest gift possible! Jesus lived a sacrificial life, died a substitutionary death, and arose victoriously from the grave. All of these acts of Jesus were acts performed in behalf of mankind, expressions of God's unmerited favor and love towards a fallen race of people. When Jesus went back to heaven, God sent the Holy Spirit to continue the compassionate work of Jesus which Jesus could no longer do in bodily form after His ascension. The Holy Spirit is the gift of God to mankind. The Holy Spirit is in the world today as the perfect expression of God's love for a loveless world. The Spirit's ministry is a multiple ministry. Among His many works, it is the work of the Holy Spirit to convict the unregenerate of his sin, to convert the repentant sinner, and to cleanse and to mature the responsive believer.

These are the very works which the Holy Spirit was involved in when He was dealing so effectively with the lives of the Thessalonians. The Holy Spirit convicted the pagan Thessalonians, the result of which was their deep repentance of sin. They turned away from their idols to serve the living and true God (1:9). They "welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit". (1:6) Not only did they initially welcome the life-transforming message, but they nurtured their lives in that faith and even spread the good news to others. Wrote Paul concerning the vitality of their new-found faith: "The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia - your faith in God has become known everywhere." (1:8)

Paul rejoiced in the love which these new believers were experiencing for each other, and Paul encouraged them to abound more and more in love. "Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more." (4:9-10) Paul urged these young believers to live lives which were pleasing to God. "Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more." (4:1) Paul urged them to live pure and holy lives in the midst of a very sensate and corrupt society: "It is God's will that you should be holy; that you should avoid sexual immorality." (I Thessalonians 4:3)

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These Thessalonian believers were saved from a practice of sinning. They were also growing in love and learning to live holy and pure lives in the midst of a corrupt society. Yet, as great as was their conversion and as wonderful as was their growth, Paul recognized that these new believers had some lacks in their lives and in their faith. Wrote Paul concerning his deep desire to be reunited with these new believers: "Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith." (I Thessalonians 3:10)

What was lacking in the faith of these new believers? The experience and reality of what might be called whole or entire or complete or full sanctification. Sanctification is the work of the Holy Spirit by which a believer is made holy through and through. Being sanctified completely or wholly is the same as being filled with the Holy Spirit. Being sanctified or filled with the Holy Spirit is a gift of God given to fully surrendered believers. Remember Jesus' words: "If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:13)

PROPOSITION: Every believer - as in the case of the Thessalonian believers - needs to be sanctified through and through. The God of peace, through the work of His Holy Spirit, is the Sanctifier. Inward cleansing and integration of the human personality is the purpose and plan of the Holy Spirit. The experience of entire sanctification is the will of God for every believer.

To better understand the importance and the meaning of entire sanctification, let us look at (1) The Source of Sanctification, (2) The Substance of Sanctification, and (3) The Surety of Sanctification.

I. SOURCE OF SANCTIFICATION - "The God of Peace"

How would you describe the work "sanctification"? Sanctification means basically two things: "separation" and "cleansing". Sanctification is a work of God in the heart and life of a person who yields to God. Another word for "sanctification" is holiness. It is God's will that humans be holy, i.e., separated from sin outwardly and cleansed from sin inwardly. "Be ye holy, for I the Lord your God am holy." In the fourth chapter of I Thessalonians, Paul wrote, "It is God's will that you should be holy." (4:3)

Holiness is the work of God - a divine enablement, not a human attainment. Christ died in order that the world could be forgiven of sins and delivered from the bondage of self-centered living. It says in Ephesians 5:25b-27 that "Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish".

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God is the source of sanctification. It is God, through the ministry of His blessed Holy Spirit, who applies the blood of Jesus to accomplish the work of justification and the work of sanctification in the lives of responsive people. Christ's blood was shed on the cross, not only to forgive us for what we have done but to deliver us from what we are. We need forgiveness for the sins we have deliberately committed, and we also need deliverance from the bondage of inner self-centeredness which gives expression to outward transgression.

God has provided a double cure for a double problem. Man's problem is twofold - outward practice of willful sins, inward attitude of self-centeredness and pride and rebellion. Man's need is twofold; forgiveness for what he has done, and deliverance from what he is. God's provision is twofold; reconciliation of the sinner to the Saviour, and empowerment of the believer for victorious living.

Where sin abounds, both in its outward practices and in its inner attitudes, the grace of God superabounds. There is no guilt so great but what God's forgiving grace is greater. There is no willfulness and self-centeredness so strong but what God's cleansing power is stronger. God is able to "save to the uttermost". This salvation includes forgiveness of all volitional sins and also cleansing from all inherited sin.

"Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit", saith the Lord. Justification and sanctification are not the work of man; they are the work of God. It is God alone who can forgive the guilty sinner and who can deliver the self-centered believer.

II. SUBSTANCE OF SANCTIFICATION

We must better understand the meaning of "sanctification" in its various dimensions.

A. Initial Sanctification

If "sanctification" means "separation", then the sinner who experiences the new birth is "sanctified" in at least an initial way. A sinner separates himself from an outward practice of willful transgressions against the known laws of God. When the Thessalonians turned to God from idols to serve the living God (1:9), they were separating themselves from a life of sin, and thus they were sanctified in the "initial" sense of the term. The Bible says, regarding separation from a practice of sin: "Therefore come out from them and be separate, Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." (II Corinthians 6:17-18 NIV) A new convert is one who has made a "moral U-turn". He has repented of his sins and chosen to follow Jesus Christ. He no longer practices sin. He is new in Christ Jesus. The old has passed away. He has separated himself from a life of sinning, and is thus "sanctified" in one sense of the term.

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B. Entire Sanctification

I Thessalonians 5:23 expresses a prayer and a desire that all of the Thessalonian believers may experience sanctification at an even deeper level. "May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you (believers) through and through." (NIV) "May the God of peace himself make you entirely pure and devoted to God." (LB) "May God himself, the God of peace, make you holy in every part." (NEB) "May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly." (RSV)

Initial sanctification, we have noted, is that beginning separation from a life of sinning, sometimes called conversion. What is full or entire sanctification? Following is a definition of entire sanctification, as one Church understands it: "We believe entire sanctification to be that work of the Holy Spirit, subsequent to regeneration, by which the fully consecrated believer, upon exercise of faith in the atoning blood of Christ, is cleansed in that moment from all inward sin and empowered for service. The resulting relationship is attested by the witness of the Holy Spirit and is maintained by faith and obedience. Entire sanctification enables the believer to love God with all his heart, soul, strength, and mind, and his neighbor as himself, and it prepares him for greater growth in grace." (Doctrinal statement of Free Methodist Church)

Initial sanctification means separation from an outward practice of sinning, resulting in conversion, reconciliation, and regeneration. Entire or full sanctification means inward cleansing from a spirit of self-sufficiency and self-centeredness, resulting in Jesus becoming the Lord of one's mind, affection, and will.

Bishop Donald Bastian describes sanctification remarkably well. Note what he says, "Holiness of heart suggests that, at the center of one's being, Jesus Christ rules in the power of the Holy Spirit. Holiness of life suggests that, as a consequence, one's daily walk increasingly reflects Christ's kind of concerns and conduct at the personal, family, and social levels. The New Testament calls believers to this quality of life (Romans 6:13 and 12:1,2). In doing so, it indicates that one does not automatically begin there. It further reflects that a believer can suffer from arrested development and settle for being a carnal Christian (I Corinthians 3:1). But the norm is full sanctification (I Thessalonians 5:23,24). The life of full sanctification is a life of constant dependence on the power of the Holy Spirit, who is the sanctifier. It is a life lived in the fellowship of the church. It is never marked by a constancy of emotions (emotions are changeable and subject to many external influences), but it is characterized by a constancy of will. In its ethical aspect, it is manifested by love for God and man. It is personal in the sense that it is lived devotionally. It is social in that it is marked by a growing concern to meet the needs of one's fellowmen." (Adventures In Church Membership; Bastian; page 84)

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C. Progressive Sanctification

Initial sanctification and entire sanctification are usually decisive, dated, and dramatic experiences of commitment to Christ, whereas progressive sanctification is an ongoing and gradual experience of daily commitments to Christ, resulting in the believer's character progressively being perfected. The Holy Spirit daily and continually cleanses the believer from anything which is a hindrance to spiritual growth. The Holy Spirit constantly works in the lives of believers to bring them into full harmony with the will of God. "Progressive sanctification is the progressive establishment of one's Christian character, its strengthening in divine grace, and the fashioning of the total personality into ever increasing Christ-likeness." (Preaching Holiness Today; Richard Taylor; page 55, 56)

A picture of the ongoing cleansing and perfecting work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers is seen in the picture of the Vine and the branches (as recorded in John 15:1-2). Said Jesus, "I am the true Vine, and my Father is the Gardener. He lops off every branch that doesn't produce. And he prunes those branches that bear fruit for even larger crops. He has already tended you by pruning you back for greater strength and usefulness by means of the commands I gave you. Take care to live in me, and let me live in you. For a branch can't produce fruit when severed from the vine. Nor can you be fruitful apart from me." (John 15:1-4 Living Bible)

Being "born of the Spirit" is a description of conversion or initial sanctification. Being "filled with the Spirit" is a description of full or entire sanctification. Learning to "walk in the Spirit" is a description of progressive sanctification. E. Stanley Jones gives a practical description of what it means to "walk in the Spirit", especially as this relates to daily surrender of our will to God's will. "You have said 'All' to Him and He has said 'All' to you. But there are a lot of little 'alls' under the big 'All'. They will come up day by day and little surrenders will have to be made, made about things and issues you did not realize would be involved. So the surrender is a blanket once-for-all surrender, but also an unfolding surrender. As you have given all you know and all you don't know, the 'don't knows' have to be dealt with as they arise. How? By a continual surrender. You do not fight or suppress the issue, you turn it over to Him and say: 'I am Yours and this thing concerns me, so this is Yours, too. I surrender it. Tell me what to do about it.' That keeps problems and issues from piling up and making you tense and burdened. It is a continual catharsis. You are saved from the tension that comes from suppressing things and driving them into the subconscious sphere where they fester, and also from evading the issues in which case they nag us from the margin of consciousness. You are fulfilling that verse, 'But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son Cleanses us from all sin'. (I John 1:7) By walking in the light, holding nothing back, you have a continuous fellowship with Christ and a continuous

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cleansing of your problems and sins. It is a working way to live." (Victory Through Surrender; page 110)

III. SURETY OF SANCTIFICATION

Paul writes, "May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it." (I Thessalonians 5:23-24)

What God has started - namely, the sanctification of His people - He will complete. "The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it." (v. 24) He who saved you from outward sinning will also cleanse you from inward sin. The one who sanctified you initially - i.e., the one who converted you - will also sanctify you through and through. God is faithful in dealing with His people. It is God's intention not only to enter your life in conversion, but also to sit on the throne of your heart, as a result of your full consecration. He wants to make you, not only a citizen of the kingdom, but He wants to make you also a soldier of the cross. He not only wants to create within you a desire to serve Him, but He wants to impart power to you to enable you to serve Him. He who imparted His love to you at the time of your new birth wants also to perfect His love in you at the time of your full sanctification. He not only wants to save you from the wrath to come, but He also wants to bring you into full harmony with the nature of God. It is God's will not only to take the repentant sinner out of the "world" of evil practices, but it is also God's will to take the "world" of carnal pleasures out of the heart of surrendered believers. Justification admits you into the family of God on earth; entire sanctification fits you for the society of God in heaven. The Holy Spirit wishes to become not only resident in your heart at the time of your conversion, but the Holy Spirit wishes to become president of your heart at the time of your inner cleansing. It is God's intention not only to save you from the guilt of sin, but also to cleanse you from the pollution of sin. God not only wants to cleanse your conscious mind, but he wants also to cleanse your subconscious mind.

There is a need for the subconscious mind to be cleansed, and for the believer to be integrated in his personality. Too many Christians are fragmented - divided in their loyalties and double-minded in their thoughts. Too many Christians are like "walking civil wars". Paul's description is very vivid: "It seems to be a fact of life that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong, I love to do God's will so far as my new nature is concerned; but there is something else deep within me, in my lower nature, that is at war with my mind and wins the fight and makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. In my mind I want to be God's willing servant but instead I find myself still enslaved to sin. So you see how it is: my new life tells me to do right, but the old nature that is still inside me loves to sin. Oh, what a terrible predicament I'm in! Who will free me from my slavery to this deadly lower nature? Thank God! It has been done by Jesus Christ our Lord. He has set me free." (Romans 7:21-25 Living Bible)

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Writes E. Stanley Jones, "The soul gets on by a series of crises. I've found it so. In conversion there is the sudden or gradual rise to a new level of life, a life as different from the ordinary man as the ordinary man is different from the animal. Then after the rise, life is on a permanently higher level. But on that new level there usually ensues an experience of ups and downs, of alternate encouragement and discouragement, of victory and defeat. It was so with me. For a year I lived under cloudless skies. The sun of my happiness seemed to have risen in the heavens to stay there forever. But after a year of unalloyed joy I found something alien began to rise from the cellar of my life. I felt there was something down there not in alignment with this new life I had found - ugly tempers, moodiness, deep-down conflicts. The general tenor of life was victory, but there were disturbing intrusions from the depths. I was becoming a house divided against itself. I was puzzled, confused, hurt with a tinge of disappointment. Was this the best that Christianity could do - to leave me wrestling with myself, or with something alien to myself? What was this dark something within?" (Song of Ascents; page 51)

We must repeat the message of Paul to the Thessalonians: "The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it." (I Thessalonians 5:24) Do what? Sanctify you entirely - through and through!

The Holy Spirit wants to cleanse your subconscious mind. He wants to take away your double-mindedness (James 1:8) and make you single-minded. He wants to take away your double will (Romans 7:22-23) and enable you to be fully consecrated to the Lordship of Christ alone. He wants to take away your divided affections (Matthew 10:37) and enable you to have an undivided loyalty for God and a supreme love for Christ.

The Holy Spirit - the Sanctifier - is the one whom God has sent, not only to convert us from sin, but also to heal us of our inner fragmentations, and to integrate our personalities to become like Christ. Not only in the decisive work of entire sanctification, but also in the daily work of progressive sanctification, the Holy Spirit wishes to perfect our lives - making our human spirits increasingly more sensitive to God, making our emotions more tender to feel God's compassion for the lost and hurting people around us, making our wills strong to accomplish God's tasks and assignments, making our bodies more healthy as we learn to keep them surrendered to the Lord.

Notes Lloyd Ogilvie, "What Paul seems to be praying is that the Thessalonians' entire spirits, souls and bodies be freely open, committed, receptive and utilized for the purpose of each part's calling and that they all work in unity to accomplish the purpose of the total life of the Christian." (Life As It Was Meant To Be; page 114)

Spirit, Soul, and Body are the three components of human nature. The spirit of man is the God-created point of contact with the Holy Spirit. When one's spirit is surrendered totally to the control of the Holy Spirit, then wholeness and integration begin

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to become a reality. The soul of man includes his intellectual and emotional and volitional capacities. When the human spirit, surrendered to the dictates of the Holy Spirit, exercises control over the soul, then the Holy Spirit - working through the channel of the cleansed human spirit - has access to the mind, the emotions, and the will. The Holy Spirit then begins the process of what can be called "the Christianization" of the mind, the emotions, and the will. The Holy Spirit progressively works to bring every thought into submission to the thoughts of Christ, to bring every emotion into alignment with the feelings and compassion of Christ, and to bring the will into conformity to the revealed purposes of God. "Christ makes a beachhead in our spirits and then penetrates into soul, capturing our understanding, healing and liberating our emotions and reorienting our wills to do His will." (Life As It Was Meant To Be; Ogilvie; page 116)

Not only does the Holy Spirit seek to permeate the human spirit and, through the human spirit, begin the process of Christianization of the mind, emotions, and will of the believer, but the Holy Spirit also seeks to sanctify the body of the believer. As a believer, have you set aside and consecrated your body entirely to God, to be a cleansed vessel for the use of the Holy Spirit? Entire sanctification is concerned not only with the spirit and the soul of the believer, but entire sanctification also includes the body of the believer. Wrote Paul to the Corinthians, "Haven't you yet learned that your body is the home of the Holy Spirit God gave you, and that he lives within you? Your own body does not belong to you. For God has bought you with a great price. So use every part of your body to give glory back to God, because he owns it." (I Corinthians 6:19-20 Living Bible)

The Holy Spirit seeks to bring our human spirit into submission and communion with Christ. "Wholeness is begun when we yield our spirits to be filled with His Spirit." (Ogilvie; page 116) The Holy Spirit seeks to correct our thinking in order that we might be able to think clearly and Scripturally. The Holy Spirit seeks to cleanse our affections and emotions from any perverted desire, and to enable us to feel God's compassionate feelings with Him. The Holy Spirit seeks to strengthen our wills in order that we might have courage to do the things which are helpful to others. The Holy Spirit seeks to make us aware that our bodies are His temples, and that we must not engage in any activity which abuses our bodies. All hurtful habits which result in quick or gradual destruction of our bodies must be abandoned, and those activities which enhance the health of our bodies must be practiced, such as proper diet and exercise and rest and recreation.

When the God of peace, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, brings peace and integration to our spirit, soul, and body, then we, as sanctified believers, are ready to witness effectively and winsomely in a world of hurting people. A world that is "out of joint" spiritually needs to hear a healing message from people who are "in step" with God spiritually. A disintegrated world needs to hear the good news of God's love from the lips of people whose lives demonstrate peace and wholeness and integration.

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Thus, wholeness involves not only personal healing but relational healing as well. We are personally healed so that we, in turn, can be God's instruments to help heal others. "The total, integrated expression of our spirits, souls, and bodies is in our relationships. A vital part of wholeness is what happens to us in our contact and communication with people. We are not whole as we were meant to be until we are free to develop deep, satisfying relationships with loved ones and friends. Wholeness is not a solo flight. We were made for community." (Life As It Was Meant To Be; Ogilvie; page 120)

What is wholeness? "Wholeness, then, is the maximum development of our lives spiritually, intellectually, emotionally, volitionally, physically and relationally. It encompasses our relationships with God, self, others and our life in the world." (Ibid; page 121)

**CONCLUSION:** It is God's will that you be sanctified or made holy, through and through! How can you be sanctified in this deeper way? By making a complete and unconditional surrender of your spirit, soul, and body to the lordship of Christ. It is your responsibility to do the consecrating. It is God's part to do the sanctifying. As you surrender, surrender all! Let Christ have your all! Then, simply open your inner life to the fullness of God's Holy Spirit.

E. Stanley Jones expresses the attitude of faith in this way: "Having given yourself, you now have a right to take Himself. Then repeat to yourself: 'He comes - He comes. I let Him come. I welcome with open heart His coming. I am grateful for His coming. It is done. We belong to each other, forever.' Close the eternal bargain." (Abundant Living; page 158)

Pray this prayer: "Father, fill me decisively today with your Holy Spirit. I surrender the controls of my heart to your total control. Cleanse me from all inward sin and shed abroad your love in my heart by your Holy Spirit. Enable me to live a consistently victorious life as I daily learn to affirm your lordship in all of my actions, attitudes, and relationships. Thank you. In Jesus' name."

I THESSALONIANS  
The Experience Of Entire Sanctification

Q U E S T I O N S

1. What can you say concerning the Person and the work of the Holy Spirit?
2. How would you describe the character and the life-style of the Thessalonians at the time Paul wrote his first letter to them? (Note I Thessalonians 1:6-9; 4:1, 9-10)
3. What do you believe, according to I Thessalonians 3:10, was lacking in the faith of the new Thessalonian believers? (Note I Thessalonians 5:23-24)
4. Is "entire sanctification" a gift from God or is it a human attainment? (Note Luke 11:13)
5. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following: "The experience of entire sanctification is the will of God for every believer." (Note I Thessalonians 4:3)
6. What are the two basic meanings of the word "sanctification"?
7. What act of God and of Christ and of the Holy Spirit makes possible the sanctification (cleansing) of believers?
8. Tell what is meant by the following statement:  
"God has provided a double cure for a double problem."
9. What is your response to and interpretation of the following statement: "Salvation includes forgiveness of all volitional sins and also cleansing from all inherited sin."?
10. In what sense can it be said that the sinner who repents of his sin is "sanctified"? (Note II Corinthians 6:17-18)
11. How would you describe and define "entire sanctification"? What is the difference between "initial sanctification" and "entire sanctification"?
12. Is a "life of holiness" marked by a "constancy of emotions" or by a "constancy of will", or by both? Why or why not?
13. Ethically, personally, and socially, how does a Spirit-filled life manifest itself?
14. What is the relationship between "faith" and "consecration", as these terms apply to the Holy Spirit's work of sanctification in the life of a believer?
15. How would you describe and define "progressive sanctification"? How does the picture of the Vine and the branches in John 15 help one to understand "progressive sanctification" in the life of the believer?

I THESSALONIANS  
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16. What is the difference between the following three experiences: "born of the Spirit", "filled with the Spirit", and "walking in the Spirit"?
17. How can surrender to God be both "blanket once-for-all surrender" and also a "daily unfolding surrender"? Why is there a need for a "continual catharsis" in the life of a believer?
18. How can the experience of "full sanctification" be described in contrast to the experience of "initial conversion"? Give a list of contrasts.
19. Is it possible for a believer to be like a "walking civil war"? (Note Romans 7:21-25)
20. How would you interpret the following statement by E. Stanley Jones: "The soul gets on by a series of crises"?
21. What, according to I Thessalonians 5:24, does God promise to do for a believer? What conditions must a believer meet in order for God to fulfill His promise which is given in I Thessalonians 5:24?
22. In His progressive work of sanctification, what specifically does the Holy Spirit intend to do for the believer in his spirit, mind, emotions, will and physical being?
23. What attitude, according to I Corinthians 6:19-20, should a believer have regarding his body?
24. Give your interpretation of the following statement: "Wholeness involves not only personal healing, but relational healing as well."
25. How would you describe that attitude of faith which claims God's power to sanctify you wholly?

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