1 Thessalonians - Commentaries by Edward Cross

Book Study: 1st and 2nd Thessalonians, 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

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Edward Cross and Others

Comments preceded by the letter (R.) are communicated by our readers; those furnished by the contributors mainly responsible for this series of papers are preceded in each instance by their initials; whilst editorial comments are distinguished thus — (ED.).

1 Thessalonians 1:1

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

(ED.) — Of the three here mentioned the writer of the epistle is Paul. This is evidenced by verse 18 of chapter 2., where he says “Even I, Paul,” and by what follows; but, rendering honor to whom honor is due, Paul associates with himself, in the letter, the two who had been associated with him in the actual preaching of Christ which had brought these Thessalonians into blessing (see Acts 17, where Silas is evidently the person Paul speaks of as Silvanus), and in later service towards them (see Chapter 3:2 and compare 1 Corinthians 1:19, “The Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, even by me and Silvanus and Timotheus”).

Silas was a prophet, diligent in his service, and one of the “chief men among the brethren” (Acts 15:32, 34, and 22), whilst Timothy, who is mentioned last in order of the three — for there is always a beautiful fitness in the inspired writings — was evidently much younger both in the faith and in years (Acts 16:1; 1 Tim. 1:2 and 6:22).

(E. C.) — It is significant that here there is no mention of Paul’s apostleship, which is so distinctly asserted in the opening verses of other epistles, such as those, to the Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, and Colossians, etc. Inquiry as to the reason for this leads us to note, briefly, the purpose of this epistle, and the state of those addressed.

The occasion for the writing of the epistle was the good tidings brought by Timothy, whom Paul had sent to inquire as to their state, knowing the affliction they were called upon to endure for the gospel’s sake (ch. 3:6). He was greatly comforted by what he heard, and out of a full heart he writes to encourage them, as well as also to perfect that which was still lacking in their faith (ch. 3:10), — though this he does rather from a moral and practical point of view than from one doctrinal and instructional. Not that the great truths unfolded elsewhere in his later epistles are ignored here; but their discussion is not yet called for. The epistle is not marked so much by depth of thought, profound reasoning, defense of the truth questioned or attacked, or by the revelation of hidden heavenly and eternal mysteries; but rather by the warmth of affection, and the burning desire of laboring love, the simplicity and exuberance of expression proceeding from a heart overflowing with a fresh and fervid spirit towards his newly converted children in the faith. Soon he will have occasion for words of authority and rebuke; but here we have only words of comfort, exhortation, and instruction, opening out as they do with thankfulness and prayer, and sealed at the close with “an holy kiss.” Therefore we have no mention here of his apostleship. It is as unnecessary as it would be inappropriate. Elsewhere he will use the authority of that title. Here it would be out of place.

So, too, he does not speak of his apostleship to the Philippians, “Inasmuch as both in his bonds and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel they were all participators of his grace”: nor again in writing to Philemon, his “dearly beloved brother and fellow-laborer without whose mind he would do nothing”: there too it would be out of place; and in this epistle the pressure of authority is not needed, but rather the consolation and exhortation of sympathetic love.

(E. C.) — His address is “to the assembly of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” They alone are so addressed. The Corinthians are addressed as “the assembly of God,” etc, It was intended to emphasize that fact in contrast to what was merely human, and the repetition of the word “God” is characteristic of 1 Corinthians “The assemblies of Galatia” are addressed as the aggregate of those so associated in that province. Elsewhere Paul writes “to the saints,” etc. thus giving them their personal calling and character. Here he writes “to the assembly of the Thessalonians,” which is distinguished from other assemblies in that place as being “in God the Father” in opposition to what was pagan, and “in the Lord Jesus Christ” in contrast to the unbelieving Jews. They are thus set at once in the fullest measure of revealed grace in God the Father and in the direct consciousness of individual responsibility to the Lord Jesus Christ (compare 1 John 2:22). This starts, if I may so say, their Christian career.

(ED.) — “In God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ.” Here, in the first verse of the first apostolic letter to the youngest of the churches addressed in Scripture, is the full revelation of God in Christianity; and though those addressed were only babes in Christ, they were in the same glorious light as the most experienced saint of God. They needed, undoubtedly, to be instructed in the truth of these relationships in which the gospel had placed them, and this truth is most blessedly unfolded in John’s epistle, but they needed no further revelation, for they were in the full shining of “God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ;” all is wrapped up in this — the divine nature and eternal life, though these things are not the subject of the epistle.

(J.C.T.) — This is the only church spoken of as “in God the Father.”

They were babes in Christ, and it is of such that the apostle John writes in 1 John 2:13 — “I write unto you little children because ye know the Father.”

(R.) — “Grace be unto you and peace.” The ordinary Greek salutation is almost equivalent to the word “grace,” while “peace” is the ordinary Hebrew greeting. Taken by the Holy Spirit into the service of God, the words are greatly enlarged and deepened in meaning. Grace expresses God’s attitude towards men: peace, the result to all who receive that grace in Christ. Thus they sum up the gospel, and are used by the apostle in all his epistles.

(R.) — What is very noticeable in this chapter is the number of couplets and triplets of words and expressions which occur there, and indeed throughout the epistle. This may possibly be in view of adequate testimony, which these young converts required to strengthen and support their faith, for “in the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established,” and “a threefold cord is not easily broken” (2 Cor. 13:1; Matt. 18:16; Eccl. 4:12). Thus, for example, notice verse: Paul, Silvanus and Timotheus; verse 3, work of faith, labor of love, patience of hope; verse 5, in power, in the Holy Spirit, in much assurance; verse 6, in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit; verse 8, Macedonia, Achaia, in every place; 2:3, not of deceit, uncleanness or guile; 2:10, holily, justly and unblameably; 2:11, exhorted, comforted, charged; 2:19, hope, joy, crown of rejoicing; 3:2, brother, minister of God, fellow-laborer; 4:16, shout, voice of archangel, trump of God; 5:23, spirit, soul and body; etc., etc.

1 Thessalonians 1:2

“For you all, making mention of you in our prayers;”

(E.C.) — At once his heart bursts out in thanksgiving and in prayers for them all. Mark the fullness and overflowing of his spiritual affections on their behalf. How beautiful to contemplate! How lovely to dwell upon! Here is the thing as it ought to be. Here are the true pulsations of the Spirit of God.

Love, the great power that begets; love, the true nurse that cherishes the offspring that is begotten of it. And is it not the same Spirit in the gospel that begets today? Is it not the same Spirit in the assembly that cherishes that which is begotten? How earnestly therefore should we seek to cultivate this love, which is the greatest, the mightiest power of all.

(R.) — “For You All.” Christians differ in attainment, but there is always something of Christ in each, and hence always something for which to thank God.

1 Thessalonians 1:3

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

(E.C.) — Rightly too, as we can understand, the opening chapter of this prefatory epistle, if I may so call it, of Christian truth begins with the essential principles and characteristics of Christian life, the faith, hope, and love, which are its intrinsic qualities, the spring and power of the work, labor and patience in which it is expressed.

Christianity is not a pastime. The Son of God did not become incarnate merely to make us happy. He is our life, not merely a relief — a life energized by His own Spirit to the glory of God. We see it at once in these Thessalonian saints in its nature and in its fruit — the true expression of vital Christianity here on earth — in faith that rises above the visible, and takes hold. of God, above all circumstances, and addresses itself to its allotted task with a single eye to His glory — in hope that seizes the invisible, and realizes the promises, so that, with the future present to its view, it endures patiently the trials of the way, knowing that the exercise which is but for a moment will issue in eternal glory: — in love which is the potent spring of all blessedness, the very nature of God Himself, the almighty never-failing power of all good. This is the practical character of Christian life. This is the subject matter before us in the epistle. Other epistles will treat of the doctrines of Christianity; this treats of the characteristics of Christian life.

(ED.) — That faith, love and hope are the innermost springs of vital Christianity is evident from 1 Corinthians 13:13, “Now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”

(E.C.) — Observe the contrast in Revelation 2, where the Lord speaks to the Ephesians, saying, “I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience... nevertheless I have against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent...” Work was there, labor was there, and patience was there — the outward form and habit abode, but the secret springs of life had failed — they had left their first love. Declension had set in, and declension of a most serious kind, involving, if not repented of, the removal of their candlestick as being no longer a proper testimony for God, and issuing in a long line of increasing corruption, until every vestige of Christianity is lost in the final apostasy, and the whole scene is swept by the devastating judgments of God. What a finale! And what a contrast to the freshness and beauty of this opening picture of Christian life at Thessalonica! How it should affect us! What serious reflections in us it should produce! And how earnestly should we seek grace and mercy from the Lord to enable us to walk humbly before Him, duly cultivating the springs of Christian life in our souls, so that we may escape the corruption that is in the world through lust! (Compare Psa. 1; 2 Pet. 1:11).

(R.) — Here we have that acceptable work which faith produces and prompts; labor which is the product of love, not of legal bondage; and patience born not of mere resignation to the inevitable, but of confidence in ultimate triumph.

1 Thessalonians 1:4

“Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.”

(E.C.) These fruits of grace amongst them (verse 3) were an evident proof of their election of God.

(R.) — The word here used for “knowing” intimates that his knowledge came not by revelation, nor by intuition, but from observation; hence the rest of the chapter recounts what led Paul to conclude that these Thessalonians were among the elect of God.

1 Thessalonians 1:5

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

(E.C.) — This tells not of the subject of the preaching, but of the manner of it, and the effect on them. Mark also the redundancy of expression in the threefold way in which it is expressed. In the exuberance of his feelings his language is molded in the same spirit. They received the Word of God objectively in power, instrumentally in the Holy Spirit, and subjectively in much assurance. Moreover, this testimony rendered to them in word was confirmed by the lives of those who had brought it to them in their midst.

1 Thessalonians 1:6

“And ye became followers of us, and of I the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the holy ghost:”

(J.C.T.) They became followers of the apostles, and of the Lord. To the Corinthian believers the apostle wrote: — “be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.” (1 Cor. 11:1) we shall make no mistake if we follow the apostles as they followed Christ.

(R.) — The reception of the Word brought them into “much affliction” that was the outward result, but it also brought them into much “joy of the Holy Ghost”-that was the blessed inward result.

(J.C.T.) — Peter and John “rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His Name.” There, too, we see joy and affliction going together.

(R.) — Contrast with this Matthew 13:20-21, where again we have the same three things associated, viz., the “reception of the word,” “joy,” and “affliction.” There the “word” is not really received in faith, so the “joy” is only superficial, and “affliction” is not patiently endured, but overwhelms.

1 Thessalonians 1:7

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

1 Thessalonians 1:8

“For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak anything.”

(ED.) — Connect this with the last clause of the preceding verse. A joyful Christian is a good example.

(R.) — The word “ensamples” may be better translated “models.” These Thessalonians were “models to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia.” No other company of saints is thus spoken of in Scripture. To the Philippians, Paul and Timothy were models (ch. 3:17); Timothy was exhorted to be a model of the believers (1 Tim. 4:12; see also Titus 2:7, model of good works); the elders were to be models to the flock (1 Peter 5:3); but the Thessalonians alone, simply as saints, are spoken of as models to all around.

(E.C.) — These Thessalonian believers had become witnesses themselves, in their own lives and conduct, of the emancipating and uplifting power of the gospel in such wise that there was no further need for others to speak anything. And this is as it should be. Here is the true and visible effect of the gospel, bringing the saving light of God to souls, and enabling them, as saved and in the liberty and power of salvation known and enjoyed, to serve Him gladly in word and work. Here was the effect of the word of life seen in the Christian lives of those who had received it. Would that it were so seen amongst believers today. Let us pray earnestly that it be so.

(J.C.T.) — First, the practical life — “ensamples to all that believe,” then, “sounded out the word of the Lord.” It is a great thing when testimony flows out of the practical life.

(R.) — “The word of the Lord” is the message from the Lord, which is delivered with His authority, and made effective by His power.

(ED.) — Macedonia (now part of Turkey) was their own province, — there first is their witness rendered; then Achaia (the adjoining province, corresponding approximately to Greece); then more widely still. This is ever the order in Scripture, we must first be faithful in that which lies nearest at hand, then widen out. It is thus in the words of the risen Lord to His disciples, “Ye shall be witnesses unto Me both (1) in Jerusalem, (2) and in all Judea, (3) and in Samaria, (4) and unto the uttermost parts of the earth” (Acts 1:18). The sphere of witness ever widens, but it begins at home.

1 Thessalonians 1:9

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

(R.) — The first clause of this verse shows that not only had the remarkable religious movement at Thessalonica influenced believers elsewhere (1 Thessalonians 1:7), but it had become a matter of general report, “a new thing” (Acts 17:21), of sufficient interest to give a zest to conversation even among men for whom the story had little significance.

Then is stated their deliberate turn to God from idols. Note the order, it is to God from idols; the motive in this conversion was not that they were repelled by the grossness of their idols, but that they were attracted by the grace and character of God.

(J.C.T.) — The order is important. Having got God, they could afford to drop idols. We must have the good, to enable us to drop the evil.

(E.) — “Living and true” is in contrast to “idols,” which are both dead and false.

(E.C.) — The power of idolatry was broken — the world worship of false gods, dead images of its own passions and fears.

(R.) — The word used for “to serve” signifies to discharge the duties of the purchased slave, to which there were no limitations either in the kind of service, or in the time of its performance. The whole life of the Christian is to be lived in obedience to the will of God.

1 Thessalonians 1:10

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

(ED.) — The second advent of the Lord Jesus occupies a prominent place in this epistle, and is mentioned in every chapter. It is to be the bright hope of the Christian, whether newly converted as were the Thessalonian believers, or long on the way as were the assemblies addressed in the last chapter of Revelation (verses 16-20).

(ED.) — “Raised.” Here is the cardinal truth of the gospel, and the demonstration of the mighty power of God.

“From the Dead.” In these words is enshrined the wondrous story of Calvary, where shines in all its splendor, its infinite depths and heights, the love of God, which, known and enjoyed, forms the hidden spring of the Christian’s glad service of the living and true God.

(J.C.T.). — Mark then what lay before them, and filled up their future: “Wrath.” The coming wrath I But what a contrast now. They were waiting not, for wrath, but for God’s Son from heaven, even Jesus; Who, having borne all the judgment Himself in His own body on the cross, had taken out of their future all wrath, and filled it instead with Himself! Blessed exchange! And this He has done for us. We wait not for death, or judgment, but for Him!

Their Past — Idolatry.

Their Present — Serving the living and true God.

Their Future — The coming of God’s Son from Heaven — Jesus, their hope and ours!

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EDITORS’ NOTE: Readers are invited to send us, in the FIRST week of each month, BRIEF expository comments on any or all of the separate verses contained in the portion to be considered the following month. Comments considered helpful, will be published, as far as space permits. Questions are also invited as to the meaning of any verse or part of a verse, on which special comment is desired. The portion to be considered in the March issue is Chapter 2 of the epistle.

Book Study: 1st and 2nd Thessalonians, 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

Edward Cross

1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Before passing to the consideration of the second chapter, let us look once again, briefly, at the closing verses of the preceding chapter, for these give a certain scope and setting to the whole epistle:

“... how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; And to wait for His Son from heaven, Whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.”

The state of the pagan world in general, as of the Thessalonians in particular, is depicted here, and more fully described in Romans 1, as sunk in idolatry, addicted to the worship of those who are described in Deut. 32:17-21 as “no gods.”

How the anger of God was provoked against them on this account, and His wrath stirred up against them to their destruction, is fully set forth as a warning to Israel by Moses in the book of Deuteronomy — compare Deut. 4:14-28; 7:23-26; 11:16-17; 12:29-31 and so forth. And terrible

were the denunciations made to them should they forsake the worship and service of the Lord God, and, reverting to the idolatry out of which Abram had been called (Josh. 24:2), follow the example of the surrounding nations.

They were thus, both of them, Israel and the nations alike, amenable to the wrath of God; nor was there the possibility of escape, when once His hand in the fury of His anger was lifted up. “For a fire is kindled in mine anger, and shall burn unto the lowest hell, and shall consume the earth with her increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains. I will heap mischiefs upon them. I will spend mine arrows upon them,” etc. (Deut. 32:21-23).

These words are addressed to Israel, but their echo is heard among the nations around. How blessed amidst the rolling of such thunders to hear the gospel sound, telling of “Jesus, our Deliverer,” — Deliverer of every believer, Jew and Gentile alike — “our Deliverer from the coming wrath,” a wrath as certainly coming as the fact of it had already been made known (cf. Eph. 5:6, Col. 3:6).

“Ye turned to God from idols,” denotes rather the general idea of their conversion than its specifically Christian character; they turned from the idols they had served to the God whom Paul preached to them — to serve Him whose true character is the “living and veritable God,” and to wait for His Son from the heavens, even Jesus, our Deliverer from the coming wrath already announced.

He is the living God, in contrast to dead idols — “no gods” who have no life in them. “Behold ye are worse than nothing and your work is of naught “(Isa. 41:24, margin). Such is the idol in itself: the worship of it is rank corruption.

He is the true, the veritable God, in contrast to what is merely specious and shadowy (cf. Jer. 10:10; 1 John 5:20).

“To wait for His Son from heaven.” This was their hope, and this hope, the coming of the Lord, characterizes the epistle. It has been well said that “hope is the keynote of this epistle, as joy is of the Epistle to the Philippians” (Ellicott). In every chapter the corning of the Lord is set forth. In one aspect or another of it, it is the characteristic hope of the Christian. Thus it is presented:

In 1 Thess. 1:10 in connection with the deliverance to be brought about at that day.

In 1 Thess. 2:19 with the joyful reunion of the saints and those who have labored amongst them.

In 1 Thess. 3:13 with the present sanctifying effects produced by the consequences of the responsibility that will be then manifested.

In 1 Thess. 4:14-17 with the rapture of the saints and their coming again with the Lord at His return.

In 1 Thess. 5:2 with “the day of the Lord” and the judgment that will then come, as already pronounced, upon the unbelievers.

And in 1 Thess. 5:23 with his desire that the saints should be preserved blameless in view of that day, fraught as it is with so many mighty issues.

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Chapter 2

In the preceding chapter, Paul dwells thankfully on the fruits the gospel had produced in those whom he addresses; in this chapter he discusses seriously, in the full sense of the responsibility attaching to it, his own conduct as a servant of God in their midst.

There he spoke of their faith, hope and love, the essential and internal elements of Christian life, evidenced in its reality by the work and patience and labor that accompanied them; and also of the external evidence of the power of the gospel over them, seen by all as they turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God and to wait for His Son from heaven. Here he speaks of the boldness, the uprightness, the faithfulness, the considerateness, the tenderness, the untiring and unselfish devotedness of his ministry amongst them; able as he is (happy man!) to call them and God to witness how holily and justly, and unblameably he, with his fellow laborers, had behaved themselves among them that believe, at once manifesting the gentleness of a nursing mother, and ministering the wise counsel and instruction of a devoted father amongst his children. It is a beautiful and grateful picture to study; and as the mind dwells upon it, it is refreshed from the springs of spiritual life that come bursting up from their source, with all the instinct of holy affections as yet unrestrained by the coldness or defilements of this nether world.

Why is it that we do not get more ministry from the epistles to the Thessalonians? Why is it that much of what we do get is of a merely doctrinal kind, where doctrine, as such, has so little place? Is it that the affections of life amongst those who believe are so little developed, or have become so atrophied for want of being properly nourished, that we are but little capable of appreciating that which, by contrast with the highest gifts, the apostle calls the “more excellent way?” (1 Cor. 12:31). Or is it that we are more occupied with the ordering and administration of our relationships than with the fulfillment of them?—that our heads have got beyond our hearts, and both beyond our feet? Let us take heed to the word, “these things ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.”

We notice here, as before, the same fervency, the same superlative style, his thought amplified in triplets, as though words could scarce express the over-flowing of his feelings. Tense and short he can be when the occasion requires — “But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached let him be accursed: As we said before, so say I now again... let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:9-10). One word of sharp and extreme animadversion is there enough, and he will not use a second, even though he use it twice. But here, how different! words are piled up to give vent, as it were, to the feelings with which his heart is charged towards his beloved children in the faith.

Doctrine is no doubt necessary in its place, and the full understanding of all the glorious purposes of God for the ages, as revealed in the Scriptures, is of the utmost importance for the proper and intelligent enjoyment of the Christian; but here we have the spring that vitalizes all the rest, without which these vast and far-reaching truths, given for the glory of God and for the blessing of His people as in a land flowing with milk and honey, become as barren as the steppes of Tartary, as arid as the sands of the Sahara desert. Made known for the glory of God, the Giver, and for the blessing of man, the receiver, they are ofttimes taken up by the mind of man for his own glory, and they thus fail in the purpose of their revelation, whether for God or man. Life we must have, whatever else we have: and life, divine and spiritual life, has its spring and expression in love and the holy affections that flow from it. Doctrine must surely be maintained at the height of the revelation as given of

God: but the soul must be nourished in the affections that give it life and unction.

1 Thessalonians 2:1-2

He designs to encourage them to patience and constancy in the sufferings through which they were passing; but he does not exhort them to travel a road by which he himself had not gone. He does not drive them. And so likewise Paul can speak of his own sufferings, and the shameful treatment to which he and his fellow laborers were subjected at Philippi, and how “we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention.”

1 Thessalonians 2:3-8

It is most interesting, and affords instruction worthy of the most serious consideration, to note the profoundly serious way in which he regards the trust of the gospel committed to him by God, always associating with himself in this service to the Thessalonians his fellow laborers, Silvanus and Timotheus. How bright the saving light of the gospel thus appears as first sent forth into this poor dark world! What a message to carry, and what messengers to carry it! Here the curtain rises on a new scene where the God of Heaven proclaims the supremacy of good in a world lying in the wicked one; this gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believes.

He charges the saints at Thessalonica that they should walk worthy of God, who had called them to His own kingdom and glory; but first he vindicates his title to give such a charge to others.

Mark well the things that were absent from this exhortation and then note that which characterized it. It was free from deceit, uncleanness, guile: they spake “not as pleasing men but God, which trieth our hearts”: they used no flattery nor pretext of covetousness: and this was not said lightly, God was their witness: nor did they seek glory of any human source, though as apostles of Christ they might have clothed themselves with the weight and consideration of their commission. No such object commanded them, no such desire impelled them. If not, what then? What motives did govern these honored servants of God? What motives should govern and characterize His beloved servants today? The answer is beautiful and before us. First, fidelity to Him whose servants they were, “not as, pleasing men but God which trieth our hearts “; and second, tenderness and love towards those whom they were sent to serve. And what exquisite refinement and depth of feeling is evidenced in their manner of behavior towards them. Gentle as a nursing mother with her own children, desirous of imparting not the gospel of God only but their very selves, because they had become so dear to them.

1 Thessalonians 2:9

Nor does any false modesty prevent his calling to their minds how they had labored and wrought night and day so as not to be chargeable to them in the way of monetary expense, while preaching to them the free grace of God. On this point Paul is more than ordinarily emphatic. In one place he calls it his reward that in preaching the gospel he would make it without charge (1 Cor. 9:18). Elsewhere he says that as the truth of Christ is in him no man shall stop him of this boasting (2 Cor. 11:10), and of this we have proof in his closing address to the elders at Ephesus, in these memorable words: — “I have coveted no man’s silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have skewed you all things, how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, It is more blessed to give than to receive’” (Acts 20:33-35). What a man! What a servant! What an exponent in his own life and ways, of the gospel that he had received from God! of the gospel which he preached to others.

1 Thessalonians 2:10-12

What forceful eloquence therefore in his words where he calls them and God to witness “how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe;” and how touching his appeal to their own personal knowledge — “how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father,” taking individual interest in every separate child in the family that they should walk worthy of God — the God who had called them, to His own “kingdom and glory.”

In Ephesians 4:1 he exhorts them to all lowliness (mark the word all, for it is forgotten), meekness, longsuffering, and the like, as he beseeches them to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they were called.

In Colossians 1:9, 10, his constant prayer and desire for them was that they might be filled (mark the word filled) with the complete knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, that they might walk worthy of the Lord.

Here he dwells on the testimony of a holy, righteous, and blameless life in the sight of others, even as “the kingdom of God is... righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost; for he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable’ to God, and approved of men” (Rom. 14:17-18).

Additional Notes by Readers.

1 Thessalonians 2:1

The apostle recognized these Thessalonian converts as “brethren,” the new relationship formed in Christianity. Paul himself was a Jew, these one-time idolaters were Gentiles, but now in Christ Jesus they were all one.

1 Thessalonians 2:2

In this epistle God is present to faith as the living and true God. To such a God had these Thessalonians turned. Hence we can understand the way the apostle links every movement of saints and servants directly with Him, for everything connected with the apostle’s work arose from the activities in grace of the living and true God. Thus: bold in our God; gospel of God; allowed of God; God, which trieth our hearts; God is witness; God, who hath called you; and so through the whole epistle.

BOLD IN OUR GOD. — This boldness was not mere natural courage, but the calm fearlessness that comes of consciousness of the presence of God.

1 Thessalonians 2:3

OUR EXHORTATION. — On those who were persuaded of the truth of what Paul preached (Acts 17:2, 5), the missionaries had urged certain practical considerations; this is here described as “our exhortation.”

IS NOT OF DECEIT (ERROR). — They had not themselves been carried away by any wiles of error, neither had they sought to mislead others by such wiles (Eph. 4:14). They had not been deceived, neither were they deceivers; see 2 Tim. 3:13, where the word is used which is translated in this verse “deceit,” but which is usually and more correctly translated “error.”

NOR OF UNCLEANNESS. — Compare the description of the false teachers in 2 Peter 2:18, where sensuality and error are again associated (see also Jude 4). Corinth and Thessalonica were both cities wherein gross vice was consecrated to the service of religion. Christianity, Paul declared, did not share the character of the old religion. Compare Chapter 4:7.

NOR IN GUILE. — The preceding words deny a wrong source and a wrong motive; this denies a wrong method. The meaning of the word is best seen from its first New Testament occurrence (Matt. 26:4), where it is translated “subtlety.”

1 Thessalonians 2:4

Here the choice is between pleasing God and pleasing men, and the Lord Jesus Himself is the pattern: He always did the things that were pleasing to His Father (John 8:29).

In Romans 15:1 and 2, and in 1 Corinthians 10:33 (which is to be interpreted by verse 24 of the chapter), the choice is between pleasing ourselves and pleasing others. Here again Christ is the pattern: He pleased not Himself (Rom. 15:3. See also Phil. 2:4, 5).

1 Thessalonians 2:5

The glad tidings were their own commendation; they did not require flattering words to be added to them, or anything which was merely human.

A Cloak, that is — a pretense, something assumed to mislead others as to one’s real motives. The word is well illustrated in Acts 27:30, where it is translated “color.”

GOD is WITNESS. Concerning flattery, which is of the tongue, he appealed to his readers; concerning covetousness, which is of the heart, he appealed to God.

1 Thessalonians 2:7

GENTLE. — Note the contrast with the false apostles of 2 Corinthians 11:13, 20.

1 Thessalonians 2:9

NIGHT AND DAY. It is very interesting to note that the almost invariable Old Testament formula is “day and night,” whilst in the gospels and epistles the order is usually reversed — night and day. Why is this? May it not run with the trend of the periods, the one towards darkness, the other towards light? “The darkness is passing and the true light already shines” (1 John 2:8 JND).

1 Thessalonians 2:10

AND GOD ALSO. Always God is the Judge. This is a bold appeal — from the world that knew little of them to the Church that knew more, and, finally, to God who knows all. Compare with this 1 Corinthians 4:3, 4 where again the apostle appeals from man’s day, that is, the world, to “you,” that is, the saints, from the saints to his conscience, from his conscience to his Lord.

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EDITORS’ NOTE: Readers are invited to send us, in the First week of each month, BRIEF expository comments on any or all of the separate verses contained in the portion to be considered the following month. Comments considered helpful, will be published, as far as space permits. Questions are also invited as to the meaning of any verse, or part of a verse, on which special comment is desired. The portion to be considered in the April issue is Chapter 2:13-20, of the Epistle.

Book Study: 1st and 2nd Thessalonians, 1 Thessalonians 2:13-20

Edward Cross

1 Thessalonians 2:13-20

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

For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews: Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men: Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.

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

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

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

For ye are our glory and joy."

1 Thessalonians 2:13-14

Seeing then that it was God who was calling them, it was His word they heard and not the word of men. The emphasis lies not on what they heard, but on the source and authority of it; and so the apostle says, "having received the word of the report of God by us [that is, the word which we preached to you], ye accepted, not men's word, but, even as it is truly, God's word, which also works [is operative] in you who believe" (New Translation). Similarly "the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth" (Jonah 3:5). The word they heard was not to them the word of the prophet merely, but the Word of God.

Moreover, with these Thessalonians as with the Ninevites, it displayed its own energy as the Word of God in their souls: it became operative through faith, as was evidenced by their enduring sufferings at the hands of their own countrymen, even as the churches of Judea did from the Jews.

1 Thessalonians 2:15-16.

These latter were at the time the most pronounced foes of Christianity. From the beginning of their history the category of their crimes had been terrible, and the judgments that had befallen them from the hand of God in consequence had been exemplary. This list had been immeasurably increased and their character still further emphasized by their conduct in recent times, as the apostle says: "[they] have both slain the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and have driven us out by persecution, and do not please God, and are against all men" (New Translation); while their blindness is completed in their "forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway."

By the title "Lord," which he uses here, he enhances their guilt, and sets the heinousness of their sin in the strongest light: by the word "alway" he shows the unbroken, unchanging character of their conduct through all time, from the beginning of their history right on. (Compare Deut. 1:26; Deut. 9:24; Acts 7:51).

An unbelieving people from the beginning, they had been visited in the government of God with varying judgments from time to time; but now wrath had fallen on them to the uttermost. In a few years — some fifteen from then — destruction and misery were to overtake the nation, their city was to be demolished and themselves scattered over the face of the earth, as they are to this day, awaiting the still more crucial troubles that shall befall them in "the latter days." Then will be "the time of Jacob's trouble" (Jer. 30:7), when the crisis of their unbelieving history will have arrived, and the final wrath of God will be culminated in them.

1 Thessalonians 2:17-18

In what touching words the apostle here describes his emotions. Feeling the bereavement of separation from 'them for a little moment in person, not in heart, through circumstances over which he had no control, his longing was the more increased to see them "with much desire;" and once and again he essayed to do so, but — and the reason he gives for his failing to do so is remarkable — "Satan hindered us."

Who, in the face of such words, can question the actuality and personality of this mysterious power? Satan, the evil spirit, the adversary, by whatever agencies or means he acted, was the hindering power to oppose the purposes of God for the comfort and blessing of the saints through the personal ministry of the apostle. This opposing power is ceaseless and varied in the forms in which it manifests itself, but it is specially signalized as Satan's to these souls newly converted from its thralldom (Cf. Job 1:6; Zech. 3:2; Rev. 12:7-9).

"Satan hindered": what the means were which he used is not revealed. Nor is the mystery of the existence of this power cleared up for the curiosity of "fleshly minds" "intruding into" things not made known (Col. 2:18). But the existence and personality of this power, and its direct and ceaseless opposition to God with the desire to thwart His purposes, are put beyond all doubt by the Scripture record: while its constant rebellion against the will of God — the proud will of the creature against the Creator (1 Tim. 3:6) — and its final and complete overthrow, is the uniform theme of Scripture from Genesis 3 to Revelation 20 He is called "the god of this world" — this "age" (2 Cor. 4:4), and "the prince of this world" (John 12:31): and seeing that Scripture constantly attributes to him such authoritative power (Acts 26:18; Col. 1:13; Eph. 2:2), it would be folly indeed to treat lightly, or fancifully, so real and so terrible an enemy both of God and man.

1 Thessalonians 2:19-20

From all this how naturally and simply the apostle's mind turns to the time when no power of the disturber will be there to hinder in a brighter scene, in the presence of the Lord Jesus at His coming, the fulfillment of his desire, which will in due course be realized, even though it be postponed till then.

And with that thought a new element is introduced into the character of "that day." In 1 Thessalonians 1:10, it is connected with the coming of the Son of God, and the deliverance He will then accomplish for His people: here he is concerned with the fact that He will gather them all together into the joy of His presence. The delivered ones will be united with those who have been instrumental in their deliverance, each to increase the other's joy.

And how surpassingly true this will be of Him, of whom primarily and preeminently it is written, "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing His sheaves with Him" (Psa. 126:6).

"For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For ye are our glory and joy." In this same spirit sang Samuel Rutherford:

May we, too, take fresh courage, and remember the words of the apostle: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58).

Book Study: 1st and 2nd Thessalonians, 1 Thessalonians 3:1-13

Edward Cross

1 Thessalonians 3

1. Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone;

2. And sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellow labourer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith:

3. That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto.

4. For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know.

5. For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labor be in vain.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1 Thessalonians 3:1-3

As in the preceding chapter we see the devoted and self-sacrificing love of the apostle, as of a nursing mother and of a father cherishing, instructing, and bringing up their children with tender care: so here we see the anxiety with which he thinks of them as exposed to the perils and sufferings of their new pathway.

It is instructive and inspiring to see the various feelings of the Spirit of Christ brought into play in the ministry of His servant, and the emotions that fill his breast. His work was not the work of a mere preacher. The least part of it was the preaching. apostle, evangelist, preacher, pastor, teacher, father, mother, friend, and lover, all in one, he sought not theirs but them. He sought them at the cost of all he had — himself. He sought them not merely for their present, but for their eternal, their highest good. He sought them, not for themselves and their welfare merely, but for the Lord Jesus Christ and for God. He was a servant in the true sense of the word; and with the perceptions of the Spirit, and the presentiments that are alike the pleasure and the pain of true affection. Nor is he alone in this, though surely foremost. Others are joined with him in the same spirit; and in the same unselfish spirit he joins them with himself.

As we have already remarked, Thessalonica was the resort of a large colony of Jews, and the place was greatly under their influence, even as it is to this day. Now the Jews were, as I might so say, the hereditary enemies of the testimony of God, and therefore of Christ and of Christianity (ch. 2:15), and it was therefore no wonder that the Christians at Thessalonica suffered sorely at their hands. In Acts 17 we read that they succeeded in chasing Paul out of Thessalonica, and not content with that, they followed him to Berea and stirred up against him the people in that place also, so that from there he had to leave for Athens. Carrying therefore in his mind the sense of the persecuting opposition from which he himself was suffering, he was naturally in much anxiety about the baby converts he had left in Thessalonica, and in his tender solicitude on their behalf he elects to be left alone in solitude at Athens (and how solitary he must there have felt!) — and he sends Timothy back to them to inquire of their welfare, and to establish and exhort them concerning their faith, encouraging them that no man might be moved by these afflictions.

1 Thessalonians 3:4

Already he had foretold them that tribulation is the appointed lot of the believer. In this statement there is nothing new. The Lord Himself had clearly foretold it to His disciples, (John 15:20-25; 16:2-33). It is the necessary adjunct of the testimony of God in a world that hates Him: and it was not only the preaching but the portion of the Church from earliest times (Acts 5:41; 14:22).

But from then till now, and so it ever will be, that the north wind is as necessary for the garden as is the south wind, “that the spices thereof may flow out” (SoS. 4:16); and while the storm of persecution may do some damage, yet nevertheless, generally speaking, it does more good. Some indeed think that when they are saved, they are saved from all trouble; and they think it strange when some fiery trial overtakes them. The apostle says rather “Rejoice inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy” (1 Pet. 4:12, 13). As well might a sailor expect to learn navigation on a duck-pond, as for a Christian to follow Christ, and not take part in His sufferings. “If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.” It is the royal lot of the Christian, and therein “the Spirit of glory and of God” resteth upon him (1 Peter 4:14): although we none of us like it.

1 Thessalonians 3:6-10

How greatly therefore was the apostle comforted in his own distress and affliction by the good tidings that Timothy brought him of their faith and love, and of how they reciprocated his feelings towards him, and desired to see his face, even as he did theirs. He is comforted in all his distress by their faith; and what intensity of feeling is betokened in the words “because now we live if you continue to stand firm in the Lord” (Lit. trans.). Joy in their present standing, comfort in the lowliness of their faith, solicitude as to all that was still before them: — “if you continue to stand firm in the Lord.” Their trials were not yet over, nor was the goal reached: so that while his heart is filled with thankfulness to God, and joy before Him on their account, he is also importunate above measure in prayer, night and day, that he might see their face, and perfect that which was deficient as to their intelligence in the faith.

And how natural and unaffected is all this: the exposure, the laying bare of those deep and tender feelings of the heart that cannot be hid I And how it invests Christianity with an open, frank transparency, a ‘deep and vital reality, an earnest and practical expression, which is too easily lost sight of amidst the withering controversies of terminology, and the profitless disputes of words which loom so largely before the apostle’s mind as the rank growth of later times (cf. 2 Tim. 2:14-23).

1 Thessalonians 3:11

The grammatical structure of this verse is remarkable. With two nominatives the verb “direct” is in the singular. The same construction occurs again in 2 Thessalonians 2:16, 17; but the order of the Persons there is changed. As another has put it, “God the Father and Christ the Lord forming, so to speak, one in the thought of the apostle’s mind, though personally clearly distinguished,” each individually, or both collectively, are rightly addressed in prayer (cf. also 2 Thess. 3:5-16).

1 Thessalonians 3:12

He prays (ver. 11) that his way may be directed to them, if such be the will of God: but (ver. 12) under any circumstances his heart enlarges towards them, and enwraps them in his own spirit, breathes into them, and as it were feeds them with his very breath, in his desire that in any case, whether he sees them or not, “ the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another and toward all men, even as we do toward you.”

Too often we are content to love those that love us, and them not very much. But the word of the gospel teaches us to “love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, bless them that curse you and pray for them which despitefully use you” (Luke 6:27, 28). We see how necessary it was to inculcate such pure and wholesome teachings on these, who were till so recently, poor benighted pagans. We might add, how important for those who teach to themselves practice, lest their guilt become doubly dyed, and their judgment correspondingly severe. “If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.”

The Thessalonian saints had seen a living illustration of this doctrine in the spirit and conduct of those who, at the risk of their own lives, had come to preach it to them, and to practice it amongst them; and who could now use the moral weight of their own behavior amongst them, as being the exponents themselves of what they had taught to others. Happy men! May we seek each one to be animated by and to carry out into practice the same spirit.

1 Thessalonians 3:13

Notice too that he puts love (ver. 12) before holiness (ver. 13). Holiness is not the life of the Christian; but love is. It is a holy love. But it is love, divine love, the very nature of God Himself and of the child of God, that produces holiness: not holiness that produces love. And as this is connected with the responsibility of the Christian it is therefore referred to the presence of “God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.”

It is not a question here of going into the Father’s house for the enjoyment of all the grace connected therewith; but though God is always our Father, still it is here at the time of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, when the consequences of Christian responsibility will be manifested, and it will appear how far we are unblameable before Him. This must not be lost sight of in the remembrance of His grace: and again His grace must not be beclouded in view of this. This will be the holy judgment of God at the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ with His holy ones, when every secret will be searched and every hidden thing laid bare.

But he is careful to say it is all “before God, even our Father.” And with this are closely connected the words of the apostle Peter: “as He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation.... and if ye call Him Father (Lit. trans.) who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man’s work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear” (1 Pet. 1:15-17). We need to distinguish between, but not to divorce these two great principles: the government and the grace of God.

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We must have faith, not only in the form of fixity of doctrine, but also in the shape of constant dependence upon God.

A whole Bible for my staff, a whole Christ for my salvation, and a whole world for my parish.

You can work without praying but it is a bad plan and your work will be mainly barren. But you cannot pray in earnest without working.

Book Study: 1st and 2nd Thessalonians, 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

The first two words of this chapter connect very distinctly what the apostle here says with the subject introduced at the close of the preceding chapter (ver. 13). There he spoke of the holiness of God our Father, before whom the whole responsible issues of the Christian's life will be manifested; here he turns with concern and emphasis to the consideration of the moral condition common to the whole pagan world, out of which the gospel had called these Thessalonian saints. And, seeing that he appeals to them in a manner so forceful and authoritative, it may be well first to give, as nearly as possible, the exact rendering of this passage according to some of the best authorities, so as to be able to better appreciate the earnestness with which the apostle addresses himself to a subject, the importance of which, in its practical bearing, he evidently rates most highly.

"Furthermore, then, brethren, we beg [or beseech] you and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that even as ye have received from us the way how ye ought to walk so as to please God, as indeed ye are walking, that so ye would abound still more.

For ye know what commandments we gave you through [or by] the Lord Jesus.

For this is God's will concerning you, your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication; That each one of you know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor.

[Not in lustfulness of desire, even as the nations who know not God.]

Not overstepping the rights of and wronging his brother in the matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all these things, even as we also told you before and have solemnly testified.

For God has not called us for [i.e. in that condition characteristically, for] uncleanness, but in [i.e. in the very elements of] holiness.

He therefore that in this matter disregards his brother, disregards not man [merely] but God [the God who has also given His holy Spirit to you."

Reflecting on this passage it is not easy to say which is the more to be admired, the delicacy and gentle tact with which the apostle addresses himself to the subject, or the authoritative non-compromising firmness with which he handles it. It was a subject that demanded his utmost skill, and we see at a glance the inspiration of the Spirit in the way he treated it, setting forth in a few short sentences its various aspects in the clearest light, and connecting in the most comprehensive way each issue with the highest Christian principle involved, and so raising it from the plane of mere social morality to the highest level of divine truth and Christian responsibility.

As is well known, the sin fornication (used here with a general and comprehensive meaning) was lightly thought of in the Gentile world. It was regarded indeed as an indifferent thing; while in some cases — true in both ancient and modern times, as in India under British rule to this day — it was even consecrated in the name of religion. It is a common and pernicious vice in the fallen family of man; an offense against the soul; the cause of bitter strifes in the world "teterrima belli causa" (quoted by Alford); a sin in the sight of God, which, when He separated a people to Himself from the nations around, He definitely prohibited under penalty of a curse, by the seventh commandment.

Assuming that there are five commandments in each table of the law, the seventh commandment in the second table stands opposite to the second commandment, against idolatry, in the first, that is, the grievous evil against God, that brought His judgment on the pagan world, stands correlatively placed opposite the great social evil of man against himself and against his neighbor.

The emphasis laid by the Lord on the seventh commandment is especially to be noticed (Matt. 5:27-30), connected as it is with the twice repeated threat of having the "whole body... cast into hell." Again, at the conference at Jerusalem the apostles and elders classed it with idolatry on the one hand, and on the other hand with practices that disown the fact that God is the author and owner of life (Acts 15:19, 20).

We can understand, therefore, how the apostle is moved to use to them in regard of this matter the very strongest language, both in the way of entreaty and command, founded alike on personal affection and on Divine authority, so as to direct their walk in a manner, pleasing to God. Nor was it now for the first time that he addressed them on this subject. He had done so already; but he repeats and enforces his exhortation, because of the need there was to retain their minds and to cultivate them in the new atmosphere of holiness, into which they had been lately called, from out of the impurity of their former pagan life. He had set before them the "how" they were to walk and please God, which, he adds with a touch of refined delicacy and encouragement, they were actually doing; but he desires that they would abound more arid more.

This was the true test of life and spiritual energy; for it is certain that where there is no growth in holiness there must be decay. We live, not in the sufficiency of what we have acquired, but in the energy of acquisition. The vital question is not whereto we have attained, but the goal of pursuit, the energy of attaining (Phil. 3:7-16); when the latter fails, the failure of the former is inevitable. Let us know, let us “follow on to know the Lord” (Hos. 6:3).

But he does not rest his exhortation merely on his own entreaties. He passes from them to the commands he had given them by the Lord Jesus, through whom, as the mediating channel directly from God Himself, the apostle had delivered them to the Thessalonian saints: and so he adds, “For this is God’s will, even your sanctification,” that is, (in the words of another), “It is not merely the fact that God wills so; but it is a matter of God’s will. It is of such a character that God Himself wills it.” And this will of God means, is put in apposition with, “that ye should abstain from fornication,” that each should “possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor... not overstepping the rights of and wronging his brother in the matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all these things, even as we told you before and have solemnly testified.” More stringent language, more pathetic appeal, more authoritative commands, or more solemn warnings could not be well conceived. And the style of the apostle’s address to them recalls to mind the words of the Lord Jesus when He said, “He that heareth you heareth Me, and he that despiseth you despiseth Me, and he that despiseth Me despiseth Him that sent Me” (Luke 10:16, cf. John 13:20).

He then that in this matter disregards his brother, in whom also the Spirit of God dwells, disregards not man merely but God — the God who has not only called us in holiness, but has also given His Holy Spirit, thereby furnishing us with the power of realizing the purpose of that call.

1 Thessalonians 4:4, “his own vessel.” Some understand this to mean his wife; but the weightiest authorities take it to mean “his own body.”

1 Thessalonians 4:9-10

But if the negative abstaining from evil was above the morality of the pagan world, the positive and essential nature of Christian life was beyond the conception of the human mind. The word used for love in the New Testament is not found in the whole range of classical Greek. It is not used by Philo or Josephus. Other words for love are there, but debased as they are by man’s passion, they are not used in the sacred writing.

The words for “philanthropy” and “brotherly love” are common; but the former meant little more than friendly decorum and hospitality; the neighborly feeling that considered the legal rights and welfare of others, and did its duty towards them, where self-interest did not clash; but hardly rose, if at all, to the spontaneity of a love that is above the prescriptions of law: while the latter was confined to the affections between blood relations, members of the same family.

But “love is of God,” and God was not yet revealed. The word is first used in the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament, but even there it could not rise to the true and essential meaning of it as manifested in the “gift of God.” In John 3:16, and 1 John 4:7-12, we have the declaration of the love of God and the grand climax of revelation now made known (2 Cor. 9:15).

Love does not in itself exclude affection, but it is the moral affection of conscious deliberate will, not the natural impulse of immediate feeling, so that it becomes self-denying and compassionate in devotion to its object. What it is, it is not for itself but for others (Cremer S.V.)1

Now the Thessalonian saints were “taught of God to love one another,” not by any code of ethics conceived by man. “It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God” (John 6:45), and the apostle here recognizes this underlying principle of divine teaching, the word of life rendered effectual in them by the operation of the Spirit of God: and love is the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22).

All this is alike beyond the mind of man and his practice. There is a saying of Aristotle’s, “The Deity exists not to love but to be loved.” Therein, with all his acuteness of mind, he betrays his utter ignorance of God. His god is an idol, the creation of his own selfishness; an idol that is natural to us all. And if, indeed, we have learned anything otherwise, it is because we “have been taught of God to love one another.” But how little we have learned it is a matter of sorrowful and humiliating reflection! These Thessalonian saints had learned something of it and were practicing it: and we can well understand how earnestly the apostle exhorts them to abound still more; not content with the progress they had made, but lovingly urging them on to increased energy of attaining.

1 Thessalonians 4:11-12

But besides that he exhorts them to seek earnestly to be quiet, and to mind their own affairs, and to work with their hands at their ordinary calling, so that they should have need of nothing from any man, and thus present a seemly deportment and becoming demeanor “towards them that are without,” who were not Christians, and by the honest pursuit of daily toil maintain themselves in the conscious sense and the avowed testimony of honorable independence.

The appointed lot of man since Genesis 3:19 has been “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread”; and the loyal acceptance of this judgment is alone his right and proper attitude, wherein he can look for and receive at the hands of God the mercy needed for his daily toil. But fallen man is a thief and a robber. Barabbas is his masterpiece. And the elemental propensity of his evil nature is to acquire, without honest labor in the fear of God, either by plunder or by begging. If he has power he will practice the former; if he has not, he will resort to the latter.

This was a subject of frequent admonition on the part of the apostle, as the spirit and practice of the world was ever before his eyes. For himself he set the example of an honorable independence, and he enforced it on others. It is inconceivable that a system of Christian ethics could be divinely set up in which it was ignored: and so he says to the elders of Ephesus with great emphasis, “Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me.

“I have sheaved you all things, how that so laboring ye ought to support [come to the aid of] the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:34-35).

And in very similar words he wrote to them afterward, “Let him that stole steal no more; but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing that is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth” (Eph. 4:28).

It seems plain that this exhortation, necessary in a general way everywhere, was particularly so at Thessalonica, where we might gather from verse 11 That the Assembly was mostly composed of the class of persons thus laboring (Alford); for by comparing 2 Thessalonians 3:6-12, we learn that he was obliged to pass from a loving exhortation as to this practice to a stern and authoritative “command... in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” to withdraw from every brother walking disorderly and not according to the instruction here given.

Another important lesson is herein set forth, how that the topmost stone of the fabric reared high to the glory of God is based on the establishment of governmental principles connected with the most elementary factors of daily life. It is in vain that we pretend to the former if we ignore the latter.

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Undiscovered Wealth

A poor farmer owned a piece of land, hard and rocky, from which only at the price of severest toil was he able to support his family. He died and bequeathed the farm to his eldest son. By an accident the son discovered traces of gold on the land, which, being explored, was found to contain mineral wealth of immense value. The father had precisely the same property that the son now possessed, but while the one died a poor man, the other attained to great wealth.

It is even so with Christians. All have received the same wonderful gifts of the grace of God, but some have never discovered their riches. For instance, think of the passage, “What know ye not that your bodies are the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you which ye have of God and ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price” (1 Cor. 6:19-20). How many Christians are alive to this great truth? The realization of it makes all the difference between spiritual poverty and prosperity.

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“He that gathereth not with Me scattereth.” There may be gathering, as we see, in looking round at what is called the church; but if it is not with Christ, the whole thing, vast as it is, is but scattering. One may be very ignorant about Christ, but it must be Himself around whom we gather.

Christ did not come to be occupied with the ten thousand vanities filling the hearts and minds of poor sinners down here; but He came from His Father’s bosom, to tell out all His Father’s love, that He might occupy their hearts with the joys of the Father’s presence. “If thou knewest” was ever on His lips.

“Thy will be done” is the keynote to which every prayer must be tuned.

Book Study: 1st and 2nd Thessalonians, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Edward Cross

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

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

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

15. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

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

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

18. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

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The subject of this section is “concerning them that are fallen asleep;” the object in view “so shall we ever be with the Lord;” while the way of its accomplishment is set forth in the intervening verses.

It is not uncommonly thought that the occasion of this unfolding was the excited and perverted notions that the Thessalonian saints had of the coming of the Lord, which had prevented their following in a quiet and sober manner the ordinary avocations of life. But it is not so stated by the apostle, nor does it seem necessary to seek for any other motive for him so writing to them, than the very natural and needful desire to instruct these young converts in so fundamental and important a subject of Christian truth.

It requires no great research to see, nor spiritual intelligence to understand, why the kingdom and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ loomed so largely before the minds of the first preachers of the gospel. In fact we have already seen how constantly and in different aspects the apostle dwells upon it in this epistle: and as before he speaks of living saints in connection with it, so here he shows its relation to those who were “asleep through Jesus,” and the way in which their connection with it would be brought about.

It is common in both Christian and pagan writings to use the word “sleep” as a euphemism for death. As a figure, while involving the idea of continued existence, it suggests repose and abstraction from the toil and business of life. It is of frequent use in Scripture (compare Isa. 11:2;

Acts 7:60; 13:36; 1 Cor. 11:30). In this sense of severance from the affairs of this world without any superadded thought, it is also common in pagan writings. Thus Catullen, quoted by Alford, says, “Suns may set and rise again; but when the shadows fall on our brief light, we’re doomed to the long sleep of one eternal night.” No conclusion can then be drawn from this word as though it meant the sleep of the soul in an unconscious state pending its resurrection at a future day. Not only is the general use of the word contrary to such an idea, but the language of the apostle, when he expresses his fervent desire “to depart and be with Christ, which is far better,” forbids any such conclusion. Moreover, it is never said, “the soul sleeps.” It is people who sleep, not their souls.

He bids them “not to sorrow as the rest who have no hope.” In this category are included both the unbelieving Jew and the pagan world. As to the latter, the future was black darkness to them; a darkness whose “authority” was incontestable, (compare Col. 1:13, Eph. 4:18, Acts 26:18.) Of this their own writings bear witness; as one of the greatest of their poets sorrowfully expresses it, “once dead there is no resurrection” (Aeschylin). The greatest power within their cognizance was the power of death. The greater power of God in resurrection that annuls him that has the power of death, i.e., the devil, and delivers those “who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Heb. 2:14), was not known to them. Nor was the Jew at best as yet clear on this subject. Many amongst them, and they a very influential party, “say there is no resurrection, neither angel nor spirit” (Acts 23:8; Luke 20:27); “they know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God” (Matt. 22:29); and for the rest, what they had was at best but a glimmer of the coming light. True, it was to be found in their Scriptures, as the first rays of the early dawn, if they only read them aright; but as yet they saw as through a glass dimly, and it could not be otherwise, seeing that life and incorruptibility are “brought to light by the gospel,” and apart from the death and the resurrection of Christ, the key of knowledge is not available to unlock the great mystery: even of the disciples themselves it is written, “as yet they knew not the Scripture, that He must rise again from among the dead” (John 20:9).

He bids them “not sorrow even as the rest.” It is not that they were not to sorrow so much as the rest, They were not to sorrow in that way at all. It is not a question of the sorrow they might have in a natural way for their own loss in losing from this present scene their relatives or friends; but of sorrow on behalf of those that slept, and of the loss they thought that these would sustain in not participating in the glory of the day of the coming of the Lord. In point of fact they would lose nothing, for, as he goes on to show, the portion of all the saints, the dead as well as the living, is to “be forever with the Lord.” There was, therefore, no occasion for sorrow on that account.

1 Thessalonians 4:14

The reason he gives them for this assurance is of vast moment, based as it is on the complete victory of Jesus over death and the grave. “For if Jesus died out of this scene and rose anew into [the glory of] another,” for such is the implied meaning in full of the words used here, then surely there is no remaining hindrance why God should not lead, or bring in association with Jesus and in the participation of His glory, in whatever place or form it may be revealed, those who have been laid on sleep through His instrumentality. That they had so fallen asleep was assuredly no crime for which they should be excluded from what otherwise would have been their rightly hoped for privilege; and they were not so to regard it in any sense.

1 Thessalonians 4:15

Now this was in consonance with a direct word or revelation of the Lord to the apostle. It had never been revealed before—not in the Old Testament nor even during the lifetime of the Lord on earth. He had told His disciples, “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now” (John 16:12). Events had not yet proceeded far enough to enable them to take in intelligently what He had yet to tell them. “To everything there is a season and a time to every purpose under heaven” (Eccl. 3:1), and the ways of God in all departments of His government evidence alike His wisdom and that patience is a sign of power. In vain you would look in earlier times for the truth the apostle brings before us here. Now was the occasion and the necessity for its revelation. Now was the sure foundation laid in the death and resurrection of Jesus, on which it could be made known; and now for the first time, and henceforth, we are assured on this infallible testimony, that when that time comes the living saints shall have no precedence over the saints who are asleep, as regards their coming into the presence of the Lord to share the glories of His advent.

1 Thessalonians 4:16

The reason for this he now proceeds to give. “Because the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven...” Mark the emphasis on “Himself.” He will not send another, He will come Himself. This day is a day for which He has long waited. This is the day of His deep joy, and of that joy increased by sharing the glory of it with His own redeemed ones. O glorious day! Once before He said, “with desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer” (Luke 22:15). He had long waited for that day. It was the settlement of the great question of good and evil brought to an issue at the cross; here it is the result in glory, when He who had been the suffering Victim was now “to see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied.” For this day He had long waited. He shall descend in great and glorious circumstance, with an assembling shout, with archangels’ voice commanding the angelic hosts, and with trump of God—mark the crescendo, “He shall descend from heaven.” These words are all without the article, and as such they present the thought characteristically before the mind with correspondingly greater force, rather than concretely before the eye. “From heaven”: two propositions in Greek are translated “from” the one (apo) having reference merely to the place locally “from which”; the other (ek) connecting the movement with the character of the place. The former is the prep used here. He comes “from heaven.” That is the place of His power. From thence He comes. It is no question here of His advent being heavenly in its character; simply, He comes “from heaven.”

This is the first act in the drama. The second follows. “And the dead in Christ shall rise first.” While the application here is to the Christian dead, from 1 Corinthians 15:51-57, we learn that the circumstances include all the holy dead up to that time, who, with others also in their several spheres, are partakers of the first resurrection, in which general expression many classes are included, (compare Rev. 20:1-4). But the object of the apostle here is not to outline these various classes, but to instruct the Thessalonian saints as to the difficulties that were particularly exercising them at the time.

Next follows the third act: then we, the living who remain, shall be caught up, or raptured in clouds, as in triumph, together with them to go to meet the coming Lord in air, that is, the air; and thus they and we united shall be ever with the Lord. Other things connected with the coming of the Lord are not here under consideration. They must be looked for elsewhere. The Father’s house, the heavenly calling of the Church, the millennial reign of Christ, the administration of the Kingdom, and other subjects of vast and commanding-interest are to be found in the Scriptures that treat of them. What is set before us in this scripture is the immediate hope of the Christian, as the first act in the

accomplishment of all that is to be brought about for the saints through the redemption power of Christ in His victory over death and the grave. “We shall be always with the Lord.” That is all that is said here. It is all that need be said.

The event is frequently called “The Secret Rapture” as being contrasted with those events that will usher in publicly the advent of the Lord in the power and glory of His kingdom; and in the record of it as here given it is connected solely with the grace that associates the saints who have part in it with the Lord Himself, and as we would gather from John 14:1-2, with all the joy of the Father’s house. No question of responsibility is here referred to, whether in reference to the saints, Romans 14; 2 Corinthians 5; or the judgment of the world, Acts 17:31; “the quick or the dead,” 2 Timothy 4:1; and therefore we are warranted to conclude, that it must necessarily take place before these events that publicly introduce the reign of Christ as set forth in other Scriptures.

If we look for a figure of it in the Old Testament, it would seem to be represented by the translation of Enoch before the flood; while Noah and his family represent the remnant of the nations, including Israel, who are brought through the flood, i.e., the judgments that will close up the present age and prepare for the introduction of the age to come, (cf. Jer. 25:15-38; 30:7). Meanwhile “we shall be ever with the Lord,” whether in the Father’s house above, or in the glory of the Kingdom. There is therefore in respect of those who are put asleep by Jesus, no ground for grieving, but contrariwise, the apostle closes up this section by saying, “wherefore comfort one another with these words.”

Book Study: 1st and 2nd Thessalonians, 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Edward Cross

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

1. But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you.

2. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.

3. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.

4. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.

5. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.

6. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.

7. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night.

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

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

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

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

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Having already spoken of the coming of the Lord in connection with the saints, the apostle now speaks of it in that aspect which has to do with the world. This is known as “the day of the Lord.” The expression occurs for the first time in Isa. 2:12, and from thence onwards through the prophets it is frequently found. The idea involved in it may be gathered from 1 Corinthians 4:3, (N.T.), where we read, “For me it is the very smallest matter that I be examined of you or of man’s day. Nor do I even examine myself... but He that examines me is the Lord... So that do not judge anything before the time, until the Lord shall come...” Man has his day today, as the Lord says: “This is your hour and the power of darkness” (Luke 22:53). But His day is coming, when they shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the power of God (ver. 69; Matt. 26:64).

The events and the character of “the day of the Lord” are the burden of many Scriptures. A few passages from among them will set before us the principal features of it.

“For the day of the Lord of Hosts shall be upon everyone that is proud and lofty, and upon everyone that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low” (Isa. 2:12).

“And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low; and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day” (ver. 17).

“In that day the Lord will take away the bravery of their tinkling ornaments... instead of sweet smell there shall be stink.... burning instead of beauty. Thy men shall fall by the sword; and thy mighty in the war” (Isa. 3:18-25).

“In that day shall the branch of the Lord be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel” (Isa. 4:2).

“Alas, for the day! for the day of the Lord is at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come” (Joel 1:15).

“They shall enter in at the windows like a thief” (Joel 2:9).

“For the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; and who can abide it?’ (Joel 2:11).

“Woe unto you that desire the day of the Lord! To what end is it for you? The day of the Lord is darkness and not light... even very dark and no brightness in it” (Amos 5:18-20).

These passages suffice to show clearly what the character of “the day of the Lord” is in judgment on the ungodly: while also it brings the joy of salvation to the godly remnant of Israel.

1 Thessalonians 5:1-3

“But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren,” the apostle writes, “ye have no need that ye should be written to, for ye know perfectly well yourselves, that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief by night” (JND). This is the one and only point in connection with it on which he insists; the certainty and sudden stealth of its coming. As to “the times and seasons” he says nothing.

Regarding the words themselves, “time” is the more general and indefinite period: “season” is a shorter time of the same, cut off. Plato calls time, “the movable image of eternity.” Season — kairos, from keiro, to cut — is a portion of time cut off; as we speak of “the four seasons of the year;” “a convenient season;” hence also the expression, “the nick of time.”

In Acts 1:7 (JND), when the disciples inquired of the Lord, “Wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” He replied, “It is not yours to know times or seasons, which the Father hath placed in His own authority.”

This it was not given them to know. But the great prophetic fact of “the day of the Lord” was already revealed; and so much at least they knew, as their question shows. But further information as to the “times and seasons” was reserved from them.

This fact is still more emphasized in Mark 13:32, where we read, “of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven; neither the Son, but the Father.” In Mark’s Gospel the Lord is before us in His mediatorial servant character; and the essence of this is to hold all in subjection to the Father. Accordingly He does not here assume the knowledge of these things, occupied as He is with the humbler role of obedient service. Compare also Revelation 1:1, where it is said of Him “The Revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave to Him.” That He had all divine knowledge is equally true, in the sphere in which it belonged to Him by divine right, but everything in its proper place. To our feeble minds and narrow intelligence there are many things “hard to be understood;” but we must not seek to evade the consequences of His humanity because we believe in the reality of His Deity. What we understand, we believe because we understand it — what is written, we believe because it is the Word of God.

How unbecoming, then, is the presumption that would peer into those things, which for wise purposes, are kept secret: and how disturbing to the health of the soul and enervating for true service, the restless inquisitiveness that would misspend its energies in prying into hidden mysteries and trying to forecast the time, instead of “redeeming” it (Eph. 5:16) in seizing the opportunity to serve the Lord. There is great fascination for some minds in this kind of imaginative occupation; but Christianity is not a fascination, but a life of humble obedience and submission to the will of God. Besides, what judges could we be of “the times and seasons”? We are too short-lived and ignorant to know when, after the lapse of unknown ages from the first creation of the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1), the due time came for the Spirit of God to move in the chaos that succeeded and renew the face of the world (Gen. 1:2).

Neither was it for the wisest of men to fix the date, or judge from passing events, when “the fullness of the time” should come, when God would send forth His Son, incarnate, to work the great redeeming work of grace (Gal. 4:4; Rom. 5:6).

Neither can we today foretell from the trend of circumstances, according to our judgment, nor forecast from Scripture that does not reveal it, when the time is fixed for the Lord to gather His saints to Himself; nor when He is to return in the power and glory of the kingdom in which He will judge the world in righteousness. “The times and seasons” are not for us to know, and we cannot divine them. The Thessalonian saints knew that “the day of the Lord so comes as a thief by night” with the certainty of sudden destruction. That was the horizon of their knowledge with regard to it. This much they knew “perfectly”: but they knew no more, nor does the apostle furnish them with further knowledge as to it. Certain events were to take place, spoken of in the second epistle to the Thessalonians, prior to the revelation of the man of sin “in his own time” (2 Thess. 2:6), but they are referred to, not to satisfy curiosity, but to encourage the saints to “stand firm, and hold fast, the instructions” which they had been already taught (2 Thess. 2:15, N.T.).

Unlike the “secret rapture” which needed a special revelation (1 Thess. 4:13-17), it was already a matter of open knowledge that “the day of the Lord” is coming swiftly, stealthily, and certainly as a thief by night, on the world of the ungodly. The expression itself we have in Joel 2:9, and it is repeated in Matthew 24:43, and so when they say ‘peace and safety,’ as they said of old in Ezekiel 13:10, then swift destruction shall surprise them, as the labor pang suddenly seizes a woman with child, and they shall by no means escape from it (ver. 3).

That is what the apostle insists on. It is the one and only point that he adduces; and in this he shows the contrast between the saints and the world, as he passes from “we” and “ye” to “they.” Our hope-figured by Enoch, who “was not, for God took him” (Gen. 5:24), before the flood of Noah’s day-is to be caught up to be with the Lord before the coming judgments are poured out on the world. The saints of this present period will be saved from that time of trial. “Because thou hast kept the word of My patience I also will keep thee out of the hour of trial which is about to come upon the whole habitable world to try them that dwell upon the earth” (Rev. 3:10 JND). The remnant of Israel will be saved through it. “Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob’s trouble; but he shall be saved out of it” (Jer. 30:7).

“Times and seasons” then, as connected with the Lord’s second coming, refer to this world and the judgment of the coming age. The proper portion of the Church is outside of all ages, compare 1 Corinthians 2:7; Ephesians 3:9-11: outside the course of this world altogether, its judgment and its end.

1 Thessalonians 5:4-11

“But ye brethren are not in darkness, that the day should overtake you as a thief: for all ye are sons of light and sons of day; we are not of night nor of darkness. So then do not let us sleep as the rest do [who are not Christians], but let us watch and be sober”; that is, not merely keep awake, but have all our faculties alive in service and in faith: with the organs of life and energy protected with the breastplate of faith and love, and the head covered with the sustaining hope of salvation, the full fruit of the grace of God, through the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In this way the apostle reverts again to the trinity of Christian graces, faith, hope, and love, as before in Chapter 1:3, compare also 1 Corinthians 8. They were the witness of the effectual power of the Gospel in the saints at Thessalonica; and he here urges them to continue in the same spirit in which they were then moving; for wrath, the wrath of that coming day, is not our portion from God, but the obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether watching or sleeping, we may live together with Him. This is our hope: this is our eternal portion; and this paragraph may well end, as it does, thus: “wherefore encourage one another, and build up each one the other, even as also ye do.”

How interesting and instructive this is; but alas! how little carried out. Were it done so in the warmth of freshness and simplicity, what a brightening up of souls there would be all round, as each one encouraged the other in the hope of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of our living “together with Him.”

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“One of the greatest blessings that can come to God’s people is for them to see God’s saving grace and power in their midst. It softens the crotchety ones, sanctifies the worldly ones, and strengthens the weak ones, while it stimulates all to more prayerful and earnest fellowship in the word of the Lord.”

Book Study: 1st and 2nd Thessalonians, 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28

Edward Cross

1 Thessalonians 5:12-28

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

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

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

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

16. Rejoice evermore.

17. Pray without ceasing.

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

19. Quench not the Spirit.

20. Despise not prophesyings.

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

22. Abstain from all appearance of evil.

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

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

25. Brethren, pray for us.

26. Greet all the brethren with an holy kiss.

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

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

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In this concluding section of the epistle, the apostle turns more directly to what is purely hortatory, as the previous part is rather the expression of his own feelings and personal affection towards them. It is marked by the same exuberance of style in which the outflowings of his spirit are poured forth: and in the structure of it the subject seems to fall naturally before us into three parts: he beseeches them; he exhorts them; and he prays for them.

If we make a distinction between the terms, the word “beseech” (ver. 12) means to beg in a tender and delicate way, so as to gain thereby the request desired; while “exhort” (ver. 14) carries with it the idea of admonition, encouragement, comfort, as using persuasion, and so gaining the will.

1 Thessalonians 5:12

First, he beseeches them with regard to those who are over them in the Lord, that they should recognize them with the respect which is their due, and esteem them “hyper-highly,” if one might be permitted so to render as closely as possible the word, in love for their works’ sake, and to be at peace among themselves.

It is very interesting to see already rising up among these young converts those who took the oversight and guidance amongst them. They were in much need of such; and in the Lord's tender care for His people, such were provided for them by Him. No doubt these young teachers had much to learn themselves. Their experience and their knowledge were but scanty: but they put their hands, as best they could, to the need before them, and they were blessed in the deed.

It is useless to wait for perfection before you do what lies before you to be done. If your implements are not perfect, make the best use of what you have. He who waits to do until he finds perfection wherewith to do it, will never do at all. But he who does what he can do, and does it to the Lord, will do as she did of whom it is written, "She hath done what she could.... Verily, I say unto you, wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done [mark well the word "this also," as an accompaniment of the very gospel itself] shall be spoken of for a memorial of her" (Mark 14:8, 9).

But, in a community freshly brought out from paganism, it is easy to understand how needful such an exhortation as this would be, where all the elements of ignorance and pride, independency and self-will, a vain impatience of restraint and such like things, were as yet only held in check, for the most part unconsciously, by the fresh force of first love, and had not yet been measured experimentally by them in their essential opposition to the kingdom of God. All this exercise will come in due course; it must do so; but meanwhile the apostle beseeches them in the most delicate and winning way to submit themselves in all love to the direction of this new regime, under which they had already found such joy and blessing: and to be at peace among themselves.

How clearly he diagnosed, so to speak, the constitutional taint that needed such an exhortation; even as Joseph said to his brethren of old, "See that ye fall not out by the way" (Gen. 45:24). How soon this taint was manifested amongst them. Alas! how soon! A taint that for well-nigh 2,000 years has developed itself into all the hideousness that has disfigured the erst fair face of the Church of God on earth.

1 Thessalonians 5:14-22

He now turns to their conduct in respect of those (ver. 14) who would naturally test the reality of the grace that was in them. There is nothing strange in this testing. If we have received grace, it is that we may show its virtue. Of what value is it, if it be not thus proved?

When the disciples came down from the mount of transfiguration, where, in the company of Moses and Elias, they had seen the glory of the Lord in the splendor of that scene, they were at once confronted with the circumstances of another scene, which put to the test how much available power they had brought with them from the glory of the scene above. Alas! They quickly showed how out of touch they were, subjectively, with all that had so lately passed before their eyes. The glory of the kingdom had been before them, and they, had been impressed by the sense of it when they said, "Lord it is good for us to be here" (Matt. 17:4); but they were not yet able to translate into practical effect the power of it in common life.

If we have received grace, it is that it should control us in the various circumstances which we are bound to meet in a world of temptation such as this. How manifold the trials are! But grace is given us that we should conduct ourselves in a becoming and Christian manner in the midst of all, and thus, as it is written, "show forth the virtues [margin] of Him who hath called us out of darkness into His marvelous light " (1 Pet. 2:9). This section falls naturally into two parts: 1St, their conduct towards others: 2nd, their own state within. In each part there are seven injunctions; and in view of the general structure of the Epistle on which we have before remarked, it is quite possible that this double handful of fullness is not accidental but of design.

1. "Warn them that are unruly,"

2. "Comfort the feebleminded,"

3. "Support the weak,"

4. "Be patient toward all men."

5. "See that none render evil for evil unto any man;"

6. "But ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves"

7. "And to all men."

Little need be said as to these things in detail. Let us rather see to it that we ponder them in the presence of God; and that we steadfastly set ourselves to practice them before men.

Then he adds, as regards their personal state:

1. "Rejoice evermore." There are those — pessimists, men of moody minds — who dwell in the contemplation of evil, where sunlight seldom shines to brighten up the soul. Such men would not allow themselves to rejoice; or, if for a brief moment a gleam of brighter things flits across the sky, they quickly correct themselves lest they should presume too much on the "grace wherein we stand." They forget the injunction "Rejoice evermore."

2. "Pray without ceasing." How needful this is for those who are young in the faith, just starting on their Christian course! Those who are older will know its value better.

3. "In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" (comp. Phil. 4:6). We are ready enough to give thanks while things are prosperous according to our notions of prosperity. It is the province of faith to give thanks always. Let those who are in great difficulty only try its virtue.

4. "Quench not the Spirit." In Eph. 4:30 we read, "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God," that is, by the practice or allowance of evil contrary to His holy nature. Here it is not the question of corrupt conduct which "grieves," but as a fire which might be "quenched," whether in ourselves or others, by refusing to follow His promptings in simplicity and in faith.

5. “Despise not prophesyings.” That which is of the Spirit is of spiritual value, wherever it appears. Despise it not.

6. “Prove all things; fold fast the right” (New Trans). The existence of evil — which they were to test — need be no hindrance to their progress, but the reverse. The sifting of it would teach them to discriminate between right and wrong: would cast them on the truth and the power of it; and they would thereby learn to “have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Heb. 5:14). In result they would learn to hold fast the right.

7. — Abstain from every form of evil (New Trans.) This closes up in a general injunction the sum of all that he inculcates. And how suitable to the circumstances of those who had just been called out of the darkness of their former state into the light of the gospel, to “serve the living and true God; and to wait for His Son from heaven.” How suitable it remains still for us in our day, who are called by the same grace and in the same hope.

1 Thessalonians 5:23

His heart now turns to God Himself — the God of peace — who alone, above and beyond the best efforts of feeble man, could effectuate these desires, and make good and real and complete in them this truly divine work of sanctification, and preserve them blameless, their whole spirit and soul and body in reference to, or at, the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is to be noticed that he does not say, “sanctify you perfectly,” as though they were already partly sanctified, and they had to progress in it to perfection; but “sanctify you wholly,” i.e., entirely, in all your parts, spirit, soul, and body, and that in these you be preserved blameless to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The three parts, spirit, soul and body, constitute the entire man. The spirit is the superior and active part that properly moves and governs the rest. Of it is predicated both mind and will; and upon it the Holy Spirit acts in the highest functions of spiritual life.

The soul is the inferior animal part. It is the seat of the affections and passions, and is the more passive part normally acted on and governed by the spirit which is above it.

The body is the material part which serves as the instrument for the expression of the immaterial part — the vehicle for the carrying out of the will. The three parts form the entire man.

The movements of the soul and of the spirit are necessarily much involved, and they are not always easily distinguishable. The Word of God, “sharper than any two-edged sword,” unerringly divides between them (Heb. 4:12).

1 Thessalonians 5:24-28

And with these mighty desires on their behalf filling his soul, and foreseeing too, as doubtless he did, all the dangers that lay exposed to his prophetic vision, as he foretold to the elders of Ephesus (Acts 20:29, 30), yet with undaunted faith he adds without qualification or limitation, “Faithful is He who calls you, who will also perform it” (New Trans.).

Ver. 25. But if the apostle was a strong man, he was also a dependent one: ultimately dependent on God, mediately dependent on the prayers of the saints, as he also devoted himself in prayer for them. Were there more prayer, mutual prayer one for the other, there would be less trouble amongst the saints.

Ver. 26. The holy kiss was the greeting of love.

Ver. 27. Is there not here a foreboding, realized actually later on (cf. 2 Thess. 2:2, 3), of the evil way in which his teaching would be subverted, either by suppressing what he had written, or by misrepresenting it, or by false letters purporting to be his, misleading the saints and disturbing their minds as to what he had really taught? Hence he solemnly adjures them “by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren.”

Ver. 28. The epistle ends with grace, “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ”: and all will end in glory. Amen.

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