

Study Notes For I Thessalonians

(Chapter Five)

I Thessalonians 5:1-3 - After clarifications about the return of our Lord (I Thessalonians 4:13-18), this was written to the church of the Thessalonians: *“But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. 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”* (I Thessalonians 5:1-3).

In connection to the previous chapter, the “times” and the “seasons” is relative to Christ returning. They, like we are today, were in the last days (Hebrews 1:1-2). Like them then, we do not know when that day will be. In fact, Jesus said: *“Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away. But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father”* (Mark 13:31-32). Apparently, they understood this as they did not have a need for it being written.

The saints in Thessalonica knew “perfectly” that the Lord was going to come as a thief in the night. The Greek term “ἀκριβῶς” that is translated “perfectly” is defined like this: “exactly, accurately, diligently” (Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon; Strong’s # 199). In other passages of Scripture we find this term translated in the KJV as: “diligently” (Matthew 2:8 and Acts 18:25), “perfect” (Luke 1:3), and “circumspectly” (Ephesians 5:15). So, this information is not new to them. It is not clarification as was given in the previous chapter.

They get it. Teaching someone about something they already get has multiple reasons behind it. For one, it is good to be reminded of things we know (II Peter 1:12-13 and II Peter 3:1-2). Secondly, teaching is also about building upon knowledge (Hebrews 6:1-3). What we will see as this context continues is that they are going to be taught from what they already know to be prepared for Christ returning (I Thessalonians 5:6ff.). Knowing Jesus is surely coming back at an unknown time and being ready for Him to come back are two different subjects, even though they are certainly closely related.

As they knew and we who are in Christ should know, the return of Christ is likened to a thief coming in the night. Notice what Jesus said to His disciples: *“But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. Then shall two*

be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh. Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods. But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; And shall begin to smite his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 24:37-51).

Like Jesus said, there will be those when He returns that think they are safe when they are not safe at all. By implication, those under discussion as being unprepared are those that will be damned. That matters. Christians are to live prepared for the return of Christ as we will discuss more in a future article about things written later in this context. The unbelievers however, they have a surprise coming when Jesus returns. It is an unfortunate and sad truth. In the second epistle to the saints in Thessalonica, this was written: *“So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure: Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer: Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day” (II Thessalonians 1:4-10).*

Travail upon a woman with child should be an obvious illustration. It is about a woman in childbirth and the pain associated with childbirth. This illustration is used throughout the Scriptures in various contexts (Psalms 48:6, Isaiah 21:1-3, Jeremiah 4:27-31, Jeremiah 6:16-24, Hosea 13:9-13, etc.). The illustration is to bring upon the understanding of “sudden.” Then, there is the fact that the sudden destruction will be inescapable. There is no person that will be able to escape the judgment of our Lord (Romans 2:1-3). That is why one must give the more earnest heed to the hearing and obeying of the truth (Hebrews 2:1-4). These thought provoking truths need to be on all

of our minds. As we will study going forward, be ready always and don't lose the urgency for obedience (Matthew 25:1-13).

I Thessalonians 5:4-7 - In light of the return of our Lord and the day of sudden destruction (I Thessalonians 4:13-5:3), this was written to the saints in Thessalonica: *"But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night"* (I Thessalonians 5:4-7).

In one sense, the saints in Thessalonica were not in darkness relative to their relationship with our Lord (Acts 26:18-20 and Ephesians 5:1-11). The saints in Colosse were told: *"Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins"* (Colossians 1:12-14). In this regard, one cannot walk in darkness and claim to have a relationship with the Lord (II Corinthians 6:14-7:1 and I John 1:1-7). What is discussed here is not just about the relationship with Christ in the light. This is about darkness in the sense of ignorance or lack of proper knowledge one obtains through the Gospel (II Corinthians 4:1-6).

Let's address the fact that knowledge and action in regard to the subjects at hand are tied together. During the first century saints were taught about a day of judgment that was coming upon Jerusalem (Matthew 23:37-24:34). They could see that day coming as the aforementioned reference shows and other Scriptures speak to (Hebrews 10:23-25, James 5:8, and I Peter 4:7; cf. Luke 21:20-24). With this in mind, this was written to the saints in Rome: *"The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof"* (Romans 13:12-14).

As the saints in Rome, the saints in Thessalonica were not in darkness. They both had the relationship in Christ and the revelation at that time necessary to prepare for a coming judgment. Awareness leaves one capable of being ready (Ephesians 1:17-18). Enlightenment comes from the word of God (Psalms 19:7-11). Let's think more on that.

The Psalmist wrote: *"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path... The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple"* (Psalms 119:105; 119:130). So, as Christians were and are even more enlightened (Ephesians

3:1-11), they and we are not in the dark regarding spiritual matters. To the Jews Jesus said: *“Then Jesus said unto them, Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth”* (John 12:35). Later in that context, He went on to say: *“I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness”* (John 12:46).

Now, we must also address that Christians who have the revelation of God must apply that knowledge as to not be in darkness. The enlightened saints in Ephesus were told: *“But all things that are reprov’d are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light. Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is”* (Ephesians 5:13-17).

Knowledge is then tied to being watchful and sober. To watch for the Lord is easy to understand when we are looking forward to His coming (Matthew 24:42). We are to watch because we do not know when He is returning (Matthew 25:13). In general, even unrelated to the coming of our Lord, Christians are to be on watch (I Corinthians 16:13 and Revelation 3:2-3). Peter used that same Greek word (γρηγορεύω; Strong’s # 1127) and it is translated in the KJV as *“be vigilant”* (I Peter 5:8). To be sober is also a clear principle that faithful Christians understand our Lord expects of us (Romans 12:3, Titus 2:1-12, and I Peter 1:13). What that means is that we are: “1) to be sober, to be calm and collected in spirit; 2) to be temperate, dispassionate, circumspect” (Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon; Strong’s # 3525).

Think about how the Thessalonians were then instructed regarding sobriety with the illustrations of sleep and drunkenness. In general, nighttime is historically a time of sleep (Genesis 28:10-11). When a person is asleep, they are not aware. That person is not observing their surroundings. Being asleep leaves us vulnerable. Thieves tend to break into homes in the night because of the assumption that those in that home are asleep; unaware of what is going on. Thus, this illustration is used to show that Jesus comes at an unknown time when people are not in a state of awareness (II Peter 3:10).

Drunkenness affects the ability for one to watch and be sober (Psalms 107:27 and Isaiah 19:14). A drunken man is overcome by wine (Jeremiah 23:9). Drunkards, whether literal or figurative, are not awake in the sense of awareness (Joel 1:5). The figure of the night, being a time not only of rest but also of times wherein people would and do get drunk, is not good for Christians past or present. We are disadvantaged by that which obscures our vision. Avoid all such things. Be alert and able to see clearly.

I Thessalonians 5:8-11 - *"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. For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him. Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do"* (I Thessalonians 5:8-11).

We concluded our last study with the importance of not being a people of the night wherein we are vulnerable due to unawareness. This study draws the Thessalonians back to the fact that they were children of the day (I Thessalonians 5:5) with all that such means (I John 1:5-2:11). Then, again, the emphasis of being sober is reiterated. Being aware is certainly a point that cannot be stressed enough (I Peter 5:8-9). However, this context is not just repeating sobriety in connection to the Day of Judgment. We will come back to considering the Judgment Day, but briefly the battlefield is brought into the context.

What is the point of armor? Whether we are talking about carnal or spiritual warfare, armor is for protection. One wears armor because there is a battle. Faithful Christians are in a battle (II Corinthians 10:3-4, I Timothy 1:18, I Timothy 6:12, II Timothy 2:1-4, and II Timothy 4:6-8). Note this text that should be familiar to us: *"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God"* (Ephesians 6:10-17).

The armor pieces mentioned in what we are studying are faith, love, and hope. That is fitting (I Corinthians 13:13). Christians walk by faith (II Corinthians 5:7). The significance of love is clear as love [charity] is the greatest. Hope however, is really the contextual focal point in looking forward to Christ's return. Hope is significant for us in overcoming all we face in Christ (I Peter 1:3-9 and I John 3:1-3). The Hebrew writer penned words wherein hope was presented as an anchor of the soul (Hebrews 6:19). When Paul wrote to the saints in Rome he pointed out that salvation is found in hope of things to come (Romans 8:24-25).

The hope of salvation is so important for Christians because the alternative to salvation is facing the wrath of God that will come upon those who are disobedient

(Colossians 3:6). Faithful Christians can fight the fight of faith without this fear. The hope we have is because of Jesus Christ. Do you remember what was written concerning this earlier in this letter? Notice: *“And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come”* (I Thessalonians 1:10).

Even though I have already indicated this hope is for the faithful in Christ, I think it best to allow the Scriptures to present that fact more clearly. Those who have been in Christ, but then choose to be sinners, do not have this hope. Notice: *“For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”* (Hebrews 10:26-31).

The faithful do not have to fear the coming day of wrath because Jesus died for us (I Peter 3:18). We cannot confuse the language of this though. Jesus did not just die for some predetermined group of people as some falsely teach (Matthew 28:16-20, Luke 24:44-49, John 1:29, John 4:42, I Timothy 2:1-6, Titus 2:11-14, and I John 4:14). What separates those in Thessalonica and those faithful today from all others is our obedience to Christ and thus He is our source of salvation (Hebrews 5:8-9 and II Thessalonians 1:7-9). Therefore, whether the faithful are alive or dead at His return in the Judgment Day; we shall be together with Him. This is what was already taught in this epistle and is now being repeated (I Thessalonians 4:13-17).

What is also being repeated is that this information can be used to comfort one another (I Thessalonians 4:18). In addition to comforting one another, they were also instructed to edify one another. Each brother and sister in Christ then and now are expected to edify [spiritually build up] one another (Ephesians 4:16, Ephesians 4:29, I Timothy 1:4, and Jude 1:20). Like we have seen with other things in this letter, it is not that they were not already doing such (i.e. I Thessalonians 4:9-10). It is just a reminder (cf. II Peter 3:1-2) to keep on doing the right things they were doing. What could be more edifying than reminding each other of the hope we have in Christ during the days of battle in this evil world?

I Thessalonians 5:12-14 - After the instructions to continue comforting and edifying one another (I Thessalonians 5:11), the saints in Thessalonica were told: *“And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves. Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men”* (I Thessalonians 5:12-14).

The Greek word that is translated “know” [εἶδω] is very broad in definition (Strong’s # 1492). What we can draw from this word is that the contextual meaning is about closely knowing those teaching. We can see this drawn out because of other verses wherein this word is used in this same letter (I Thessalonians 2:1-2, I Thessalonians 2:5, I Thessalonians 2:11, etc.). The same is shown in the second letter to these saints (II Thessalonians 3:7). Think of this instruction as one seeing something close up, personally. That Greek word is used in I Thessalonians 2:17 and is translated “to see” relating to face to face communication.

As we begin considering the instructions noted above, we have to consider who those that labored among them were. That would include those teaching among them, such as evangelists (I Corinthians 3:5). Specifically, those that were located among the saints such as Philip was in Caesarea (Acts 21:8). So that one is not confused, evangelists did/do have some authority (Titus 1:5; 2:15). Consider also: *“I beseech you, brethren, (ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints,) That ye submit yourselves unto such, and to every one that helpeth with us, and laboureth”* (I Corinthians 16:15-16). It would also include elders, if they had such, that were locally among them as elders must be (Hebrews 13:7; 13:17 and I Peter 5:1-4). Also, one should consider that some elders did double duty in that they oversaw the flock and taught also (I Timothy 5:17-18).

The specific is drawn out that those who are to be known among the saints are those that admonished them. This is certainly a role that those that preach the Gospel must fill (Acts 20:28-31, I Corinthians 4:14, and Colossians 1:28). In verse twelve it is clearly about those who have the work of teaching among the saints. This instruction however is not to exclude the fact that all Christians are expected to admonish one another. We will address this further when we talk more about verse fourteen.

Those laboring among the saints in Thessalonica were to be esteemed very highly for the sake of their work. This instruction is about how a faithful teacher of the word of God should be received (cf. Matthew 10:40). Receive them in love for what they do. Those that teach the truth know how it feels to be under appreciated (II Corinthians 12:15). The faithful messenger is all too often hated for teaching the truth (I

Kings 18:17-18, I Kings 21:20, I Kings 22:1-38, II Chronicles 24:20-21, II Chronicles 36:14-16, Proverbs 15:12, Isaiah 29:21, Jeremiah 20:7-8, Amos 5:10, Amos 7:10-16, John 3:19-21, John 8:31-59, Acts 5:25-42, Acts 7:51-58, and Galatians 4:16). This instruction has to be carefully observed. The teacher is not to be exalted above the message (I Corinthians 4:1-6). Nor is the preacher of God's word or overseer of the flock to be worshipped in any way (Acts 14:8-18). If the preacher or elder is exalted, there will certainly be division following. To avoid such division and to have peace, the weakest among the flock should receive the most honor (I Corinthians 12:14-27).

Rather than division (I Corinthians 1:10), peace is to be found among the saints. Consider the following instructions that are very simple and effective: *"Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another... I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace... Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful"* (Romans 14:19, Ephesians 4:1-3, and Colossians 3:12-15).

Then, the exhortation was that the saints in Thessalonica were to warn, comfort, support, and be patient. Each member of the body of Christ are to be involved in warning [admonishing] each other (Romans 15:14 and Colossians 3:16). In the second letter, the unruly were addressed and what to do with them is stated (II Thessalonians 3:6-15). The feebleminded were faint hearted (Strong's # 3642). The reward does not come to someone who gets weary and faints (Galatians 6:9). So, those individuals need comforted the way someone might be if they lost a loved one (John 11:19; 11:31). This can also be done through teaching (I Thessalonians 2:11). When you think of those weak, who need supported, think about someone who is physically ill. The Greek word that is translated "weak" [ἀσθενής] (Strong's # 772) is also used in that way (Acts 5:15-16). Having said that, the application here is more likely to the conscience and/or spiritual state of such weak ones (I Corinthians 8:1-13 and I Corinthians 11:28-30). Also, a faithful Christian will be patient towards everyone. That means to have forbearance; be longsuffering (Strong's # 3114). This word is translated "bear long" (Luke 18:7) and "longsuffering" (II Peter 3:9). We will consider that further in our next article as it ties to what we will be studying therein.

I Thessalonians 5:15 - Our last article ended with the instruction for the saints in Thessalonica to be patient [forbearing; longsuffering] with all (I Thessalonians 5:14). That instruction leads to what we are going to study now. Notice: *“See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men”* (I Thessalonians 5:15).

Think about how forbearance fits into not repaying evil with evil. Christians are instructed to: *“Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye”* (Colossians 3:12-13). For the sake of clarity, we should recall that Jesus doesn't forgive unconditionally (Luke 13:1-5) nor can we (Luke 17:1-4). Having made that clear, we need to think about how forbearance gives a person the opportunity to change. Whereas, immediate retribution may prevent such.

Our Lord shows us this clearly. For example, when the Jews crucified our Lord He did not call for fire from Heaven to immediately destroy them (Luke 23:34). As a result of our Lord's forbearance, many were able to later repent and be converted (Acts 2:1-41). It is not that people will always change if given the chance. Consider what happened in Thyatira to a trouble-making woman there: *“Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works”* (Revelation 2:20-23). Even though the woman did not change, Jesus gave her the opportunity to do so. Aren't we to follow His example (I Peter 2:21 and I John 2:3-6)?

We live in a world that lacks compassion. Our world's present “cancel culture” doesn't give people a chance to correct their errors. We cannot conform to the ways of the world (Romans 12:1-2). The root of rendering evil for evil starts with a lack of forbearance. So, my brothers and sisters in Christ, work on that first. If we can be longsuffering, we will be able to resist repaying evil to those who treat us badly.

We live in an evil world (I John 5:19). So, it is likely that we all will experience someone doing wrong to us because of that very fact. Having said that, our chances of being treated poorly by someone are greatly increased due to the fact that we are Christians. At the beginning of our Lord's teachings on earth He said this: *“Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner*

of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (Matthew 5:10-12). If you have been a faithful Christian for a lengthy period of time you likely have faced some form of persecution (II Timothy 3:12). How did you respond? When someone does us wrong, we have to keep from retaliation.

To the saints in Rome, Paul wrote: *"Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not... Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good"* (Romans 12:14; 12:17-21). Peter wrote: *"Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing. For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it"* (I Peter 3:8-11).

Rather than repaying evil with evil, Christians need to ever follow that which is good to both saints and sinners alike (Matthew 5:38-48). The Galatians were told: *"As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith"* (Galatians 6:10). In the Hebrew letter this was written: *"Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord"* (Hebrews 12:14). Paul wrote this to Titus: *"Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work, To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men"* (Titus 3:1-2).

This information should not be new to faithful Christians. Jesus taught: *"Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God"* (Matthew 5:9). It is easy enough to find trouble in this world. We do not want to escalate it. With doing good, we want to put to silence the ignorance of foolish men (I Peter 2:15). We want to remember that in this world we are behind enemy lines (so to speak). We do not want to draw any unnecessary attention to ourselves. By being "do-gooders" we decrease our chances of facing persecution (I Peter 3:13). So, press forward doing good as defined by our Lord!

I Thessalonians 5:16-18 - *“Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you”* (I Thessalonians 5:16-18). These instructions are very similar, though more brief, to what Paul wrote the saints in Philippi: *“Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things”* (Philippians 4:4-8).

The Greek word that is translated “rejoice” [χαίρω] is defined as: “1) to rejoice, be glad; 2) to rejoice exceedingly; 3) to be well, thrive; 4) in salutations, hail!; 5) at the beginning of letters: to give one greeting, salute” (Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon; Strong’s # 5463). The wise men rejoiced when they saw the star indicating Jesus’ location after birth (Matthew 2:10). Rejoicing is what a shepherd does when he finds his lost sheep (Matthew 18:12-14 and Luke 15:4-5). When John heard about the faithfulness of saints, he rejoiced (II John 1:4 and III John 1:3). These occasions for rejoicing are pretty obvious. There are times however when a Christian should rejoice that one may not immediately think of when hearing the word “rejoice.”

In times of persecution, a follower of our Lord should rejoice and be exceedingly glad (Matthew 5:10-12). The Apostles did such when they were arrested, beaten, and commanded not to speak the truth (Acts 5:17-42). In these times one should be able to focus away from the suffering of persecution and be able to rejoice because of the reward ahead in eternity (Luke 6:22-23). Along these lines of thought, Peter wrote this: *“Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But 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”* (I Peter 4:12-13). So, the point we have to focus on is that our ability to rejoice evermore or rejoice always is about the hope that is before us (Romans 12:12; cf. Romans 8:24-25). So, stay focused.

Then, we have another tool provided by God that helps us in our staying focused. That tool is prayer. The instruction we are looking at in this study is pray without ceasing. What does that mean? Does that mean you should be praying twenty-four hours per day every day without pause? NO! Jesus ceased praying (Luke 11:1). Therefore, we are left to conclude that this does not mean a continual prayer, but the continual practice of praying. We ought to always pray and not fail in such (Luke 18:1). Thankfully, the instruction doesn’t just stop with pray without ceasing. The saints in

Thessalonica were given more detail about prayer that helps us very much today in our prayer lives.

The instruction to give thanks in everything is a great detail we don't want to miss. Notice the connection between continuing in prayer and thanksgiving: *"And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him... Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving"* (Colossians 3:15-17 and Colossians 4:2).

Being thankful plays a huge part in our spiritual well-being, mental health, and continued faithfulness to our Lord. In the previous paragraph I quoted verses from a letter written to the faithful brethren in Colosse. Notice four more verses from that same letter: *"Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son... As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving"* (Colossians 1:12-13 and Colossians 2:6-7).

All that we have covered shows us the connection between prayer and being thankful. The prayer life of a Christian should be focused on thanksgiving (Ephesians 5:20 and Hebrews 13:15). That is clear. Let us not stop there though. It goes further than our actions. The mind of a Christian needs to be focused on being thankful. Think about something for a moment. One of the contributing factors in disobedience to God is a lack of thankfulness. Notice: *"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened"* (Romans 1:18-21).

So, the conclusion is that it is the will of God in Christ that Christians pray with thanksgiving continually. Be a people that rejoice always. In the best and worst of times, we should be able to accomplish these things (Psalms 34:1).

I Thessalonians 5:19-20 - *“Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings”* (I Thessalonians 5:19-20). In this article we are going to study two passages of Scripture that pertain to spiritual gifts. In the first century, after a person was baptized into Christ, they received the gift of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of the Apostles’ hands (Acts 8:5-24). To get a mental image of what happened, notice this: *“And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied. And all the men were about twelve”* (Acts 19:1-7).

Speaking in tongues and prophesying were not the only gifts Christians received through the Holy Spirit of God in the first century. We find more information in what Paul wrote to the church in Corinth: *“Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost. Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will”* (I Corinthians 12:3-11). We don’t see these things among Christians today because they were temporary gifts (I Corinthians 12:28-13:13 and Ephesians 4:7-16).

With all of that information in mind, let’s consider what it meant to not quench the Spirit. As you might imagine, the word “quench” means what you likely think it means. The Greek word “σβέννυμι” translated quench is defined like this: “1) to extinguish, quench; 1a) of fire or things on fire; 1a1) to be quenched, to go out; 1b) metaphorically to quench, to suppress, stifle; 1b1) of divine influence” (Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon; Strong’s # 4570). You will find that Greek word translated in the KJV as “quench” (Matthew 12:20, Ephesians 6:16), “gone out” (Matthew 25:8), and “quenched” (Mark 9:44; 9:46; 9:48 and Hebrews 11:34).

In the age of spiritual gifts a person could extinguish the Holy Spirit. How is that? Well, a person was not possessed by the Holy Spirit and overtaken against his or her freewill. In a context dealing with spiritual gifts, we see that Christians had control over the usage of those abilities (I Corinthians 14:1-40). In that context, this was said about the prophets: *“And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets... If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord”* (I Corinthians 14:32; 14:37). Having said that, there is another application too. One that fits better into this context. Let’s get into that now as we think about the word despise.

There is no need to define “despise.” If you do the word study, you’ll see the translation is accurate and the word is clear (Strong’s # 1848). The question begs asking, why would someone despise prophesyings? It is not that “prophesyings” in some way is a mistranslation. The Greek word [προφητεία] (Strong’s # 4394) is most often translated “prophecy”, “prophecies”, or “prophesying” (Matthew 13:14, Romans 12:6, I Corinthians 12:10, I Corinthians 13:2, I Corinthians 13:8, I Corinthians 14:6, I Corinthians 14:22, I Timothy 1:18, I Timothy 4:14, II Peter 1:20-21, Revelation 1:3, Revelation 11:6, Revelation 19:10, Revelation 22:7, Revelation 22:10, and Revelation 22:18-19). Could it be that people despise prophecies because they don’t like the message?

Do you recall this statement from chapter four of this letter: *“He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit”* (I Thessalonians 4:8)? That connects both of the verses we are talking about in this study. It is cautionary. It is easy for someone to reject the words of a prophet when they just think of them as words of a man. It gets much more difficult to reject those words when a person is reminded that the prophet is actually speaking God’s word. That is exactly what prophets did. Notice: *“The Spirit of the LORD spake by me, and his word was in my tongue... And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judaea a certain prophet, named Agabus. And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles”* (II Samuel 23:2 and Acts 21:10-11).

If you will recall the account of Stephen’s teaching and death (Acts 6:8-7:60), that gives us the image of the combined points in this article. Specifically, notice this: *“Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye”* (Acts 7:51). One can resist the Holy Spirit of God by despising the teachings of men that were inspired by the Holy Spirit. Don’t do that!

I Thessalonians 5:21 - After being instructed not to quench the Spirit nor to despise prophesying, this was written: *“Prove all things; hold fast that which is good”* (I Thessalonians 5:21). This is a straightforward instruction to the saints in Thessalonica. To prove something is to: “test (literally or figuratively); by implication to approve: - allow, discern, examine, X like, (ap-) prove, try” (Strong’s # 1381). To hold fast is to: “hold down (fast), in various applications (literally or figuratively): - have, hold (fast), keep (in memory), let, X make toward, possess, retain, seize on, stay, take, withhold” (Strong’s # 2722).

So, why is it that Christians then and now should test everything? Solomon wrote: *“The simple believeth every word: but the prudent man looketh well to his going”* (Proverbs 14:15). We should not be naive and take whatever we hear as credible. One of the Spiritual gifts that we read about Christians having in the first century (I Corinthians 12:1-11) was the ability to discern spirits (I Corinthians 12:10). We later see this instruction: *“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world. Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error”* (I John 4:1-6).

There have long been false teachers/prophets in the world (Jeremiah 14:14 and Lamentations 2:14). Those that taught that which was false were very successful in the first century. Notice what Peter wrote: *“But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not”* (II Peter 2:1-3). Jesus warned of those who were false that appeared to be among the sheep (Matthew 7:15-20). In a prophetic message about the destruction of Jerusalem, Jesus said: *“For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect”* (Matthew 24:24).

The Thessalonians were not the only ones told to test all things. Notice what was written to the saints in Ephesus: *“Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.*

Be not ye therefore partakers with them. For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light: (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;) Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them” (Ephesians 5:6-11).

Proving all things is not only about being cautious concerning false doctrines. We also need to stay aware that people work hard at deception in general (Psalms 28:3 and Proverbs 26:22-28). People use what are otherwise kind words to try and be deceptive (Matthew 22:15-22). There are people that put on fake appearances (Matthew 23:28). Think about all of the scams that are run in this world. These are reasons why God instructs His people not to be overly trusting. Having said all of that, once we test someone or something and find good, we should hold on.

As an example for holding fast to that which is good, consider what was written in the second letter to the Thessalonians: *“Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle”* (II Thessalonians 2:15). My point is, there is a time wherein testing comes to a fruitful conclusion. This is an important point because there are those who would stay in a perpetual state of not believing anything because they lack the ability to trust. There are those that always think someone is trying to deceive them. They remain in a state of doubt which causes them to be unstable (James 1:8). Don't be that person. One can know the truth (John 8:32). Once you inspect fruit, you can know a good person from an evil person (Luke 6:43-45).

Once we have that which is good we want to grab hold of it and not let go. Solomon wrote: *“Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding”* (Proverbs 23:23). Paul told Timothy: *“Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus”* (II Timothy 1:13). To those that were faithful in Thyatira, Jesus said: *“But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden. But that which ye have already hold fast till I come”* (Revelation 2:24-25). The faithful in Philadelphia were told: *“Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown”* (Revelation 3:11). Faithful Christians have to be able to hold fast till the end (Hebrews 3:1-6 and Hebrews 10:23). So, test everything. Don't be a gullible, naive person. Yet, once you know the truth and those that are in the truth; don't keep the guard up so high that you end up failing.

I Thessalonians 5:22 - *“Abstain from all appearance of evil”* (I Thessalonians 5:22).

There is a lot to think about from what is stated in this one short sentence. When a person chooses to be a disciple of Jesus Christ that person has decided to depart from the evil ways of this world. Paul wrote this to Timothy: *“Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity”* (II Timothy 2:19). This is not just a New Testament truth either. Being among God’s people has always carried with it that you leave evil behind. One Psalm says: *“Depart from evil, and do good; and dwell for evermore”* (Psalms 37:27). Solomon wrote: *“Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil”* (Proverbs 3:5-7). It is hypocritical to claim that you love good without the abhorrence for evil (Romans 12:9). However, the instruction wouldn’t be given if there wasn’t a reason for such.

Some fell away because they loved the world (II Timothy 4:10). Some fell away because they loved money (I Timothy 6:10). Some fell away because they had ungodly lusts that they pursued (I Corinthians 5:1). Some fell away because they listened to false teachers (II Timothy 2:14-18). The list could go on. The one commonality of all that we could list is that evil things cause Christians to err from the faith.

Followers of Christ are commanded not to sin (John 5:1-14, John 8:1-11, Romans 6:1-2, I Corinthians 15:34, II Corinthians 7:1, I Peter 4:1-2, I John 2:1, etc.). How can this be accomplished? Well, that is really what I Thessalonians 5:22 is all about. From the time Jesus was on this earth He taught principles that will keep a person from sinning. For example, He told Peter this: *“Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak”* (Matthew 26:41). Later, when Peter was teaching, he wrote something very close in principle to what Jesus taught him. Notice: *“Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul”* (I Peter 2:11).

In both the main verse we are considering in this article and the one I just quoted above, we find the word “abstain” being used. If you were to use your Bible program and do a word study on this, you’d find it is translated from the Greek word “ἀπέχομαι.” That Greek word can be simply understood as to refrain from (Strong’s # 567). We saw this word used already in this first letter to the saints in Thessalonica in chapter four (I Thessalonians 4:3). There is nothing too complicated in understanding what it means to abstain from something.

The word translated “appearance” in the KJV is the word that often gives folks trouble. The Greek word that appears there is “εἶδος” which means: “a view, that is, form (literally or figuratively): - appearance, fashion, shape, sight” (Strong’s # 1491).

You can think of this word as “shape” (Luke 3:22 and John 5:37), “fashion” (Luke 9:29), or even “sight” (II Corinthians 5:7). Remember the previous verse is about testing all things and holding fast to that which is good (I Thessalonians 5:21). To hold fast to what is good one needs to refrain themselves from all fashion, shapes of evil.

From the beginning of life on this earth evil has been the opposite of good (Genesis 2:9). Good does not bring forth evil (Matthew 7:17-18). Thus, saints are taught to eschew evil and do good (I Peter 3:10-12). We are to follow that which is good rather than to follow that which is evil (III John 1:11). Some people take these things too far though.

It is pretty easy to take I Thessalonians 5:22 and think that if something even appears to be evil it has to be shunned. While on the surface this seems to be a safe route to take, but it would leave a Christian seeking a place to be alone in the middle of a deserted area. The whole world lieth in wickedness (I John 5:19). So, think about the measures a person would have to take to avoid everything that even looks evil. God does not require Christians to avoid such (I Corinthians 5:1-13). That does not mean we should immerse ourselves in the world either.

Consider one of the reasons that Jesus gave His life for: *“Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ, Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father”* (Galatians 1:3-4). That is not to physically remove His disciples from this world (John 17:11-17). The expectation is that saints do not have close companionship with the world nor love the world (James 4:4 and I John 2:15-17).

These instructions do not mean that we have to completely separate ourselves from all in the world or of the world (I Corinthians 10:23-33). Jesus was separate from sinners (Hebrews 7:22-26). That did not mean spacial separation (Matthew 9:9-13). The very work Christ expects from us demands us to be in the midst of evil (Philippians 2:14-16). We have to be on guard though. Evil can rub off on us (I Corinthians 15:33). For us to remain faithful we have to make sure we are not putting ourselves in harm’s way. That is the teaching of I Thessalonians 5:22. When you study through other Scriptures you see that this will have many different individual applications. The recovering addict may have to abstain from forms of drugs that others may not (i.e. pain killers). Apply I Thessalonians 5:22 so that you can remain faithful. Just do so with the proper balance.

I Thessalonians 5:23 - After the instruction to abstain from all appearance of evil, this was written: *“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”* (I Thessalonians 5:23). You have to love that the beginning of this sentence is a reminder that God is our “God of peace” (Romans 15:33, Romans 16:20, Philippians 4:9, and Hebrews 13:20).

Think about why it is so important to be reminded that we serve the God of peace. What do we have in this world? When Jesus was talking to the twelve He said: *“These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world”* (John 16:33). So, we have to allow the spiritual peace that we have (Romans 8:6) to rule in our hearts (Colossians 3:15). God is our source of peace (I Corinthians 14:33). So, with that preface in mind (so to speak), we are going to study through the other statements in I Thessalonians 5:23.

We are going to start with the word “sanctify.” The translation of the Greek term “ἁγιάζω” in the King James Version is rather interesting (Strong’s # 37). It is translated “Hallowed” (Matthew 6:9 and Luke 11:2), “sanctifieth” (Matthew 23:17, Matthew 23:19, Hebrews 2:11, and Hebrews 9:13), “sanctified” (John 10:36, Acts 20:32, Acts 26:18, Romans 15:16, I Corinthians 1:2, I Corinthians 6:11, I Corinthians 7:14, I Timothy 4:5, II Timothy 2:21, Hebrews 2:11, Hebrews 10:10, Hebrews 10:14, Hebrews 10:29, and Jude 1:1), “sanctify” (John 17:17, John 17:19, Ephesians 5:26, Hebrews 13:12, and I Peter 3:15), and “holy” (Revelation 22:11). If you read all of the aforementioned references and some of the contexts of those references, you see a variety of meanings and applications. It is fitting therefore to think of this word as it is translated and defined in the sense of something set apart, made holy, etc. In the verse of our study in this article it is God setting apart these Christians “wholly” [completely (Strong’s # 3651)]. We have already seen, through a slightly different Greek word, the teaching of sanctification earlier in this epistle (I Thessalonians 4:3). God sets apart His people for Himself (Psalms 4:3). He then expects His people to maintain that holiness even as He is holy (I Peter 1:13-16).

The desire is that the Thessalonians, having been wholly sanctified by God, be preserved blameless in spirit, soul, and body. The Greek word translated “preserved” [τηρέω] is broad in meaning (Strong’s # 5083). The translation of that term varies being translated “keep” (Matthew 19:17), “observe” (Matthew 23:3), “watched” (Matthew 27:36), “keepers” (Matthew 28:4), “reserved” (Acts 25:21), etc. It is not that God keeps someone under some form of bound sanctification. It is upon each Christian to remain in a relationship with God. Jude wrote: *“Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life”* (Jude 1:21). God plays a part in that too and we don’t want to miss that truth (Jude 1:24). The word translated “keep” in

the previous quote is the same Greek term that is translated “preserved” in I Thessalonians 5:23. The idea in this part of this verse is well explained by the wording of Paul to the church in Corinth. Notice: *“Who shall also confirm [establish; Strong’s # 950] you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord”* (I Corinthians 1:8-9).

Jesus expects to find His people blameless when He returns. This is abundantly clear in another context about the end of the world. Notice: *“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless”* (II Peter 3:9-14).

How can these things be applied? First, we will consider the spirit of man. Jesus told the disciples: *“Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak”* (Matthew 26:41). So, think about this term as it relates to the will of man. Next, the soul [ψυχή] (Strong’s # 5590) of man. The Hebrew writer wrote: *“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds”* (Hebrews 12:1-3). There the Greek word [ψυχή] (Strong’s # 5590) was translated “minds.” Finally, think about the body. Think about using your body in a godly manner (Philippians 1:20). Think about how these saints were taught to abstain from fornication in this letter (I Thessalonians 4:3-5). Fornication is a sin against one’s own body (I Corinthians 6:18). So, there we have the whole lesson of this verse. God will do His part. The Christian’s duty is to be blameless in will, mind, and body until Christ comes!

I Thessalonians 5:24 - *“Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it”* (I Thessalonians 5:24). The point of this verse is simple. The point is that God is trustworthy. With the saints being told that they were expected to be blameless in mind, body, and soul (I Thessalonians 5:23); it is great that they are reassured of God’s faithfulness. Living right for Jesus Christ will not result in nothing. The promises of God can be trusted. He will do what He says He will do. Truly knowing that emboldens the children of God (Hebrews 10:23).

One Psalmist wrote: *“They that trust in the LORD shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever”* (Psalms 125:1). Jeremiah said: *“Blessed is the man that trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit”* (Jeremiah 17:7-8). If you are a student of the word of God you know that those under the Law of Moses trusted in God for physical things (i.e. Psalms 25:2). In Christ, we do not look to God for physical protection from our enemies. In fact, Christians know that physical persecution and harm are more likely than not (Matthew 5:10-12, Luke 6:22-23, and I Peter 3:14). The faithfulness of God being trusted in, that we are studying about, is related to the return of Christ (I Thessalonians 3:13).

From the second letter to the saints in Thessalonica we learn that they were facing persecution (II Thessalonians 1:3-4). Their rest was dependent upon their looking forward to the return of Christ (II Thessalonians 1:5-10). Whether them or us, Christians are saved by hope (Romans 8:24-25). We have that hope because we can trust God’s promises. The writer of the Hebrew epistle stated: *“That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec”* (Hebrews 6:18-20).

We should consider the significance of reassurance. Without the full revelation of God, these Christians were vulnerable. Think about how lonely it could feel with your teachers being in other places while you suffer in the flesh. The same was true of other saints in other congregations. Reassurance was needed. We even benefit from what was written to them. Think of this text: *“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? If*

God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:28-39).

God will do what He has promised. Throughout the Scriptures we find: *“God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good... Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations... God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord... Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness; In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began” (Numbers 23:19, Deuteronomy 7:9, I Corinthians 1:9, and Titus 1:1-2).*

The calling they had from God was through the Gospel of Christ (II Thessalonians 2:13-14). What we see in Christ confirms the fulfillment of the promises made to the fathers (Acts 3:18 and Romans 15:8). When you read through the entirety of the word of God you see that God kept His promises time and time again. Even when man made it difficult, God came through to fulfill His word (Psalms 105:1-45). Knowing that God keeps His word helps us in knowing that our living right before Him is not a useless endeavor (II Corinthians 7:1).

We live in a world of uncertainty. People often look to man for help and end up disappointed. This is no surprise (Psalms 146:3). Sometimes we find people that seem really nice. They seem good to be around. Then you get surprised to find out that they were saying nice things, but deception was in their heart (Proverbs 26:22-28). Sometimes those closest to us are the ones that we have to be the most aware of (Jeremiah 9:1-6, Micah 7:5-6, and Matthew 10:36). Let not your heart be troubled. You can trust in God. Jesus will return and the faithful will have eternal life (I John 5:20).

I Thessalonians 5:25-26 - *“Brethren, pray for us. Greet all the brethren with an holy kiss”* (I Thessalonians 5:25-26). At the beginning of this epistle Paul, Silvanus, and Timotheus wrote that they had been mentioning the saints in Thessalonica in their prayers as they remembered their work of faith, etc. (I Thessalonians 1:2-3). Now, at the conclusion of this letter, Paul, Silvanus, and Timotheus are requesting prayers for themselves. It was a general request. Having said that, what would the saints have prayed for concerning Paul, Silvanus, and Timotheus?

Since there are no specific details mentioned in this prayer request, all that we can do is look at possibilities. There are several possibilities, but there is one that fits into something previously written in this epistle. Consider what we read in chapter three: *“For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God; Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith? Now God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you”* (I Thessalonians 3:9-11). Writing is certainly a good way to teach, however it is inferior to seeing those you are teaching in person (II John 1:12 and III John 1:13-14). How does that relate to prayer?

Paul did not toss a coin into the air to figure out where to go next. God directed him where to go and where not to go. Notice: *“Then came he to Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek: Which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium. Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek. And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem. And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily. Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not. And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us. And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them”* (Acts 16:1-10).

Is it too much to consider that this is what was behind the prayer request? Well, notice this specific request to the saints in Rome: *“Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me; That I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judaea; and that my service which I have for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints;*

That I may come unto you with joy by the will of God, and may with you be refreshed" (Romans 15:30-32). Paul made that request because he wanted to come to Rome, but had been hindered (Romans 15:18-24).

Brethren can pray for one another in situations of sin and the confession of such (James 5:16). That doesn't fit this request. Paul, Silvanus, and Timotheus were not confessing any sins. If they were in sin, they had no right to teach in that state (Matthew 7:1-5 and Romans 2:1-29). Nor does it make sense that they were praying for miraculous healing (James 5:15). Paul, Silvanus, and Timotheus had not stated anything about such in this letter. So, the likely request I mentioned above is all I can think of. Can you think of something else that fits the context of this first letter to the Thessalonians?

In addition to the prayer request that was made, there was the instruction for the holy kiss. Throughout the epistles we find the following statements about kisses in the sense of a greeting: *"Salute one another with an holy kiss. The churches of Christ salute you... All the brethren greet you. Greet ye one another with an holy kiss... Greet one another with an holy kiss... Greet ye one another with a kiss of charity. Peace be with you all that are in Christ Jesus. Amen"* (Romans 16:16, I Corinthians 16:20, II Corinthians 13:12, and I Peter 5:14).

So, what was the "holy kiss" or the "kiss of charity" as stated in the Scriptures above? The Greek word that is translated "holy" [ἅγιος] means: "Sacred (physically pure, morally blameless or religious, ceremonially consecrated): - (most) holy (one, thing), saint" (Strong's # 40). The Greek word that is translated "charity" [ἀγάπη] is defined as: "love, generosity, kindly concern, devotedness; pl. love-feasts" (Strong's # 26). Does that clear it up for you? I do not find much clarity from those definitions.

I can see, from the Scriptures we looked at about the holy kiss and kiss of charity that such was some form of a loving greeting. I can see that it was to be pure. So, this was not a kiss associated with carnal lust or anything of the sort. Of course, these brothers would not have given such an instruction if it was of lust or the like (I Thessalonians 4:1-5). Whatever this holy kiss was, these saints did not need a description. They knew what it was.

For us today, there is not a clear description of how or when to perform a holy kiss or a kiss of charity. The Scriptures do not give clarification on this. We do not know if it is a kiss on the cheek. We do not know if it is something kept among the same sex or not. If this was more than a customary greeting, God would have had instructions that would leave clarity for generations to come (II Timothy 3:16-17). We don't have the clarity to perform holy kisses.

I Thessalonians 5:27-28 - We have now reached the conclusion of the first letter to the saints in Thessalonica. The last two sentences in this epistle are the following: *“I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen”* (I Thessalonians 5:27-28).

This epistle was sent from Paul, Silvanus, and Timotheus to the church of the Thessalonians (I Thessalonians 1:1). We noted in an earlier article that the terms “we” (I Thessalonians 1:2, I Thessalonians 1:5, I Thessalonians 1:8-9, I Thessalonians 2:2, I Thessalonians 2:4-5, etc.) as well as “us” (I Thessalonians 1:6, I Thessalonians 2:8, I Thessalonians 2:13, I Thessalonians 2:15-16, etc.) were used. However, there are the times wherein “I” is used (I Thessalonians 3:5, I Thessalonians 4:9, I Thessalonians 4:13, etc.). When this occurred, Paul was referring to himself (I Thessalonians 2:18). Remembering this is important at this point in this epistle.

Silvanus and Timotheus did not hold the office of an Apostle. First century Christians followed “the apostles' doctrine” (Acts 2:42). What the Apostle Paul spoke or wrote were the words of Christ (I Corinthians 14:37 and Galatians 1:6-12) unless otherwise noted by Paul (i.e. I Corinthians 7:6-11). An evangelist just took what they were taught by men such as Paul and repeated those things to others (I Corinthians 4:17 and II Timothy 2:1-2). In that sense, they were teaching the word of Christ as well, but not in the direct manner in which the Apostles were doing (John 16:1-13). So, when Paul writes here “I charge you by the Lord” he is exercising the authority of his office. For clarity, I am not saying that Silvanus and Timothy were not speaking the words of Christ. We read earlier in this letter that they had taught the commandments of the Lord (I Thessalonians 4:1-2). I am just intending to establish the unique position Paul was in to use the authority given to him that Silvanus and Timothy did not have.

Paul is using his authority to give a “charge.” The Greek word that is translated “charge” [ὀρκίζω] is defined as: “1) to force to take an oath, to administer an oath to; 2) to adjure (solemnly implore)” (Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon; Strong’s # 3726). This term is used only two other times in the New Testament. Interestingly, both of the other times this term was used it was used by evil spirits (Mark 5:7 and Acts 19:13). In the first of the two references, the evil spirit is referring to the authority of the Father. In the second reference, the authority of Christ is being referred to.

The charge given by Paul to the saints in Thessalonica was that this letter be read to all of the holy brethren. Paul instructed the saints in Colosse similarly: *“And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea”* (Colossians 4:16). While we today realize that all Scriptures are profitable (II Timothy 3:15-17), it is possible that some could have thought that the letter was intended for elders or evangelists rather than the whole congregation. It is also possible that some might

have thought a letter was only for one congregation. This instruction made it clear that this letter was not to be kept private.

The fact that the terminology “holy brethren” appears does not infer anything beyond the fact that faithful brethren are holy. From the time that Jesus walked on this earth it is clear that brethren, in the sense of the spiritual relationship, are those who are obedient to the will of God (Mark 3:31-35). When it comes to the word “holy”, that too describes saints. Notice: *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love... Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy”* (Ephesians 1:3-4 and I Peter 1:13-16). In fact, the Greek word translated “holy” [ἅγιος] (Strong’s # 40) is also translated “saints” (Acts 9:13, Romans 1:7, Romans 12:13, Romans 15:25-26, Romans 15:31, Romans 16:2, Romans 16:15, I Corinthians 1:2, I Corinthians 14:33, II Corinthians 1:1, II Corinthians 8:4, II Corinthians 9:12, II Corinthians 13:13, Ephesians 1:1, etc.).

This epistle then concludes with the extension of grace from our Lord to these holy brethren in Thessalonica. This is a common conclusion to letters that Paul wrote to saints (Romans 16:20, and Romans 16:24, I Corinthians 16:23, Galatians 6:18, Philippians 4:23, II Thessalonians 3:18, and Philemon 1:25). Yet, Paul was not the only one to extend grace to brethren (II Peter 1:2 and Revelation 22:21).

For me, when I read letters such as this, it is powerful to read the conclusion as it relates to the grace of our Lord. It is a reminder for me that we can have grace because of Jesus Christ (John 1:17 and Romans 5:21). It also reminds me that grace gives me responsibilities as well (Titus 2:11-14 and II Peter 3:18).

This concludes our study of the first letter to the saints in Thessalonica. As with most studies, there is some meat left on the bone (so to speak). As you use these articles in this study challenge yourself to find things in the text that we did not address. There is a wealth of information in this text and others. Enjoy your studies of God’s word!