

SYLLABUS

Standing for Truth

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Introduction

In this class, we will be considering the role of the church in standing for truth. We will be using the epistles of Paul, especially the letters to the church at Thessalonica. The Apostle Paul wrote them to a group of brand new believers facing extreme pressure from others in their community.

Saul, the man we know as Paul, was born in the first decade AD in Tarsus, a small but prosperous harbor city on the trade route from Syria to Asia Minor. Tarsus was known for its schools of philosophy and liberal arts, and some scholars believe that Paul must have had some contact with these. Like most cities in the Roman Empire, Tarsus probably contained synagogues of Greek-speaking Jews who were often as devout as their Hebrew-speaking counterparts.

Paul's name wasn't changed at his conversion. Saul is from the Hebrew and Paul is from the Greek. Paul, like king Saul, was from the tribe of Benjamin.

Saul was sent to study Jewish law in Jerusalem under the foremost rabbi of his day, the Pharisee Gamaliel.

Read Acts 22:3 and Galatians 1:14 and record what you learn about Paul's life:

The Pharisees (the Hebrew word means "the separated ones") felt that God had set them apart to live by the Torah, the Law, or teaching, of Moses. For them, this meant following the interpretations of the Torah laid down by generations of teachers. Some Pharisees held that a man was righteous if he had done more good than bad, but Saul apparently followed the stricter group who insisted that even the least implications of the Law must be kept.

Paul's conversion may have marked his first move outward from cloistered Judaism into pagan culture. He spent ten years in the Roman provinces of Cilicia and Syria, probably preaching Jesus along with Hellenistic (Greek-speaking) Jewish Christians who had fled Jerusalem during the persecution. Then a believer named Barnabas called Paul from Tarsus to Syrian Antioch, where by this time rapid conversions had made the church more gentile than Jewish.

After a while, the church in Antioch commissioned Paul and Barnabas to evangelize the provinces of Cyprus and Galatia. The two men succeeded in founding churches in several cities. The mission to the Gentiles was so successful that the apostles in Jerusalem invited Paul and Barnabas to a council to clarify exactly what God expected of gentile believers.

Read through Acts 15 and write here what you learn about the Jerusalem Council: _____

Paul asserted that both Gentiles and Jews were reconciled to God by faith in Jesus, apart from keeping the Law, but certain Jewish Christians, called Judaizers, felt that gentile converts must keep all the Jewish laws. The council confirmed Paul's view of the gospel, although some people thought that rejecting the laws as necessary to salvation would alienate potential Jewish converts. Those opponents remained Paul's enemies and continued to preach against him.

After the council in Jerusalem, Paul left Antioch with a new partner, Silas, to revisit the churches Paul had founded in Galatia. In a town called Lystra, they invited a young half-Jewish man, Timothy, to join their mission team. Along with his mother and grandmother, Timothy had accepted Christ during Paul's first visit to Lystra, and local church leaders now considered him an extremely promising disciple.

Read Acts 16:1-3 and 2 Timothy 1:5 to get more perspective on Timothy:

Paul wanted to spend more time in Asia Minor, but the Holy Spirit seemed to be guiding them away from further evangelism there. Then Acts 16:9 records that Paul had a vision of a man urging him to "come over to Macedonia and help us. So, the team set out for the province of Macedonia, north of Greece. The first city they visited was Philippi, a Roman colony planted to guard the Roman road across Macedonia. After trouble erupted there, they headed westward to Thessalonica.

Thessalonica was the largest city in the Roman province of Macedonia with a population of about 200,000, as well as the provincial capital. The city was a

center for commerce and communication because it was a seaport that lay at the junction of two major highways.

Paul's mission team arrived in Thessalonica after being forced to leave Philippi for upsetting the status quo. Philippi was so hostile to foreign religions that there weren't even enough Jews in town for a synagogue. Thessalonica, however, did have a synagogue, so as was his custom, Paul proclaimed the gospel there first. But after three weeks, Paul had so polarized the congregation between those who found his arguments convincing and those who did not that conflict exploded. The Jews who opposed Paul stirred up a riot and had Paul's team dragged before the city officials.

The seedling community of believers in Thessalonica had to post bond in order to get Paul's team out of jail. Then they smuggled Paul and his partner, Silas, out of town at night and sent them to Berea, fifty miles away. But the Thessalonian Jews pursued them, and at last Paul had to flee Macedonia entirely.

Silas and Paul's assistant, Timothy, stayed in Berea to solidify a group of converts there as best they could, while Paul went on to await them in Athens. By the time they arrived, Paul was so concerned about his Macedonian seedling communities that he sent Timothy directly back to check on the Thessalonian group and Silas back to Philippi. Paul went on to Corinth. Silas returned from Philippi with good news of a strong church planting, along with a financial gift to support Paul's ministry in Corinth. Things were more fragile in Thessalonica, however. Timothy spent the next six months playing courier back and forth between Paul in Corinth and the Thessalonian community. First and Second Thessalonians were Paul's effort to encourage that body. He knew that the Thessalonian believers faced contempt and even outright violence from their neighbors, and that staying strong was a lot to expect from people who had known Christ only for a few weeks.

THE COMTEMPORARY LOSS OF TRUTH

You can visit Thessalonica today, only the travel guide will call it Thessaloniki. It used to be known as Salonika. It is an important industrial and commercial city in modern Greece and is second to Athens in population. It served as an important Allied base during World War I. In World War II it was captured by the German army, and the Jewish population of about 60,000 persons was deported and exterminated. It is an ancient city, originally named Therma from the many hot springs adjacent to it. In 315 BC, it was renamed Thessalonica after the half sister of Alexander the Great. When Rome conquered Macedonia in 168 BC, the city was made capital of that entire province. In Paul's day 200,000 people lived there, most of them Greeks, but also many Romans and a strong Jewish minority. Today it has a population of 300,000, and is one of the few cities that has survived from the New Testament era of apostolic ministry.

Paul's commission was to take the Gospel to the Gentiles, but he always started his ministry among the Jews. The local synagogue was the place where the Old Testament Law was known and revered. Paul could get a sympathetic hearing in the synagogue, at least until persecution began. Furthermore, there were always many Gentile "God-fearers" in the synagogues, and through them Paul could begin a witness to the pagan Gentiles. Add to this Paul's great burden for the Jews, and the historical principle of "to the Jew first" and you can see why Paul and his associates began their work in the synagogue.

Read Romans 9:1-3,16 and 10:1 for more information: _____

It is interesting to study the words Luke used to describe Paul's public ministry in the synagogue.

Do a word study on "reasoned" from Acts 17:2-3 _____

Reasoned means "to discourse using questions and answers." Perhaps "dialogue" would be a good synonym. *Opening* simply means "explaining." Paul would read a portion of the Old Testament Scriptures and explain their meaning with reference to Jesus Christ and the Gospel. *Alleging* literally means "to lay beside." Paul put the Scriptures before them in an orderly manner, showing them how

they harmonized. *Preach* means “to proclaim, to announce.” Paul did not simply teach the Scriptures; he proclaimed Christ and urged his listeners to receive Him by faith.

Paul wanted to ground them in the doctrines of the Christian faith, particularly with reference to Christ’s return. It appears that the church was going through severe persecution, and this is always a time of temptation to compromise and give in to discouragement. By reminding them of the truths of the Christian faith and what God had done for them in Christ, Paul encouraged them to stand firm and maintain their strong witness. He also encouraged them to live holy lives. Keep in mind that temptations to immorality were rife in the cities then, and that sexual sins were not condemned by most people. These letters emphasize purity of life—a concept that needs to be emphasized in our churches too.

We can learn much from Paul’s approach to evangelism. He used the Word of God, and he declared the Son of God. He started where the people were and led them into the truth of the Gospel. When Paul preached to Gentiles, he started with the God of Creation, since they had no knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures. Acts 14:8-18; 17:16

The new Christians were confused about the return of Jesus Christ. Paul had told them that the Lord would return in the air and take them home, but some of their number had died. The bereaved ones wondered if their Christian dead would be included in the “catching up” of the church. Because the persecutions were so intense, some of the believers thought that “the Day of the Lord” had arrived. It is possible that a forged letter contributed to this confusion. Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians to explain this doctrine and to assure them that the Day of the Lord had not yet arrived.

Finally, in this letter, Paul sought to correct some weaknesses in the church. Some members were not respecting and honoring their spiritual leaders as they should. Others were refusing to work, arguing that the soon-coming of the Lord made this the logical thing to do.

There was some confusion in their public services that also needed to be corrected. Each New Testament letter has a special message, or blessing, that is uniquely its own. Romans, for example, emphasizes the righteousness of God and shows that God is righteous in His dealings with both sinners and believers. First Corinthians focuses on the wisdom of God, and 2 Corinthians on the comfort of God. Galatians is the freedom letter and Philippians is the joy letter, while Ephesians stresses the wealth that we have in Christ Jesus. What is the special blessing in the message of 1 and 2 Thessalonians? *It is the message of the return of Jesus Christ and how this vital doctrine can affect our lives and*

churches and make us more spiritual. Every chapter in 1 Thessalonians ends with reference to the coming of Jesus Christ, and each reference relates the doctrine to a practical aspect of Christian living.

Here is a summary:

- 1:10—salvation and assurance
- 2:19-20—soul-winning and service
- 3:11-13—stability in Christian living
- 4:13-18—strength in sorrow
- 5:23-24—sanctification of life

In other words, Paul did not look on this doctrine as a theory to be discussed, but as a truth to be lived. These letters encourage us to live “in the future tense” since Jesus could appear at any time. We are to practice the promise of His return in our manner of life. Turning to 2 Thessalonians, we discover additional truth concerning future events and the church. Keep in mind that the second letter was written to correct the confusion regarding our Lord’s return. Some believers thought the Day of the Lord (the time of Tribulation) had arrived, and they wondered when the Lord would appear. Perhaps the best way to grasp the major messages of the two letters is by contrast:

1 Thessalonians	2 Thessalonians
Christ comes in the air for His church (4:13-18)	Christ comes to the earth with His church (1:10)
A sudden secret rapture that can occur at any time	A crisis that is part of a predicted program
Can occur today	Can occur only after certain events happen
The Day of Christ	The Day of the Lord

Of course, people who love the Lord differ in their interpretations of prophecy, particularly the matter of the church escaping or entering the time of Tribulation. We will explore those positions in some detail. But it is important to highlight the things that all can agree on...and this is what Paul was writing to the church.

1. Jesus is coming back in the air for the church
2. You’re not going with Him if you don’t know Him

THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH

Paul, Silas, and Timothy rejoiced together in what God had done in their converts' lives. They continually and frequently gave thanks; the Thessalonians were a constant source of joy to them. Rather than being a source of grief these Christians evoked gratitude. In this they served as models for all Christians.

Three traits of these believers stood out in Paul's mind:

1. They had performed an important work produced by faith in Christ. They had turned to the true God from idols. Faith in Christ had produced true repentance.
2. Second, they performed labor prompted by love for Christ. This consisted in their serving the living and true God in the midst of persecution.
3. Third, they had endurance, "a bearing up patiently under a heavy load." They were waiting for God's Son from heaven with steadfast hope.

These are three virtues that should mark every Christian—faith, love, and hope—Each of these traits put Jesus Christ first, and produced praiseworthy behavior.

The Thessalonians had exercised saving faith in Christ in the past when they had believed the gospel, they were loving Christ in the present, and they were hoping for His return in the future. Their lives were certainly focused on Jesus Christ. No wonder Paul and his companions gave thanks for them.

The Thessalonians' response to the preaching of the gospel in their showed indisputable proof of their salvation. Paul praised their response.

Characteristically Paul addressed his fellow Christians as brothers. Do a word study on "brothers" and write your findings here: _____

Paul never claimed superiority over them but recognized the equality of all the redeemed in the sight of their heavenly Father. Paul had come a long way from being a proud Pharisee to the place where he could consider Gentiles his equals before God. He reminded his readers that they were loved by God, and even the most incidental statements are filled with the warm realization of God's presence and love.

The proof of God's love for the Thessalonians was His choosing them for salvation. Do a word study on "chosen" and record your results here:

From the word translated chosen comes the English "election." That God has chosen to bless some individuals with eternal life is clearly taught in many places in both the Old and New Testaments. Equally clear is the fact that God holds each individual personally responsible for his decision to trust or not to trust in Jesus Christ.

Read John chapter 3 and Romans chapter 5 and reflect on what it means to be among the elect: _____

How both can be true is apparently incomprehensible to finite human minds; no one has ever been able to explain this satisfactorily. This task transcends human mental powers.

The response of his converts was a supernatural work of God, not a natural response to a clearly delivered sermon. When Paul preached to them, he did not just share human opinion and philosophy. Rather, his message was marked by the power of God. Read the following verses and record what you learn here:

The difficulty in putting divine election and human responsibility together is understanding how both can be true. That both are true is taught in the Bible.

Romans 1:16 _____

John 16:8 _____

Paul's message was marked by his own certainty that this message would change their lives as it had radically changed his. Not only did Paul and his traveling companions preach a convincing message, but they also lived lives consistent with that message when they were in Thessalonica.

The Thessalonians were fully aware of their teachers' manner of life and that their motive was to benefit the Thessalonian church. The message Paul preached—the gospel of the grace of God—had entered into the minds and hearts of these Macedonians and they had been saved. From their belief beautiful lives had blossomed.

The outstanding fruit of faith in the gospel was the Thessalonians' change of behavior. They became imitators of their spiritual parents, the missionaries. This is normal Christian experience. But they also went on to imitate the Lord. This is natural, and the order is true to life as well. A new Christian first looks to other believers as his pattern, but then as he matures he realizes that Jesus Christ is his best "model." Read 1 Peter 2:21 and write your thoughts: _____

Despite severe suffering the Thessalonians welcomed the message. The Jews among them must have felt the hatred of their unbelieving brothers in the flesh who were especially antagonistic to the gospel. The Gentile converts must have had to swim against the current of paganism that filled commercial aspects of Thessalonica. The Christian wives of the city's chief men had to go home to unbelieving husbands who would not have appreciated their newly sensitized consciences.

Yet in spite of trials without, the Thessalonian believers possessed joy within, the joy of sins forgiven. It is interesting that Christians who have tribulations in their daily walks often seem to have greater joy in the Lord than those who live in more comfortable spiritual climates.

Do a word study on "joy" and record what you learn: _____

A Christian's joy is not determined by his circumstances but by his relationship with Christ. The source of this joy is the indwelling Spirit.

The testimony of these Christians did not burn brightly merely at home; it also shone abroad to other people in other parts of Macedonia, reaching even to Achaia, the neighboring province to the south. Having become imitators of the missionaries and their Lord, they in turn became the object of imitation by other believers. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians he pointed to these Macedonians as a model of sacrificial giving. Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-8: _____

He wrote that they had given money to help other believers even though they themselves were poor. One of the most revealing evidences of a Christian's true spirituality is the way he manages his money. In this revealing test the Thessalonians emerged as gold tried in the fire.

The Thessalonians had also become examples to other Christians. Do a word study on "rang out" and write what you learn here: _____

Paul saw the Thessalonians as amplifiers or relay stations that not only received the gospel message but sent it farther on its way with increased power. Apparently it was not through an organized evangelistic campaign that their witness went out, but it was through the personal lives and testimonies of these transformed individuals that neighbors heard about their faith in God.

The fact that these believers had turned to God from idols strongly suggests that many of those believers had been pagan Gentiles. The Jews, of course, abhorred idolatry.

The Thessalonians had chosen to serve the living and true God rather than God's creatures or satanic powers. The fact that God is a living Person was precious to the Jews and to Paul; this is the characteristic by which God is most often distinguished from so-called gods in the Old Testament. He is the only living God; all other gods are not alive and therefore not worthy objects of worship.

Humans have the freedom to choose who their master will be, but they do not have the freedom to choose no master.

Not only had the Thessalonians turned to God in repentance and begun to serve Him, but they were also awaiting the return of His Son from heaven. The Thessalonians were looking for Jesus' coming through the clouds, literally, "out of the heavens." But it was not the clouds, or the signs of His coming, or His deliverance which interested these believers; it was the person of Jesus, the Son of the living God. He was the object of their hope, the focus of their attention.

The return of Jesus is a source of hope for Christians for several reasons, but the reason which Paul mentioned here was Jesus' deliverance of the saints from the coming wrath of God. The wrath of God will be poured out on unrighteous people because of their failure to trust in Christ.

Read John 3:36 and Romans 1:18 _____

"The Great Tribulation" will be a period in history during which God's wrath will be poured out on the earth as never before. This chapter, like all of the others, ends with a focus on the hope of Christ's return.

As we go about our every-day activities this week, let's practice thinking about Christ first, and the hope of His return.

GROWING A CHURCH

Paul had been entrusted with God's message in the gospel. It was not a message that he made up or that he received from men.

Read Galatians 1:11-12 writing your thoughts here: _____

Paul saw himself as a steward of God's message. A steward owns nothing, but possesses and uses everything that belongs to his master. Joseph is an example of steward in the household of Potiphar. Read Genesis 39:1-6 and think through Joseph's responsibilities: _____

He managed his master's affairs and used all his master's goods to promote his master's welfare. Every steward one day must give an account of his stewardship. Read Luke 16:1-2 _____

If he is found unfaithful, he will suffer. The message of the Gospel is a treasure God has entrusted to us. We must not bury it; we must invest it so it will multiply and produce "spiritual dividends" to God's glory. Some Christians think that the church's only responsibility is to protect the Gospel from those who would change it. Read Galatians 1:6-9 _____

But we also must *share* the Gospel; otherwise, we are protecting it in vain. Faithfulness is the most important quality a steward possesses. He may not be popular in the eyes of men; but he cannot be unfaithful in the eyes of God.

1 Corinthians 4:1-2 _____

A Christian who grandstands will lose God's approval. When we see the characteristics of Paul's ministry as a steward, we understand what faithfulness means.

The emphasis of the steward is *faithfulness*; the emphasis of the mother is *gentleness*. As an apostle, Paul was a man of authority; but he always used his authority in love. The babes in Christ sensed his tender loving care as he nurtured them. He was indeed like a loving mother who cared for her children. It takes time and energy to care

2 Timothy 2:2 The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

for children. Paul did not turn his converts over to baby-sitters; he made sacrifices and cared for them himself. He did not tell them to "read a book" as a substitute for his own personal ministry. Although there is a place for good Christian literature and textbooks, it is not a substitute for personal discipleship.

Paul had patience with the new Christians. Neither new believers nor children grow up instantly. They all experience growing pains and encounter problems as they mature. Paul's love for them made him patient, because love suffers long, and is kind.

Paul also nourished them. First Thessalonians 2:7 can read "even as a nursing mother cherishes her own children." What is the lesson here? A nursing mother imparts her own life to the child. This is exactly what Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 2:8. You cannot be a nursing mother and turn your baby over to someone else. That baby must be in your arms, next to your heart. The nursing mother eats the food and transforms it into milk for the baby. The mature Christian feeds on the Word of God and then shares its nourishment with the younger believers so they can grow.

Read 1 Peter 2:1-3 and reflect on this concept: _____

Besides making sacrifices, having patience, and giving nourishment, a mother also protects her child. It was this fact that enabled King Solomon to discover which woman was the real mother of the living child. Read 1 Kings 3:16-28 for the story: _____

Paul was willing to give not only the Gospel but his own life as well. His love for the Thessalonians was so great he would die for them if necessary. Even Moses felt the burden of caring for God's people.

Read Numbers 11:12 for Moses' lament: _____

But if new Christians don't grow on the milk of the Word, they can never mature to appreciate the meat of the Word. Hebrews 5:10-14 _____

Paul considered himself a "spiritual father" to the believers at Thessalonica, just as he did toward the saints at Corinth. "For if you were to have countless tutors in Christ, yet you would not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the Gospel" (1 Corinthians 4:15).

The Spirit of God used the Word of God in Paul's ministry, and many people in Thessalonica were born again into the family of God.

Not only were the fruits of righteousness manifest in the Thessalonian converts' lives, but also the way they received the preached Word of God warmed the apostles' hearts. The "Word of God" here clearly refers to the message spoken by the missionaries. When the Thessalonians heard it they realized that it was not simply the words of man's wisdom, but a message that had its source in God.

It has been said that the gospel is not the kind of message that man would naturally invent. The Thessalonian Christians sensed the supernatural truthfulness of the gospel Paul preached as the Holy Spirit brought this conviction home to their hearts. When Christians share their faith, they do not merely give their particular viewpoint on life as one among the endless variety of human theories. They announce the divinely revealed truth of God, a word from God.

The spoken Word of God has incredible power to change. For this reason the Word of God through the Old Testament prophets was recognized as being powerful.

Read 1 Samuel 3:19 _____

The Word of God has the creative power of God behind it and in it. Paul acknowledged that the changes in the Thessalonians came through the spoken Word of God. Not only had it effected changes in them in the past, but also it was continuing to change them since they continued to believe it.

Paul encouraged his readers to recognize this evidence of God's working as being true of all believers by directing their attention to another experience common to all saints. He included himself again, by addressing them as brothers. Those whose lives are being changed by God often find themselves the objects of criticism and attack by people in whom there is no divine life. Frequently when Christians suffer persecution, they are tempted to think that God's blessing has departed. Paul countered this lie of Satan by reminding his readers that their experience duplicated that of their elder brothers and sisters in the faith who had become Christians in Judea. They also suffered opposition from their neighbors; and their neighbors were Jews too.

The Thessalonians were not alone in their suffering; they had abundant and worthy company. Their persecutors had killed the Lord Jesus Himself and the Old Testament prophets. Although Paul laid guilt for the death of Christ at the feet of the Jews he did not charge them alone with this crime. The Romans who were involved in Jesus' trial and execution were also guilty as was every human being for whose sins Christ tasted death.

Read 1 Corinthians 2:8 and Hebrews 2:9 _____

Most likely Paul mentioned the murder of Jesus first and his own persecutions last because in his mind the first example was much more serious. Those who persecute believers in Christ antagonize both God and other men. Paul knew whereof he spoke, having been a persecutor of the church himself and one to whom God had revealed that he was fighting against the Lord he sought to serve. Those who set themselves against God's people also set themselves against God. And they also hurt other non-Christians. Unbelief not only damns the unbeliever, but that it hinders the salvation of others. Such people seek to extinguish the lamp of truth and in doing so cause others to stumble.

An unbeliever who is willing to live and let live with respect to personal convictions regarding God is less dangerous than one who not only disbelieves himself but also tries to keep others from hearing the gospel. The unbelieving Jews in Thessalonica were of the latter variety.

Such people's actions hurt themselves as well as others because they heap up additional sins for which God will judge them. God will not let sin go on forever; eventually there will be judgment. The Thessalonians' persecutors were hastening God's judgment on themselves by their actions.

The manifestation of God's wrath that Paul had in mind in this verse is debatable. Perhaps he was referring to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 AD, just a few years in the future, which Paul may have known was as certain to take place as if it had already happened. Or he may have had in mind God's turning from the Jews to create for Himself a unique body of believers made up of both Jews and Gentiles who now stand on equal footing before God. Or possibly Paul was thinking of the wrath of God that is on every individual who fails to believe in Christ. Or the wrath may refer to the Tribulation

which will assuredly come upon them because of their rejection of Jesus Christ. This was probably his thought since in other contexts in this epistle where he speaks of the wrath to come he has the Tribulation in mind. Though it is not known for sure which of these thoughts was in Paul's mind—all of them could have been—it is known that the wrath of God has indeed come on unbelievers who hinder gospel preaching in every one of the ways just mentioned. Perhaps Paul chose a general statement rather than a specific one because he had several things in mind. God's wrath had reached its full limit in regard to those individuals.

Why did Paul get so excited about the fate of the Thessalonians' persecutors? It was not out of personal hatred for them. Rather it was to emphasize the seriousness of hindering the preaching of the gospel. This message was transforming the Thessalonian believers, and they were heralding it to others far and wide. These verses illustrate how important it is that the gospel reach everybody.

Read Romans 9:1-5 and Matthew 28:19-20 _____

Paul's letter reveals his deep feelings for the Thessalonian believers. He described his departure from them as an event forced on him by circumstances beyond his control.

Do a word study on "taken away" in 2:17 and record what you learn here: _____

Particularly note how many times this word is used in the New Testament. We begin to understand that Paul felt as if his family was being torn apart when he left them. He hoped the separation would be brief, but it broke his heart to leave them as spiritual babies. Though he had left them physically, they were still prominent in his thoughts; they were not "out of sight, out of mind."

Paul and his companions had tried to return to Thessalonica on several occasions because of the intense longing they felt for the believers there. The care and feeding of new Christians was not just an obligation those missionaries felt

toward God; it was something they longed with all their hearts to be able to do, because of the love of Christ, in spite of the personal danger that faced them in Thessalonica.

Paul blamed Satan for his inability to return. Read through the last two verses of 1 Thessalonians 2 and in the space provided, write your summary of Paul's feelings toward the believers receiving this letter:

Ephesians 6:12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

LEARNING TO STAND

My grandfather used to say, "if you don't stand for something, you'll fall for anything."

When Paul and his friends left Thessalonica, they went to Berea and ministered the Word. But the troublemakers from Thessalonica followed them and stirred up opposition. Paul left for Athens while Silas and Timothy remained at Berea.

Read Acts 17:10-15 for this account: _____

Apparently, Timothy joined Paul in Athens, but Paul sent him back to Thessalonica to help the young church that was going through tribulations. Several important factors were involved in this move.

1. Paul loved the Thessalonian church and because of this love that he could not abandon them when they needed spiritual help. Paul was not only an evangelist; he was also a pastor. He knew that soul-winning was but one part of the commission God gave him. These new believers must also be taught and established in the faith. Instead, Paul chose to be left alone in Athens so that Timothy could return to Thessalonica and establish the saints.

The word translated "left" in 1 Thessalonians 3:1 means "to leave loved ones at death." In 1 Thessalonians 2:17 he said that he felt "orphaned" from his friends in Thessalonica. To leave these new believers was like an experience of bereavement. This is a good lesson for Christian workers today. Paul so loved the Thessalonian believers that he would have risked his own life to return to them. He wanted to give of himself and his resources for them, as a parent provides for loved children.

Read 2 Corinthians 12:15 _____

Not every believer is equipped to establish other Christians in the faith. Ideally, every Christian should be mature enough to help other Christians grow in the Lord and learn to stand on their own two feet.

Unfortunately, some Christians are like those described in Hebrews 5:11-14:

They have gone backward in their spiritual walk and have forgotten the basic truths of the Word. Instead of teaching others, they themselves need to be taught again. They are going through a second childhood spiritually.

2. Timothy was the ideal man to send to the church to help them stand firm. Timothy and Titus were Paul's "special agents" whom he used as troubleshooters whenever the churches had problems.

Paul sent Timothy to Corinth to help straighten out the problems there. He also planned to send Timothy to help the saints in Philippi. Read 2 Corinthians 16:10-11 and Philippians 2:19-23 _____

What kind of a person can help younger believers grow in the Lord? To begin with, he must be a Christian himself: "Timothy, our brother." We cannot lead another where we have not been ourselves, nor can we share that which we do not possess. Paul had led Timothy to faith in Christ, so he was truly a brother.

Read 1 Timothy 1:2 _____

Timothy was also a minister. This is simply the Greek word for a servant. Our English word "deacon" comes from this word, *diakonos*. Timothy was not afraid to work. He had faithfully served with Paul and knew how to minister in the churches. It is a demanding thing to establish new Christians. They have many problems and often do not grow as fast as we think they should. Teaching them requires love and patience; Timothy had these qualities.

Read Philippians 2:22: Timothy was a good team player; he was called a "fellow worker." He did not try to run the show himself and get people to follow him. To begin with, he was a fellow worker with God. It was God who worked in and through Timothy to accomplish His work. Read 1 Corinthians 3:9 and Philippians 2:13 _____

But Timothy was also a fellow worker with the other believers. He obeyed Paul and left Athens for Thessalonica. He returned to Paul in Corinth with news about the Thessalonian church. No wonder Paul wrote of him: "For I have no man like-minded, who will naturally care for your state." (Philippians 2:20). In other words, Paul felt that if he could not go himself, sending Timothy was just like going himself.

The trials and testings that happen to believers are to be expected. We must expect to "suffer for His sake."

Read Philippians 1:29 _____

Persecution is not foreign to the believer, but a normal part of the Christian life. Paul had repeatedly told them this while he was with them. We must warn new believers that the way is not easy as they seek to live for Christ; otherwise, when trials come, these babes in Christ will be discouraged and defeated. Of course, behind these persecutions is Satan, the enemy of the Christian. He is the tempter, and he seeks to ruin our faith.

Read 1 Peter 5:8-9 _____

Satan will use any means to attack the Christian and weaken his faith in God. Satan told Eve she would be like God if she ate of the tree, and she fell for his flattery. Satan is more dangerous when he flatters than when he condemns. Timothy's task was to establish these believers and encourage them in their faith. It is faith in God that keeps our feet on the ground when the enemy attacks. Without faith in God, we are defeated.

Timothy rejoined Paul at Corinth (Acts 18:5) and gave him the good news that things were going well at Thessalonica. The report from Timothy was, to Paul, like hearing the Gospel. Timothy reported that the new believers were standing firm in spite of persecution. They did not believe the lies that the enemy had told about Paul. They still loved and held him in the high esteem. Paul's response was to write them this letter.

Paul wrote some letters which are not a part of the New Testament, but the two letters to the Thessalonian church are a part of God's inspired Word. This suggests that God's Word is one of the best tools for establishing new Christians in the faith. When Jesus was tempted by Satan, He used the verbal Word of God to defeat him. For the complete story read Matthew 4:1-11: _____

Paul admonished the Ephesian believers to take "the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God" in their battle against Satan and his demonic assistants. The Bible is able to establish us because it is inspired of God (2 Tim. 3:16). It is not simply a book of religious ideas or good moral advice; it is the very Word of God.

The Bible is "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." It has well been said that *doctrine* tells us what is right, *reproof* tells us what is not right, *correction* tells us how to get right, and *instruction* tells us how to stay right. First Thessalonians is saturated with Bible doctrines. Every major doctrine of the faith is touched on in these brief chapters. There are dozens of references to God the Father and Jesus Christ, and at least four references to the Holy Spirit.

In this letter, Paul dealt with sin and salvation, the doctrine of the church, the work of the ministry, and especially eschatology. Since Paul did not remain in Thessalonica very long, it is remarkable that he taught his converts so much. A working knowledge of the Bible is essential for spiritual growth and stability.

1. God's Word is *food* to nourish us (Matthew 4:4)
2. *Light* to guide us (Psalm 119:105)
3. *Weapon* to defend us (Ephesians 6:17)

One reason God has established local churches is that believers might grow in the Word and, in turn, help others to grow. Paul sent them a man, and that man established them in the Word.

The Word of God and prayer should go together. The Prophet Samuel told the people of Israel, "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way" (1 Samuel 12:23).

Peter said, "But we [the Apostles] will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the Word" (Acts 6:4).

Paul had this same emphasis: "And now, brethren, I commend you to God [prayer], and to the Word of His grace, which is able to build you up" (Acts 20:32).

Jesus prayed for His disciples, just as Paul prayed for the Thessalonian Christians, that their faith would not fail. Read Luke 22:31-32 _____

We must also pray for young Christians here at home. It is not enough to teach them Bible truth; we must also support them in our prayers. Paul prayed for three specific requests.

First, he prayed that their faith might mature. Paul asked God to make it possible for him to minister to them personally. The word translated "perfect" has the meaning of "adjust, equip, furnish." It is even used for the mending of nets (Mark 1:19). Our faith never reaches perfection; there is always need for adjustment and growth.

Paul prayed that the suffering Christians in Thessalonica might grow in their faith, and God answered his prayer.

Paul's second request was that their love might abound. Times of suffering can be times of selfishness. Persecuted people often become very self-centered and demanding. What life does to us depends on what life finds in us; and nothing reveals the true inner person like the furnace of affliction. Some people build walls in times of trial, and shut themselves off. Others build bridges and draw closer to the Lord and His people. This was Paul's prayer for these believers, and God answered it, as we will see in 2 Thessalonians.

The Jewish legalists persecuted Paul from city to city, yet Paul so loved his people that he willingly would have died for them. We love one another, but we also love the lost and our enemies. Abounding love must not be bound. It must be free to expand and touch all men.

Paul's third request was for holiness in their lives. Again, it is the return of Jesus Christ that motivates the believer to live a holy life. Our Lord's return is also a source of stability in the Christian life. Where there is stability, there can be sanctity; and where there is holiness, there is assurance. The two go together.

Notice that Paul's prayers for his friends were not careless or occasional. He prayed "night and day"; he prayed "exceedingly" which is the same word translated "exceeding abundantly" in Ephesians 3:20. True prayer is hard work. Epaphras must have learned from Paul how to pray for people. The entire Trinity is involved in this prayer. Paul addressed the Father and Son in 1 Thessalonians 3:11. In verse 12 "the Lord" may refer to the Holy Spirit, since "our Lord" at the end of 1 Thessalonians 3:13 certainly refers to Jesus Christ. If this is so, then this is the only prayer I know of in the New Testament directed to the Holy Spirit.

Paul ended 1 Thessalonians 2 with a reference to the return of Christ, and he ended this chapter in the same way. He prayed that his converts might stand blameless and holy before God at Christ's return. Our works will be tested, and you cannot separate conduct from character. Paul's prayer teaches us how to pray not only for new believers, but for all believers. We should pray that their faith will mature, their love grow, and their character and conduct be holy and blameless before God.

The Bible pattern of prayer is: to the Father, through the Son, and in the Spirit.

As we conclude our study of chapter 3, we see how important it is to care for new Christians. Leading someone to Christ is not enough. We must also lead him on in the Christian life and help him get established. If he is not established, he will fall when the winds of persecution start to blow. If he cannot stand, he will never learn to walk. What shall we do? We can be an encouragement and stand at his side as he matures. We can share the Word of God. We can pray. This is what Paul did—and it worked.

IS GOD PLEASED?

Everybody lives to please somebody. For many people it's themselves. They have no sensitivity to the needs of others. Christians should not go through life pleasing only themselves.

Read Romans 15:1 _____

We must also be careful when it comes to pleasing others. It is possible to both please others and honor God, but it is also possible to dishonor God. Read Galatians 1:10 to get Paul's opinion: _____

Pleasing God should to be the controlling motivation of the Christian life. Children should live to please their father. The Holy Spirit works in our lives "both to will and to do of His good pleasure." (Philippians 2:13). Enoch walked with God, and before God called him to heaven, Enoch "had this testimony, that he pleased God" (Hebrews 11:5).

Pleasing God means much more than simply doing God's will. It is possible to obey God and yet not please Him. Jonah is a case in point. He obeyed God and did what he was commanded, but his heart was not in it. God blessed His Word but He could not bless His servant. So Jonah sat outside the city of Nineveh angry with everybody, including the Lord!

John 8:29 "And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him."

Read Ephesians 6:6 and paraphrase the verse here: _____

How do we know what pleases God? How do we know what pleases an earthly father? By growing up with him and listening to him. As we read the Word, and

as we fellowship in worship and service, we get to know the heart of God; and this opens us up to the will of God.

Paul gave the believers in Thessalonica the commandments of God regarding personal purity. Do a word study on "commandments" in 4:2 and write the results here: _____

The word *commandments* is a military term. It refers to orders handed down from superior officers. We are soldiers in God's army, and we must obey orders. The little Bible school song "I'm in the Lord's Army" had a lot to recommend it!

God created sex, and He has the authority to govern its use. From the beginning, He established marriage as a sacred union between one man and one woman. God created sex both for the continuance of the race and for the pleasure of the marriage partners. Read Hebrews 13:4 and record it's intent here: _____

God's commandments concerning sex are not for the purpose of robbing people of joy, but rather of protecting them that they might not lose their joy.

Read Exodus 20:14 and record God's position: _____

This commandment builds a protection around marriage that makes the relationship not a prison, but a safe place for both partners. When the safe place is infringed upon, the relationship suffers and ceases to be godly.

We never have to seek to know the will of God in this matter; He has told us clearly. God clearly tells us to abstain from all sexual immorality, and no amount of liberal theology or modern philosophy can alter it. Throughout the Bible, God warns against sexual sin; and these warnings must be heeded. God's purpose is our sanctification, so that we can live for Him in purity of mind and body.

God is not a respecter of persons; He deals with His children when they sin.

Read Colossians 3:23-25 _____

While it is true that the Christian is not under condemnation, it is also true that he is not free from the ramifications that come when we sow to the flesh. Read Galatians 6:7-8 _____

When King David committed adultery, he tried to cover his sin, but God chastened him severely. We read David's sense of loss in Psalms 32 and 51. Read through those Psalms and ask if any part of it is pertinent in your life:

When David confessed his sins, God forgave him; but God would not change the consequences. David reaped what he sowed, and it was a painful experience for him.

The privilege of election also involves responsibilities of obedience. A holy walk involves a right relationship with God the Father (who called us), God the Son (who died for us), and God the Spirit (who lives within us). It is the presence of the Holy Spirit that makes our body the temple of God . Furthermore, it is by walking in the Spirit that we get victory over the lusts of the flesh. To despise God's commandments is to invite the judgment of God and also to grieve the Spirit of God.

"But I am one of God's elect!" a Christian may argue. "I belong to Him, and He can never cast me out." Election is not an excuse for sin—it is an encouragement for holiness.
Warren Wiersbe

How does the Spirit of God help us live a clean life, free from sexual impurity? To begin with, He creates holy desires within us so that we have an appetite for God's pure Word. Read 1 Peter 2:1-3 _____

Romans 13:12-14 _____

Also, He teaches us the Word and helps us to recall God's promises in times of temptation.

Read John 14:26 and Ephesians 6:17 _____

As we yield to the Spirit, He empowers us to walk in holiness and not be overcome by the lusts of the world and the flesh. The fruit of the Spirit overcomes the works of the flesh.

Paul devoted a great deal of space to this theme of sexual purity because it was a critical problem in the church of that day. It is also a critical problem in the church today. For many people, marriage vows are no longer considered sacred, and divorce, even among believers, is no longer governed by the Word of God. There are "gay churches" where homosexuals and lesbians "love one another" and claim to be Christians. Premarital sex and "Christian pornography" are accepted parts of the religious landscape in many places. Yet God has said, "Walk in holiness."

The transition from holiness to love is not a difficult one. Paul made this transition in his prayer recorded in 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13. Just as God's love is a holy love, so our love for God and for one another ought to motivate us to holy living. The more we live like God, the more we will love one another. If a Christian really loves his brother, he will not sin against him.

There are four basic words for "love" in the Greek language.

1. Eros refers to physical love; it gives us our English word erotic. Eros love does not have to be sinful, but in Paul's day its main emphasis was sensual. This word is never used in the New Testament.
2. Another word, storge, refers to family love, the love of parents for their children. This word is also absent from our New Testament, although a related word is translated "kindly affectioned" in Romans 12:10.
3. The two words most used for love are philia and agape. Philia love is the love of deep affection, such as in friendship or even marriage.
4. But agape love is the love God shows toward us. It is not simply a love based on feeling; it is expressed in our wills. Agape love treats others as God would treat them, regardless of feelings or personal preferences.

The word philadelphia is translated "brotherly love." Because Christians belong to the same family, and have the same Father, they should love one another.

Our love flows out of God's love for us. Read 1 John 4:19 _____

God the Son taught us to love one another when He said, "A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another." And the Holy Spirit taught us to love one another when He poured out the love of God in our hearts (Romans 5:5) when we trusted Christ.

Have you noticed that animals do instinctively what is necessary to keep them alive and safe? Fish do not attend classes to learn how to swim (even though they swim in schools), and birds by nature put out their wings and flap them in order to fly. It is nature that determines action. Because a fish has a fish's nature, it swims; because a hawk has a hawk's nature, it flies. And because a Christian has God's nature he loves because "God is love."

Timothy had reported the good news of their love, so Paul was not exhorting them to acquire something they did not already possess. He was encouraging them to get more of what they already enjoyed. You can never have too much Christian love. Paul had prayed that their love might increase, and God answered that prayer.

How does God cause our love to increase? By putting us into circumstances that force us to practice Christian love. Love is the "circulatory system" of the body of Christ, but if our spiritual muscles are not exercised, the circulation is impaired. The difficulties that we believers have with one another are opportunities for us to grow in our love. This explains why Christians who have had the most problems with each other often end up loving one another deeply, much to the amazement of the world.

Paul closes this section with an emphasis on the believer's witness to those who are outside the Christian fellowship. Christians not only have the obligation to love one another but also to be good testimonies to the people of the world. Paul's great concern was that the Thessalonian believers earn their own wages and not become freeloaders depending on the support of unbelievers. Although it seems like a paradox, if you are ambitious, your life will probably not be quiet. But the emphasis is on quietness of mind and heart, the inner peace that enables a man to be sufficient through faith in Christ. Paul did not want the saints running around creating problems as they earned their daily bread.

For the most part, the Greeks despised manual labor. Most of the work was done by slaves. Paul, of course, was a tentmaker; and he was careful in Thessalonica to set the example of hard work. Unfortunately, some of the new believers in the church misunderstood the doctrine of Christ's return and gave up their jobs in order to wait for His coming. This meant that they were supported by other Christians, some of whom may not have had sufficient funds for their own families. It also meant that these fanatical people could not pay their bills, and therefore they lost their testimony with the unsaved merchants.

Read Luke 16:11 and record your thoughts here: _____

Churches and Christians who defend their orthodoxy but do not pay their bills have no orthodoxy to defend. "Mind your own business and work with your hands" was what Paul commanded them. Idle people spend their time interfering with the affairs of others and getting themselves and others into trouble.

Read 1 Peter 4:15 _____

Believers who are about the Father's business do not have the time or desire to meddle in the affairs of others. Unfortunately, even a Bible class could become an opportunity for gossip, and a substitute for true Christian service. As believers, we must be careful in our relationships with those outside the church. It requires spiritual grace and wisdom to have contact without contamination and to be different without being judgmental and proud.

Read Colossians 4:5 _____

If we lack this spiritual wisdom, we will do more harm than good. There are several good reasons why Christians should work, not the least of which is to provide for their own families. If unsaved people have to work to pay their bills, why should Christians be exempt? We also work in order to be able to give to those who have need. Read Paul's perspective in 2 Thessalonians 3:10: _____

Work is not a curse; it is a blessing. God gave Adam work to do in Paradise. It is the toil and sweat of work that belongs to the curse, and not the work itself. As we review this section, we see how practical the Christian walk really is. The obedient Christian will have a holy life by abstaining from sexual sin; a harmonious life by loving the brethren; and an honest life by working with his hands and not meddling in the affairs of others. When unsaved people see Christ magnified in this kind of a life, they will either oppose it with envy or desire to have it for themselves. Either way, God is glorified.

BODILY REDEMPTION

The Apostle Paul turned his attention to another area of deficiency in the Thessalonians' understanding, which had probably come to his attention through Timothy. Though Paul had already mentioned the future in this letter. But he turned to it again and devoted considerable space to instruction and exhortations dealing with Christ's return. The subject of the rest of chapter 4 is the relationship of the Lord's return to believers who had died. This is the classic passage in the Bible on the Rapture of the church.

Paul introduced these instructions in such a way as to lay no guilt on the Thessalonians for their lack of knowledge. After all, they were new believers. He again called them brothers, emphasizing their equality of standing before God despite their knowledge deficiency.

Those who fall asleep are Christians who die. The figure of sleep for death is common in the New Testament. Read Mark 5:39 and John 11:11 _____

This is not sleep of the soul, however, because Paul wrote elsewhere that a Christian who is absent from his body is present with the Lord. Read 2 Corinthians 5:8, Philippians 1:23 and 1 Thessalonians 5:10 for a more complete picture: _____

Paul here is speaking of the "sleep" of the unredeemed body in the earth until it is resurrected, changed into a glorious body, and reunited with the soul. Read 1 Corinthians 15:35-57 and 2 Corinthians 5:1-9 _____

Paul wanted the Thessalonians to be neither ignorant nor grieving like the rest of men, that is, like unbelievers, over the death of fellow believers. Christians do grieve over the loss of loved ones; this is a normal human experience which even Jesus shared (John 11:35).

But Paul's point is that the grief of Christians differs from that of unbelievers, who have no hope of bodily resurrection to glory with Christ.

Two reasons why Christians should not grieve like unbelievers are that Christians have a revelation from God that gives them hope and they have a glorious future with Christ. Just as certainly as Jesus died and was resurrected by the Father, so God will unite the resurrected dead in Christ with their Savior at His coming.

The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are among the best-attested facts of history. Since Christians know these events took place, they can be equally certain, Paul said, that the souls of believers who have died will return with Christ when He comes for His living saints. The prophecy of the Rapture is as sure to be fulfilled as the prophecies of Christ's death and resurrection.

The revelation of this resurrection came from Jesus Christ Himself. How it came to Paul is not known, but perhaps it was a direct revelation. Not only will the souls of the dead in Christ be with Him, but their bodies will also be resurrected at His coming in the clouds. The bodies of dead Christians will be resurrected immediately before living Christians are conveyed upward.

Clearly Paul believed that he and his Thessalonian readers might well be alive when the Lord returned. He believed that the Rapture was imminent, that it could take place at any moment. And this truth of imminency brought comfort.

This event is NOT the second coming of Christ. In the rapture, Christ comes for believers and calls to them from the clouds.

Jesus Christ now sits at the right hand of God in heaven. Read the following verses for verification:

Romans 8:34 _____

Ephesians 1:20 _____

Colossians 3:1 _____

Hebrews 1:3 _____

He will leave this position and descend to the earth. By the words the Lord Himself Paul emphasized that it would be the same Jesus who had ascended through the clouds.

At the rapture, we see the Jewish wedding custom being completed. The bridegroom came for the bride with a trumpet, a friend shouting "the bridegroom is coming" and then the shout of the bridegroom telling his bride to come to the place prepared for her. The bodies of the dead in Christ will rise before the living Christians are caught up to meet the Lord in the air.

After the bodies of dead Christians have been raised, those believers who are still alive will be caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Only a moment will separate the resurrection of the dead and the translation of the living. Read 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 for more information:

In Latin the word for "caught up" is rapturo, from which comes the term "Rapture." This is the Rapture of the church, when Christians are caught up to meet Christ in the clouds. Read Acts 1:9 for more information: _____

The events described here and in the parallel passage, 1 Corinthians 15, differ considerably from those that will accompany Christ's return to the earth to set up His earthly kingdom. Read Revelation 19:11-21 _____

There is a difference between the Rapture and the Second Coming. The resurrected or translated bodies of all Christians will be united with Christ and with each other at the Rapture. From that time on and forever thereafter they will be with the Lord.

WHAT ABOUT JUDGMENT?

The phrase "times and seasons" is found only three times in the Bible, and refers primarily to God's plans for Israel. This is the way Daniel stated it when God gave him understanding of the king's dream (Daniel 2:21) _____

Our Lord's use of the phrase in Acts 1:7 indicates that times and seasons reveal that God has a definite plan for the nations of the world. Prophecy teaches that Israel is the key nation.

God has ordained times and seasons for the nations on earth, particularly Israel; and all of this will culminate in a terrible time called "the Day of the Lord." In the Bible, the word *day* can refer to a twenty-four-hour period, or to a longer time during which God accomplishes some special purpose. In Genesis 2:3 the word means twenty-four hours, but in Genesis 2:4 it describes the entire week of Creation. The Day of the Lord is that time when God will judge the world and punish the nations. At the same time, God will prepare Israel for the return of Jesus Christ to the earth to establish His kingdom.

Dr. A.T. Pierson used to say, "History is His story." Quite a contrast to Napoleon's definition: "History is a set of lies agreed upon."

Read the following verses to get a more complete idea of this time:

Amos 5:18 _____

Joel 2:1 _____

Zephaniah 1:14-18 _____

Isaiah 2:12-21 _____

Another term for this period is "the time of Jacob's trouble" (Jeremiah 30:7). Many prophetic students also call it the Tribulation and point to Revelation 6-19 as the Scripture that most vividly describes this event.

Thief in the night is the imagery used by the Lord His own teaching concerning His coming. It describes the suddenness and the surprise involved in the coming of the Day of the Lord. He also used this image to warn believers not to be caught napping. Since we do not know when the Lord will return for His people,

we must live in a constant attitude of watching and waiting, while we are busy working and witnessing. Now we can put these three concepts together and discover what Paul wanted to teach his troubled friends in Thessalonica.

He had already told them about the coming of Christ for the church, the event described in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. Read these verses and describe the event in your own words: _____

He had told them that there would be a period of intense suffering and Tribulation on the earth following this Rapture of the church. These "times and seasons" that relate to Israel and the nations do not apply to the church or affect the truth of the Lord's coming for the church. He may come at any time, and this will usher in the Day of the Lord.

His emphasis in chapter five is simply that the believers were "in the know" while the unbelievers were living in ignorance of God's plan. The suddenness of these events will reveal to the world its ignorance of divine truth.

The unsaved world will be enjoying a time of false peace and security just before these cataclysmic events occur. Note carefully the contrast between "they" and "you" or "us" throughout this entire section, "they" referring to the unsaved.

The world is caught by surprise because men will not hear God's Word or heed God's warning. God warned that the Flood was coming, yet only eight people believed and were saved.

They will say, "Peace and safety!" but we will say, "Jesus is coming, and judgment is coming!"

Read 1 Peter 3:20 and record your thoughts here:

Lot warned his family that the city would be destroyed, but they would not listen Genesis 19:12-14 _____

Jesus warned His generation that Jerusalem would be destroyed (Luke 21:19), and this warning enabled believers to escape; but many others perished in the siege.

In fact, Jesus used the Flood and the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah as examples in Matthew 24 and Luke 17. People in those days were going about their regular daily activities—eating, drinking, getting married—and never considering that judgment was around the corner. Well-meaning people have tried to set dates for our Lord’s return, only to be embarrassed by their failures. However, it is possible to expect His coming without setting a specific time. No “signs” must be fulfilled before He can return for His church. Christians are “sons of the light” and therefore are not “in the dark” when it comes to future events.

Unbelievers ridicule the idea of Christ’s return. “Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming?’” Nearly twenty centuries have come and gone since our Lord gave the promise of His return, and He has not returned yet. This does not mean that God does not keep His promises. It simply means that God does not follow our calendar.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:3 and what Paul compared the coming judgment to:

Every mother knows that labor pains start out as light contractions. But they become more frequent and stronger. Isaiah used this same picture when he described the coming “Day of the Lord.”

Read Isaiah 13:6-13 _____

The early part of this Day of the Lord was called “the beginning of sorrows” by Jesus in Matthew 24:8. The Greek word translated “sorrows” actually means “birth pangs.”

What truth do Isaiah, Jesus, and Paul teach us? The truth that out of the Day of the Lord will come the birth of the kingdom. When God’s judgments are finished, God’s Son will return “with power and great glory.” Paul described this event in his second Letter to the Thessalonian Christians.

Live expectantly. This does not mean quitting your job and sitting on a mountain. That is the very attitude God condemned. Acts 1:10-11 _____

But it does mean living in the light of His return, realizing that our works will be judged and that our opportunities for service on earth will end. It means to live

“with eternity’s values in view.” There is a difference between being ready to go to heaven and being ready to meet the Lord. Anyone who has sincerely trusted Christ for salvation is ready to go to heaven. Christ’s sacrifice on the cross has taken care of that. But to be ready to meet the Lord at the Judgment Seat of Christ is quite another matter. Scripture indicates that some believers won’t be very proud of their actions when they stand before Jesus Christ!

Read 1 John 2:28 _____

Believers who live in the expectation of the Lord’s return will certainly enjoy a better life than Christians who compromise with the world. At the end of each chapter in this letter, Paul pointed out the practical results of living expectantly. Take time now to review those verses and to examine your heart.

To be sober-minded means to be alert, to live with your eyes open, to be sensible and steady. To make the contrast more vivid, Paul pictured two groups of people: one group was drunk and asleep, while the other group was awake and alert. Danger was coming, but the drunken sleepers were unaware of it. The alert crowd was ready and unafraid. Since we are “sons of the day” we should not live as those who belong to the darkness.

Read Romans 13:12-13 _____

In other words, because “the day” is approaching, it is time to wake up, clean up, and dress up. And when we dress up, we had better put on “the breastplate of faith and love: and for a helmet, the hope of salvation.” Only the “armor of light” (Romans 13:12) will adequately protect us in these last days before our Lord returns.

The sober-minded believer has a calm, sane outlook on life. He is not complacent, but neither is he frustrated and afraid. He hears the tragic news of the day, yet he does not lose heart. He experiences the difficulties of life, but he does not give up. He knows his future is secure in God’s hands, so he lives each day creatively, calmly, and obediently.

The unsaved people of the world are not alert. They are like drunken men, living in a false paradise and enjoying a false security. When

Outlook determines outcome; and when your outlook is uplook, then your outcome is secure.

When the Holy Spirit filled the first Christians at Pentecost, the unsaved people accused the Christians of being drunk . In reality, it is the unsaved who are living like drunken men. The sword of God’s wrath hangs over the world; yet people live godless lives, empty lives, and rarely if ever give any thought to eternal matters.

Faith, hope, and love are described as armor to protect us in this evil world. Faith and love are like a breastplate that covers the heart: faith toward God, and love toward God’s people. Hope is a sturdy helmet that protects the mind. The unsaved fix their minds on the things of this world, while dedicated believers set their attention on things above.

Paul knew that the Thessalonian believers were saved and he was certain that he and they would meet Christ in the air. The person who confidently says, “I know I am saved!” is not exhibiting pride; he is demonstrating faith in God’s Word.

First John was written to help us know that we are saved. There are actually three tenses to salvation:

- (1) *past*—I have been saved from the guilt and penalty of sin;
- (2) *present*—I am being saved from the power and pollution of sin;
- (3) *future*—I shall be saved from the very presence of sin when Christ returns.

The blessed hope of our Lord’s return is the “hope of salvation.” Unsaved people are without hope. This helps explain why they live as they do: “Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die!”

Paul used the word to sleep describe the death of the believer. The body goes to sleep and the spirit goes to be with the Lord. But in this section, sleep does not mean death. It means moral indifference and carelessness about spiritual things. Jesus used the word *sleep* with this meaning in Mark 13:32-37: _____

I am a “morning person;” my husband is an “evening person.” That is, some people are wide awake before the alarm clock rings. They hit the floor running, and never have to yawn or throw cold water in their faces. Others wake up slowly—first one eye, then the other—and then gradually shift gears as they move into the day. When it comes to the return of our Lord, we must all be

“morning people”—awake, alert, sober, and ready for the dawning of that wonderful new day. But, for the unsaved crowd, reveling in its drunkenness, the coming of Jesus Christ will mean the end of light and the beginning of eternal darkness.

There is coming a time when people on earth will experience God’s wrath. God will judge those on earth for their iniquity.

Read Isaiah 26:20-21 _____

The sin that separated believers from God has already been dealt with at the cross

We know that Paul lived in the expectation of seeing Christ, for he used the pronouns *we* and *us* in discussing this doctrine in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11. The Apostle John had this same attitude. He closed his book with the prayer, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (Revelation 22:20).

SEVEN EXAMPLES

In addition to its prophetic message concerning the end of the age, the book of Revelation gives pertinent information to the churches today. Today we are going to consider the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3. We will compare them to what Paul was writing to the church in

EPHESUS: Paul had spent nearly three years in Ephesus. Now comes the word of the Lord to the church. They were commended for their hard work, perseverance and condemnation of wicked men and identification of false apostles. As we read, we will find that false teachers were present in each of the first four churches. The church in Ephesus was also commended for enduring hardships and not growing weary in serving God. It is now 40 years since the church was founded and they are still faithful.

In spite of the many areas of commendation, the church in Ephesus was soundly rebuked: Yet I have this against you: you have forsaken your first love. The order of words in the Greek is emphatic; the clause could be translated, "Your first love you have left." Christ used the word *agape*, speaking of the deep kind of love that God has for people. This rebuke contrasts with what Paul wrote the Ephesians 35 years earlier, that he never stopped giving thanks for them because of their faith in Christ and their love (*agape*) for the saints. Most of the Ephesian Christians were now second-generation believers, and though they had retained purity of doctrine and life and had maintained a high level of service, they were lacking in deep devotion to Christ.

The church today needs to heed this same warning, that orthodoxy and service are not enough. Christ wants believers' hearts as well as their hands and heads.

SMYRNA: What a comfort it was to the Christians in Smyrna to know that Christ knew all about their sufferings: I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! Besides suffering persecution, they were also enduring extreme poverty. Though extremely poor, they were rich in the wonderful promises Christ had given them. They were being persecuted not only by pagan Gentiles but also by hostile Jews and by Satan himself. Jesus calls the synagogue there synagogue of Satan. Notice how many times Satan is mentioned in the seven letters. In the history of the church the most severe persecution has come from religious people.

It is notable that there was no rebuke whatever for these faithful, suffering Christians. This is in striking contrast with Christ's evaluations of five of the other six churches, which He rebuked. Smyrna's sufferings, though extremely difficult, had helped keep them pure in faith and life.

PERGAMUM: Following the same order as in the two preceding letters, commendation is given first. Christ recognized the difficulty of their situation. They lived where Satan had his throne. By the time of this writing, the Babylonian cult religions had relocated to Pergamum (in modern Turkey). Later they would relocate to Rome after Constantine established his capital in Constantinople. (Turkey)

However, they had been guilty of severe compromise by holding the teaching of Balaam and the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Balaam had been guilty of counseling King Balak to cause Israel to sin through intermarriage with heathen women and through idol worship. Read Numbers 22-25 and 31:15-16: _____

Intermarriage with heathen women was a problem in Pergamum where any social contact with the world also involved worship of idols. Usually meat in the marketplace had been offered to idols earlier.

They were also condemned for following the Nicolaitans' teaching. Earlier the Ephesian church had been commended for rejecting what appears to be a moral departure. Some Greek manuscripts add here that God hates the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Compromise with worldly morality and pagan doctrine was prevalent in the church, especially in the third century when Christianity became popular. So compromise with pagan morality and departure from biblical faith soon corrupted the church.

At the very least, the Nicolaitans disobeyed the command issued to the Gentile churches, by the apostolic council held at Jerusalem in 49-50 AD, that they should refrain from the eating of "things sacrificed to idols." Read Acts 15:29: _____

THYATIRA: The biblical "Jezebel" was not a prophetess, but the name is used here for its related connotations. Jezebel had nine hundred prophets (1 Kings 18:19) and led God's people into idolatry. She was accused of harlotry, a damaging charge against a king's wife (the term was probably meant spiritually, as one who led Israel from their commitment to God), and of witchcraft, no doubt for her occult involvement in pagan cults. Read 2 Kings 9:22 _____

As a harlot she becomes the prototype of the evil empire of Revelation 17-18. Some scholars believe that Thyatira was one of the Asian cities with an oracle of the Sibyl; this cult purported to involve female prophetesses and its literary forms had come to be used by Diaspora Judaism. Jewish Sibylline oracles may at any rate have influenced the style and thinking of "Jezebel"; later Christian sources mention the Sibyl's prophecies frequently.

The compromises with sin here might be related to the imperial cult, although such compromises were less prominent in Thyatira than in some of the previously mentioned cities. It is known that the imperial cult employed some priestesses in first-century Asia Minor; but even if Jezebel was advocating compromise with the cult, it is unlikely that she could have had any credibility with Christians while being a priestess in it.

SARDIS: This city located about 30 miles southeast of Thyatira, on an important trade route that ran east and west through the kingdom of Lydia. Important industries included jewelry, dye, and textiles, which had made the city wealthy. From a religious standpoint it was a center of pagan worship and site of a temple of Artemis, which ruins still remain. Only a small village called Sart remains on the site of this once-important city. Archeologists have located the ruins of a Christian church building next to the temple.

The only word of approval is in actuality a word of rebuke as Christ declared that they had a reputation for being alive and apparently were regarded by their contemporaries as an effective church.

Christ quickly stripped away their reputation of being alive by declaring them dead. Like the Pharisees, their outer appearance was a facade hiding their lack of life. Christ added, I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of My God. They were falling far short of fulfilling their obligations as believers.

They were exhorted to wake up from their spiritual slumber and to strengthen the few evidences of life they still had. He exhorted them to remember... obey... and repent. He warned them that if they did not heed this exhortation, He would come on them like a thief, that is, suddenly and unexpectedly.

PHILADELPHIA: The city of Philadelphia was 28 miles southeast of Sardis. It was located in an area noted for its agricultural products but afflicted with earthquakes which destroyed the city several times, most recently about 37 AD. It must have been tremendously encouraging to know that God had a city prepared for them.

Philadelphia was named for a king of Pergamum, Attalus Philadelphus, who had built it. "Philadelphus" is similar to the Greek word philadelphia, meaning "brotherly love," which occurs seven times in the Bible. Only here is it used of the city itself. Christian testimony continues in the city in this present century.

Christ described Himself as the One who is holy and true, who holds the key of David, and who is able to open or shut a door which no one else could open or shut. The holiness of Christ is a frequent truth in Scripture), and being holy He is worthy to judge the spiritual life of the Philadelphia church. "The key of David" seems to refer to Isaiah 22:22, where the key of the house of David was given to Eliakim who then had access to all the wealth of the king. Christ earlier had been described as the One who holds "the keys of death and hades." Revelation 1:18. The reference here, however, seems to be to spiritual treasures.

LAODICEA: Laodicea lacked a natural water supply. Water piped in from hot springs six miles to the south, arrived lukewarm by the time it reached Laodicea. Although water could be heated, the natural lukewarmness of the water combined with the dissolved minerals was undoubtedly a standard complaint of local residents, most of whom had an otherwise comfortable lifestyle.

Laodicea was a prosperous banking center; proud of its wealth, it refused Roman disaster relief after the earthquake of 60 AD, rebuilding from its own resources. It was also known for its textiles (especially wool) and for its medical school and production of ear medicine and undoubtedly the highly reputed Phrygian eye salve. Everything in which Laodicea could have confidence outwardly, its church, which reflected its culture, lacked spiritually.

To this city, Jesus said: you're a banking center but you're poor
you produce clothing but you're naked
you produce eye salve but you're blind

CHOOSING LEADERS

Godly leaders are God's gifts to the church. They have spiritual authority from the Lord and we should accept them in the Lord. They are not dictators, but leaders and examples. As they follow the Lord, we must follow them. That is the meaning of the exhortation "know them who labor among you."

There is nothing wrong with honoring faithful servants of God, so long as God gets the glory. Spiritual leadership is a great responsibility and a difficult task. It is not easy to serve as a pastor, elder, deacon, or other spiritual leader. The battles and burdens are many, and sometimes the encouragements are few. It is dangerous when a church family takes their leaders for granted and fails to pray for them, work with them, and encourage them.

As brothers, the leaders are "among us"; and as leaders, they are "over us in the Lord." This could be a very strained relationship apart from true Christian love. For a pastor to be "among" and "over" at the same time demands grace and the power of the Spirit. If he gets out of balance, his ministry will be weakened and possibly destroyed. Some church members want their pastor to be a buddy, but this weakens his authority. On the other hand, if he emphasizes *only* his authority, he could become a selfish dictator.

Read Hebrews 13:17 and record what you learn: _____

This does not mean that every spiritual leader is always right in everything. Abraham, Moses, David, and even Peter made mistakes. A wise pastor knows he is made of clay and admits when he is wrong or when he needs expert counsel.

But, in spite of their limitations, God's spiritual leaders should be respected and obeyed—unless it is obvious that they are out of God's will. As the spiritual leaders of the church meet together, plan, pray, and seek and follow God's will, we can be sure that God will rule and overrule in the decisions they make. The result of the church family following the spiritual leaders will be peace and harmony in the church.

Record the admonition in 1 Thessalonians 5:13 _____

When you find division and dissension in a local church, it is usually because of selfishness and sin on the part of the leaders, or the members, or both.

Read James 4:1-3 _____

Leaders alone cannot do all of the work of the ministry; so Paul added a second essential: the value of body life.

Paul cautions against the unruly. This word means "careless or out of line." It was applied to a soldier who would not keep rank but insisted on marching his own way. While the loving atmosphere of the family encourages individual development, there are some things we all must do in the same way. If we do not have rules and standards in the family, we have chaos.

As a parent, it is a joy to see each child blossom out with his or her own personality, talents, and ambitions. But it is a sorrow to see a child rebel against the rules, abandon the traditions and standards, and think that this kind of lifestyle shows freedom and maturity. This kind of attitude in the church family causes arguments and splits.

1 Thessalonians 5:14 has a word translated variously feeble-minded or fainthearted. Do a word study on this and record your results: _____

These are the quitters in the church family. They always look on the dark side of things and give up when the going is tough. Instead of scolding the fainthearted from a distance, we must get close to them and speak tenderly. We must teach them that the trials of life will help to enlarge them and make them stronger in the faith.

There is also an admonition for weak believers. Certainly, Paul did not mean people who were weak physically, since he was dealing with the spiritual ministry in the church. He was referring to those who were "weak in the faith" and had not grown strong in the Lord.

Read Romans 14:1-15:3 _____

Usually, the weak Christians were afraid of their liberty in Christ. They lived by rules and regulations. In the Roman assemblies, the weak Christians would not eat meat, and they held to the Jewish system of holy days. They were severe in their judgment of the mature saints who enjoyed all foods and all days. We have the strong and the weak in our church families today, just as in our natural families we have children who mature faster than others. How should we handle them? With patient, reassuring love. It is unfair and unwise to compare one child with another, for each one matures in his own time and his own way. We must help them stand and walk in the Lord. This kind of personal ministry is not easy, and so Paul added some wise counsel to encourage us.

Be patient! It takes patience to raise a family. (where's the AMEN on that one?) The weaker person who demands a lot of input might one day be a choice leader, so never give up.

Often as we minister to others, they reject us and even oppose us. Often they show no appreciation. But we should always serve in love, and be ready to forgive.

Read Romans 12:17-21 _____

If your motive is a desire for appreciation and praise, you may be disappointed. If your motive is service, you won't ever be disappointed.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:5 _____

Joy takes the burden out of service.

Read Nehemiah 8:10 for his perspective: _____

If God loves a cheerful giver, He is crazy about a cheerful servant! God wants His family to be happy, and that means that each member must contribute to the joy. The four spiritual characteristics Paul mentioned in 1 Thessalonians 5, are part of the fruit of the Spirit named in Galatians 5:22 _____

Love (1 Thessalonians 5:13)
Joy (1 Thessalonians 5:16)
Peace (1 Thessalonians 5:13)
Long-suffering (1 Thessalonians 5:14).

We cannot manufacture these spiritual qualities; they only come as we yield to the Spirit and permit Him to control us.

Body life is an important spiritual concept. Body-life refers to the ministry of each Christian to the others, just as the various members of the human body minister to one another to maintain health and life. Family members must learn to minister to each other. The older members teach the younger members and encourage them when they are in difficulty.

Are you bearing your share of the burdens, or are you merely a spectator who watches the others do the job?

Read Titus 2:3-5 _____

According to Ephesians 4:12, the spiritual leaders in the church are supposed to equip the members to do the work of the ministry. In most churches, the members pay the leaders to do the work of the ministry; and the leaders cannot do it all. Consequently, the work begins to weaken and die, and everybody blames the pastor. The church only functions appropriately when each member of the body contributes to its well-being.

Prayer was important in the early church. Read the following verses, recording your thoughts:

1 Corinthians 11:1-6 _____

Acts 1:13-14 and 4:23 _____

It is a high and holy experience when the church unites in prayer. "Pray without ceasing" does not mean we must always be mumbling prayers. The word means "constantly recurring," not continuously occurring.

Thanksgiving is also a vital element of worship.

Read Ephesians 5:19 and record some of the ways this happens: _____

As we grow in our application of the Word of God, we must also grow in our expression of praise. The two go together. Read Colossians 3:16 _____

If a local church is “growing in grace” the members will want to sing hymns in praise to God. If the heart and head do not keep pace with each other, Christian worship becomes either juvenile or hypocritical.

Apart from God’s Word, we have no certain revelation from the Lord. Worship that ignores the Bible is not spiritual. There may be emotion—and even commotion—but unless there is *spiritual truth*, the Holy Spirit is not at work.

The early church did not have a completed Bible as we do. The Holy Spirit gave the gift of prophecy to certain members of the church and would speak the message through them. These early prophets preached the truth *immediately* as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. Their spiritual knowledge was given to them by the Spirit, and often they spoke in a tongue. This is why the three gifts of prophecy, tongues, and knowledge are grouped together in 1 Corinthians 13.

Of course, there are dangers in this kind of ministry, because Satan (or the flesh) could seek to counterfeit a message from God, and thus lead the church astray. If the church restrained the speakers, they might be guilty of quenching the Spirit. If they believed all that was spoken, they might be obeying false spirits. The answer was to “prove all things.” There must be a discerning of the spirits.

1 Corinthians 12:10 _____

1 John 4:1-4 _____

Paul gave specific rules for this in 1 Corinthians 14:29-33 _____

When the Holy Spirit is at work in our lives and churches, we have a warmth of love in our hearts, light for our minds, and energy for our wills. There will be harmony and cooperation; and He purifies us so that we put away sin.

Do a word study on "quench" in 5:19 _____

Read also 2 Timothy 1:6 _____

Beware of a false spirit that can lead you or the church astray. Follow the Word of God and prove all things.

Paul emphasized balance in Christian living: the negative—"Abstain from all appearance of evil" (1 Thessalonians 5:22) and the positive—"And the very God of peace sanctify you" (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

Some churches only preach the negative, and this leads to lives and ministries that are out of balance.

Do a word study on sanctification _____

Read Hebrews 10:10 _____

2 Corinthians 7:1 _____

1 John 3:2 _____

Fellowship is a part of worship. The "holy kiss" was not a sensual thing. Usually the men kissed the men, and the women kissed the women.

Romans 16:16 _____

1 Corinthians 16:20 _____

1 Peter 5:14 _____

Paul ended with another reminder that the Word of God is the important thing in the local church. The Word must govern our conduct and guide our lives. We are to read the Word personally, but we also need to hear the Word in the fellowship of the local church, for the one experience helps balance the other. Leadership in the church bears the responsibility of seeing that this actually happens.

EVIL DOESN'T STOP

Paul wrote the second letter to the Thessalonians from Corinth less than a year after he wrote 1 Thessalonians. He and his companions, Timothy and Silas, had visited Thessalonica on Paul's second missionary journey.

Review by reading Acts 17:1-10 _____

They established the church there, but Paul had to leave suddenly because of persecution. This prompted him to write his first letter, 1 Thessalonians, which contains words of comfort and encouragement. Paul then heard how the Thessalonians had responded to this letter.

The good news was that they were continuing to grow in their faith. But the bad news was that false teachings about Christ's return were spreading, leading many to quit their jobs and wait for the end of the world. So Paul wrote to them again.

Regardless of the contents of Paul's letters, his style was affirming. Paul began most of his letters by stating what he most appreciated about his readers and the joy he felt because of their faith in God. We also should look for ways to encourage and build up other believers.

While the purpose of Paul's first letter was to comfort the Thessalonians with the assurance of Christ's second coming, the purpose of his second letter is to correct false teaching about the second coming.

The keys to surviving persecution and trials are perseverance and faith. When we are faced with crushing troubles, we can have faith that God is using our trials for our good and for his glory. Knowing that God is fair and just will give us patience in our suffering because we know that He has not forgotten us.

Paul had clearly been persecuted during his first visit to Thessalonica. Reread Acts 17:5-9 _____

No doubt those who had responded to his message and had become Christians were continuing to be persecuted by both Jews and Gentiles. In Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, he said that Christ's return would bring deliverance from

persecution and judgment on the persecutors. But this caused the people to expect Christ's return right away to rescue and vindicate them. So Paul had to point out that while waiting for God's kingdom, believers could and should learn perseverance and faith from their suffering.

As we live for Christ, we will experience troubles because we are trying to be God's people in a perverse world. Some people say that troubles are the result of sin or lack of faith, but Paul teaches that they may be a part of God's plan for believers. Our problems can help us look upward and forward, instead of inward.

Mark 13:35-36 _____

Philippians 3:13-14 _____

They can also build strong character.

Romans 5:3-4 _____

And they can provide us with opportunities to comfort others who also are struggling.

2 Corinthians 1:3-5 _____

Your troubles may be an indication that you are taking a stand for Christ.

There are two dimensions of the relief mentioned by Paul.

1. We can gain relief in knowing that our sufferings are strengthening us, making us ready for Christ's kingdom.
2. We can also gain relief in the fact that one day everyone will stand before God; at that time, wrongs will be righted, judgment will be pronounced, and evil will be terminated.

The "everlasting destruction" that Paul describes is the lake of fire. Read Revelation 20:14 _____

People sent to the lake of fire are separated from God for eternity and no longer have any hope of being saved.

The exact date of Christ's return is not known, of course, but it will be a day of judgment for the lost and a day of glory and marveling for believers. Christ will be "glorified in" (not *by*) His saints, that is, His glory will be mirrored in them.

Of course, Paul is quick to point out that the Thessalonian believers to whom he wrote this epistle were included! Because they believed what Paul had taught them, they would share in this great day. Such a hope should strengthen any believer who might be buckling under the pressure of persecution by unbelievers. This glimpse into the future undoubtedly encouraged Paul's readers and it should encourage believers in their trials today.

Our calling from God is to become like Christ.

Read Romans 8:29 _____

This is a gradual, lifelong process that will be completed when we see Christ face to face.

1 John 3:2 _____

To be "worthy" of this calling means to *want* to do what is right and good (as Christ would). We aren't perfect yet, but we're moving in that direction as God works in us.

A LOOK AT TIMING

Paul appealed to them to “chill” on the basis of the truth he had taught them in his first letter: the Lord would return and catch up His own to meet Him in the air. As we saw previously, this is not the second coming, but is the event Christians call “the rapture.” Depending on your interpretation, the rapture happens sometime either immediately before or during the final seven years known as the tribulation.

During these last seven years, Satan and his forces will unfold their program. The Day of the Lord is the period of tremendous trouble on earth. It will be a time of Tribulation. Satan and his hosts will be working on earth, knowing that their time is short.

God will send righteous judgments from heaven.

Daniel chapter 9 and Revelation 6-19 describes this period for us. Read through these sections and record what you learn of the timeline here: _____

During this seven year period, the man of lawlessness arises. We know this person better as “the antichrist.” He is assisted by a “false prophet” and together with Satan, the “false father” Satan has set up his end-time trinity.

Throughout history there have been individuals who epitomized evil and who were hostile to everything Christ stands for.

1 John 2:18 _____

John 4:3 _____

2 John 1:7 _____

These antichrists have lived in every generation and will continue to work their evil. Then just before Christ's second coming, the antichrist, the man of lawlessness, the man doomed to destruction, a completely evil man, will arise. He will be Satan's tool, equipped with Satan's power.

It is dangerous, however, to label any person as the antichrist and to try to predict Christ's coming based on that assumption. Paul mentions the antichrist, not so we might identify him specifically, but so we might be ready for anything that threatens our faith. If our faith is strong, we don't need to be afraid of what lies ahead, because we know that this lawless man has already been defeated by God, no matter how powerful he becomes or how terrible our situation seems. God is in control, and he will be victorious over the antichrist. Our task is to be prepared for Christ's return and to spread the gospel so that even more people will also be prepared.

When Paul first wrote to the Thessalonians, they were in danger of losing hope in the second coming. Then they shifted to the opposite extreme—some of them thought that Jesus would be coming at any minute. Paul tried to restore the balance by describing certain events that would happen before Christ's return.

In spite of its weakness and seeming failure, never underestimate the importance of the church in the world. People who criticize the church do not realize that the presence of the people of God in this world gives unsaved people opportunity to be saved.

There are two programs at work in the world today: God's program of salvation, and Satan's program of sin, "the mystery of iniquity." God has a timetable for His program, and nothing Satan does can change that timetable.

Just as there was a "fullness of the time" for the coming of Christ, so there is a "fullness of the time" for the appearance of Antichrist; and nothing will be off schedule. Once the restraining ministry of the Spirit of God has ended, the next event can take place.

Read Galatians 4:4 _____

Paul did not use the term *Antichrist* in his letter. This term is used in the New Testament only by John.

1 John 2:18, 22 _____

1 John 4:3 _____

2 John 7 _____

But this is the name we use to identify the last great world dictator whom Paul designated as "that man of sin," "the son of perdition" and "that lawless one."

Satan has been at war with God ever since he rebelled against God and tried to capture God's throne.

Read Isaiah 14:12-15 _____

He tempted Eve in the Garden and, through her, caused Adam to fall.

Read Genesis 3 and record each act by Satan: _____

In Genesis 3:15, God declared war on Satan and his family ("seed") and promised the coming of the Redeemer who would finally and completely defeat Satan. The Greek prefix *anti* has two meanings: *against*, and *instead of*. Satan not only opposes Christ, but he wants to be worshiped and obeyed *instead of* Christ.

Satan has always wanted to be worshiped and served as God.

Compare Isaiah 14:14 with Luke 4:5-8 _____

He will one day produce his masterpiece, the Antichrist, who will cause the world to worship Satan and believe Satan's lies. Paul had explained all of this to the believers in Thessalonica, referring them, no doubt, to the relevant Scriptures in the Old Testament. We are fortunate to have the entire Bible to study, so we can get the total picture of Antichrist and his career. Prophetic students may not agree on every detail; but the main facts, when they are related, give us the following description of Antichrist in the last days.

- Sometime during the final seven years the church will be raptured.
- There is a final seven years of tribulation.
- At the end of the seven years, Jesus returns.

It is important that we distinguish His Rapture of the church from His return to the earth. It is important to believe that these are actual events, not literary devices used to describe something that is only spiritual. Only when we have a firm grasp of God's entire plan will we understand the enormity of these events.

THE POWER OF THE TRUTH

Paul consistently taught that salvation begins and ends with God. We can do nothing to be saved on our own merit—we must accept God’s gift of salvation. There is no other way to receive forgiveness from sin. Paul is encouraging the Thessalonian believers by reminding them that they were chosen by God from the beginning. *Sanctification* is the process of Christian growth through which the Holy Spirit makes us like Christ. Read Romans 8:29 _____

Paul knew that the Thessalonians would face pressure from persecutions, false teachers, worldliness, and apathy to waver from the truth and to leave the faith. So he urged them to “stand firm” and hold on to the truth they had been taught both through his letters and in person. We also may face persecution, false teachings, worldliness, and apathy.

Beneath the surface of the routine of daily life, a fierce struggle among invisible spiritual powers is being waged. Our main defense is the sword of the Spirit and prayer that God will protect us from the evil one and that he will strengthen us.

We should hold on to the truth of Christ’s teachings because our lives depend on it. Never forget the reality of Christ’s life and love!

Read Ephesians 6:10-19 concerning our armor for spiritual warfare. _____

The following guidelines can help you prepare for and survive satanic attacks:

- (1) take the threat of spiritual attack seriously
- (2) pray for strength and help from God
- (3) study the Bible to recognize Satan’s style and tactics
- (4) memorize Scripture so it will be a source of help no matter where you are
- (5) associate with those who speak the truth
- (6) practice what you are taught by spiritual leaders.

An additional reason for confidence was the conviction that the Thessalonians would continue to obey the instructions of Paul and his cohorts in this letter. The missionaries were not relying on their readers’ inherent power to do what was

right; their confidence was that since the believers were in Christ, the Lord would work in them to react favorably to this epistle.

The prayer in 3:5 expressed the apostles' petition that Jesus Christ would open up the way for the readers to obey out of a growing appreciation of God's love for them and a consequently greater love for God, as well as increasing endurance in the midst of trials which the Lord's example of perseverance stimulates within the hearts of believers.

Do a word study on the word translated perseverance and record the results here: _____

Cross reference to Hebrews 12:1-2 _____

Meditation on the love of God and the patient endurance of Christ motivates Christians to obey His Word and to endure trials patiently.

Do a word study on "direct" in 3:5 and record the results here: _____

May the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the steadfastness of Christ.

Paul addresses in the last portion of 2 Thessalonians to lazy believers. Paul explained that when he and his companions were in Thessalonica, they worked hard, buying what they needed rather than becoming a burden to any of the believers. The rule they followed was, "If a man will not work, he shall not eat." We should make the most of our talent and time, doing all we can to provide for ourselves and our dependents. Rest when you should be resting, and work when you should be working.

Some people in the Thessalonian church were falsely teaching that because Christ would return any day, people should set aside their responsibilities, quit work, do no future

There's a difference between leisure and laziness. Relaxation and recreation provide a necessary and much needed balance to our lives; but when it is time to work, Christians should jump right in.

planning, and just wait for the Lord. But their lack of activity only led them into sin. They became a burden to the church, which was supporting them; they wasted time that could have been used for helping others; and they became “busybodies.”

These church members may have thought that they were being more spiritual by not working, but Paul tells them to be responsible and get back to work. Being ready for Christ means obeying him in every area of life. Because we know that Christ is coming, we must live in such a way that our faith and our daily practice will please him when he arrives.

A “busybody” is a gossip. An idle person who doesn’t work ends up filling his or her time with less than helpful activities, like gossip. Rumors and hearsay are tantalizing, exciting to hear, and make us feel like insiders. But they tear people down.

If you often find your nose in other people’s business,
you may be underemployed. Look for a task to do for
Christ or for your family, and get to work.

Paul counseled the church to stop supporting financially and associating with those who persisted in their idleness. Hunger and loneliness can be very effective ways to make the idle person become productive. Paul was not advising coldness or cruelty, but the kind of tough love that a person would show a brother or sister.

The synagogue community enforced different levels of discipline, which the churches largely adopted. Even under later rabbinical rules, which allowed less diversity of practice than was common in Paul’s day, full excommunication involved treating the person as an infidel and bringing him under a curse.

Read the following verses and record what you learn:

1 Timothy 1:20 _____

1 Corinthians 5:5 _____

Matthew 18:15-20 _____

In law courts, lawyers often had to argue that documents were forgeries. In Paul's day, many writers used scribes and signed their names at the end. Paul often follows this practice elsewhere in his letters.

1 Corinthians 16:21

Since there were false teachers emerging in the church, Paul may have been concerned about false or forged letters as well. The Thessalonians were learning how to distinguish truth from error and learning to value what it means to stand for truth.