

AN EXPOSITION, WITH PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS, OF

THE FIRST EPISTLE OF ST. PAUL TO

THE THESSALONIANS

This epistle is generally considered to have been the first of those written by St. Paul. The occasion seems to have been the good report of the steadfastness of the church at Thessalonica in the faith of the gospel. It is full of affection and confidence, and more consolatory and practical, and less doctrinal, than some of the other epistles.

CHAPTER 1

The faith, love, and patience of the Thessalonians, are evident tokens of their election which was manifested in the power with which the gospel came to them. (1-5) Its powerful and exemplary effects upon their hearts and lives. (6-10)

1 Thessalonians 1:1

Vs. 1-5: As all good comes from God, so no good can be hoped for by sinners, but from God in Christ. And the best good may be expected from God, as our Father, for the sake of Christ. We should pray, not only for ourselves, but for others also; remembering them without ceasing. Wherever there is a true faith, it will work; it will affect both the heart and life. Faith works by love; it shows itself in love to God, and love to our neighbor. And wherever there is a well-grounded hope of eternal life, this will appear by the exercise of patience; and it is a sign of sincerity, when in all we do, we seek to approve ourselves to God. By this we may know our election, if we not only speak of the things of God with our lips, but feel their power in our hearts, mortifying our lusts, weaning us from the world, and raising us up to heavenly things. Unless the Spirit of God comes with the word of God, it will be to us a dead letter. Thus they

entertained it by the power of the Holy Ghost. They were fully convinced of the truth of it, so as not to be shaken in mind by objections and doubts; and they were willing to leave all for Christ, and to venture their souls and everlasting condition upon the truth of the gospel revelation.

1 Thessalonians 1:6

Vs. 6-10: When careless, ignorant, and immoral persons are turned from their carnal pursuits and connections, to believe in and obey the Lord Jesus, to live soberly, righteously, and godly, the matter speaks for itself. The believers under the Old Testament waited for the coming of the Messiah, and believers now wait for his second coming. He is yet to come. And God had raised him from the dead, which is a full assurance unto all men that he will come to judgment. He came to purchase salvation, and will, when he comes again, bring salvation with him, full and final deliverance from that wrath which is yet to come. Let all, without delay, flee from the wrath to come, and seek refuge in Christ and his salvation.

CHAPTER 2

The apostle reminds the Thessalonians of his preaching and behavior. (1-12) And of their receiving the gospel as the word of God. (13-16) His joy on their account. (17-20)

1 Thessalonians 2:1

Vs. 1-6: The apostle had no worldly design in his preaching. Suffering in a good cause should sharpen holy resolution. The gospel of Christ at first met with much opposition; and it was preached with contention, with striving in preaching, and against opposition. And as the matter of the apostle's exhortation was true and pure, the manner of his speaking was without guile. The gospel of Christ is designed for mortifying corrupt affections, and that men may be brought under the power of faith. This is the great motive to sincerity, to consider that God not only sees all we do, but knows our thoughts afar off, and searches the heart. And it is from this God who trieth our hearts, that we must receive our reward. The evidences of the apostle's sincerity were, that he avoided flattery and covetousness. He avoided ambition and vain-glory.

1 Thessalonians 2:7

Vs. 7-12: Mildness and tenderness greatly recommend religion, and are most conformable to God's gracious dealing with sinners, in and by the gospel. This is the way to win people. We should not only be faithful to our calling as Christians, but in our particular callings and relations. Our great gospel privilege is, that God has called us to his kingdom and glory. The great gospel duty is, that we walk worthy of God. We should live as becomes those called with such a high and holy calling. Our great business is to honor, serve, and please God, and to seek to be worthy of him.

1 Thessalonians 2:13

Vs. 13-16: We should receive the word of God with affections suitable to its holiness, wisdom, truth, and goodness. The words of men are frail and perishing, like themselves, and sometimes false, foolish, and fickle; but God's word is holy, wise, just, and faithful. Let us receive and regard it

accordingly. The word wrought in them, to make them examples to others in faith and good works, and in patience under sufferings, and in trials for the sake of the gospel. Murder and persecution are hateful to God, and no zeal for any thing in religion can excuse it. Nothing tends more to any person or people's filling up the measure of their sins, than opposing the gospel, and hindering the salvation of souls. The pure gospel of Christ is abhorred by many, and the faithful preaching of it is hindered in many ways. But those who forbid the preaching it to sinners, to men dead in sin, do not by this please God. Those have cruel hearts, and are enemies to the glory of God, and to the salvation of his people, who deny them the Bible.

1 Thessalonians 2:17

Vs. 17-20: This world is not a place where we are to be always, or long together. In heaven holy souls shall meet, and never part more. And though the apostle could not come to them yet, and though he might never be able to come, yet our Lord Jesus Christ will come; nothing shall hinder that. May God give faithful ministers to all who serve him with their spirit in the gospel of his Son, and send them to all who are in darkness

CHAPTER 3

The apostle sent Timothy to establish and comfort the Thessalonians (1-5) He rejoiced at the good tidings of their faith and love. (6-10) And for their increase in grace. (11-13)

1 Thessalonians 3:1

Vs. 1-5: The more we find pleasure in the ways of God, the more we shall desire to persevere therein. The apostle's design was to establish and comfort the Thessalonians as to the object of their faith, that Jesus Christ was the Savior of the world; and as to the recompense of faith, which was more than enough to make up all their losses, and to reward all their labors. But he feared his labors would be in vain. If the devil cannot hinder ministers from laboring in the word and doctrine, he will, if possible, hinder the success of their labors. No one would willingly labor in vain. It is the will and purpose of God, that we enter into his kingdom through many afflictions. And the apostles, far from flattering people with the expectation of worldly prosperity in religion, told them plainly they must count upon trouble in the flesh. Herein they followed the example of their great Master, the Author of our faith. Christians were in danger, and they should be forewarned; they will thus be kept from being improved by any devices of the tempter.

1 Thessalonians 3:6

Vs. 6-10: Thankfulness to God is very imperfect in the present state; but one great end of the ministry of the word is to help faith forward. That which was the instrument to obtain faith, is also the means of increasing and confirming it, namely, the ordinances of God; and as faith cometh by hearing, so it is confirmed by hearing also.

1 Thessalonians 3:11

Vs. 11-13: Prayer is religious worship, and all religious worship is due unto God only. Prayer is to be offered to God as our Father. Prayer is not only to be offered in the name of Christ, but offered up to Christ himself, as our Lord and our Savior. Let us acknowledge God in all our ways, and

he will direct our paths. Mutual love is required of all Christians. And love is of God, and is fulfilling the gospel as well as the law. We need the Spirit's influences in order to our growth in grace; and the way to obtain them, is prayer. Holiness is required of all who would go to heaven; and we must act so that we do not contradict the profession we make of holiness. The Lord Jesus will certainly come in his glory; his saints will come with him. Then the excellence as well as the necessity of holiness will appear; and without this no hearts shall be established at that day, nor shall any avoid condemnation.

CHAPTER 4

Exhortations to purity and holiness. (1-8) To brotherly love, peaceable behavior, and diligence. (9-12) Not to sorrow unduly for the death of godly relations and friends, considering the glorious resurrection of their bodies at Christ's second coming. (13-18)

1 Thessalonians 4:1

Vs. 1-8: To abide in the faith of the gospel is not enough, we must abound in the work of faith. The rule according to which all ought to walk and act, is the commandments given by the Lord Jesus Christ. Sanctification, in the renewal of their souls under the influences of the Holy Spirit, and attention to appointed duties, constituted the will of God respecting them. In aspiring after this renewal of the soul unto holiness, strict restraint must be put upon the appetites and senses of the body, and on the thoughts and inclinations of the will, which lead to wrong uses of them. The Lord calls none into his family to live unholy lives, but that they may be taught and enabled to walk before him in holiness. Some make light of the precepts of holiness, because they hear them from men; but they are God's commands, and to break them is to despise God.

1 Thessalonians 4:9

Vs. 9-12: We should notice in others what is good, to their praise, that we may engage them to abound therein more and more. All who are savingly taught of God, are taught to love one another. The teaching of the Spirit exceeds the teachings of men; and men's teaching is vain and useless, unless God teach. Those remarkable for this or any other grace, need to increase therein, as well as to persevere to the end. It is very desirable to have a calm and quiet temper, and to be of a peaceable and quiet behavior. Satan is busy to trouble us; and we have in our hearts what disposes us to be unquiet; therefore let us study to be quiet. Those who are busy-bodies, meddling in other men's matters, have little quiet in their own minds, and cause great disturbances among their neighbors. They seldom mind the other exhortation, to be diligent in their own calling, to work with their own hands. Christianity does not take us from the work and duty of our particular callings, but teaches us to be diligent therein. People often by

slothfulness reduce themselves to great straits, and are liable to many wants; while such as are diligent in their own business, earn their own bread, and have great pleasure in so doing.

1 Thessalonians 4:13

Vs. 13-18: Here is comfort for the relations and friends of those who die in the Lord. Grief for the death of friends is lawful; we may weep for our own loss, though it may be their gain. Christianity does not forbid, and grace does not do away, our natural affections. Yet we must not be excessive in our sorrows; this is too much like those who have no hope of a better life. Death is an unknown thing, and we know little about the state after death; yet the doctrines of the resurrection and the second coming of Christ, are a remedy against the fear of death, and undue sorrow for the death of our Christian friends; and of these doctrines we have full assurance. It will be some happiness that all the saints shall meet, and remain together for ever; but the principal happiness of heaven is to be with the Lord, to see him, live with him, and enjoy him for ever. We should support one another in times sorrow; not deaden one another's spirits, or weaken one another's hands. And this may be done by the many lessons to be learned from the resurrection of the dead, and the second coming of Christ. What! comfort a man by telling him he is going to appear before the judgment-seat of God! Who can feel comfort from those words? That man alone with whose spirit the Spirit of God bears witness that his sins are blotted out, and the thoughts of whose heart are purified by the Holy Spirit, so that he can love God, and worthily magnify his name. We are not in a safe state unless it is thus with us, or we are desiring to be so.

CHAPTER 5

The apostle exhorts to be always ready for the coming of Christ to judgment, which will be with suddenness and surprise. (1-11) He directs to several particular duties. (12-22) And concludes with prayer, greetings, and a blessing. (23-28)

1 Thessalonians 5:1

Vs. 1-5: It is needless or useless to ask about the particular time of Christ's coming. Christ did not reveal this to the apostles. There are times and seasons for us to work in, and these are our duty and interest to know and observe; but as to the time when we must give up our account, we know it not, nor is it needful that we should. The coming of Christ will be a great surprise to men. Our Lord himself said so. As the hour of death is the same to each person that the judgment will be to mankind in general, so the same remarks answer for both. Christ's coming will be terrible to the ungodly. Their destruction will overtake them while they dream of happiness, and please themselves with vain amusements. There will be no means to escape the terror or the punishment of that day. This day will be a happy day to the righteous. They are not in darkness; they are the children of the light. It is the happy condition of all true Christians. But how many are speaking peace and safety to themselves, over whose heads utter destruction is hovering! Let us endeavor to awaken ourselves and each other, and guard against our spiritual enemies.

1 Thessalonians 5:6

Vs. 6-11: Most of mankind do not consider the things of another world at all, because they are asleep; or they do not consider them aright, because they sleep and dream. Our moderation as to all earthly things should be known to all men. Shall Christians, who have the light of the blessed gospel shining in their faces, be careless about their souls, and unmindful of another world? We need the spiritual armour, or the three Christian graces, faith, love, and hope. Faith; if we believe that the eye of God is always upon us, that there is another world to prepare for, we shall see reason to watch and be sober. True and fervent love to God, and the things of God, will keep us watchful and sober. If we have hope of salvation, let

us take heed of any thing that would shake our trust in the Lord. We have ground on which to build unshaken hope, when we consider, that salvation is by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, to atone for our sins and to ransom our souls. We should join in prayer and praise one with another. We should set a good example one before another, and this is the best means to answer the end of society. Thus we shall learn how to live to Him, with whom we hope to live for ever.

1 Thessalonians 5:12

Vs. 12-15: The ministers of the gospel are described by the work of their office, which is to serve and honor the Lord. It is their duty not only to give good counsel, but also to warn the flock of dangers, and reprove for whatever may be amiss. The people should honor and love their ministers, because their business is the welfare of men's souls. And the people should be at peace among themselves, doing all they can to guard against any differences. But love of peace must not make us wink at sin. The fearful and sorrowful spirits, should be encouraged, and a kind word may do much good. We must bear and forbear. We must be long-suffering, and keep down anger, and this to all men. Whatever man do to us, we must do good to others.

1 Thessalonians 5:16

Vs. 16-22: We are to rejoice in creature-comforts, as if we rejoiced not, and must not expect to live many years, and rejoice in them all; but if we do rejoice in God, we may do that evermore. A truly religious life is a life of constant joy. And we should rejoice more, if we prayed more. Prayer will help forward all lawful business, and every good work. If we pray without ceasing, we shall not want matter for thanksgiving in every thing. We shall see cause to give thanks for sparing and preventing, for common and uncommon, past and present, temporal and spiritual mercies. Not only for prosperous and pleasing, but also for afflicting providences, for chastisements and corrections; for God designs all for our good, though we at present see not how they tend to it. Quench not the Spirit. Christians are said to be baptized with the Holy Ghost and with fire. He worketh as fire, by enlightening, enlivening, and purifying the souls of men. As fire is put out by taking away fuel, and as it is quenched by pouring water, or putting a great deal of earth upon it; so we must be careful not to quench

the Holy Spirit, by indulging carnal lusts and affections, minding only earthly things. Believers often hinder their growth in grace, by not giving themselves up to the spiritual affections raised in their hearts by the Holy Spirit. By prophesyings, here understand the preaching of the word, the interpreting and applying the Scriptures. We must not despise preaching, though it is plain, and we are told no more than what we knew before. We must search the Scriptures. And proving all things must be to hold fast that which is good. We should abstain from sin, and whatever looks like sin, leads to it, and borders upon it. He who is not shy of the appearances of sin, who shuns not the occasions of it, and who avoids not the temptations and approaches to it, will not long keep from doing sin.

1 Thessalonians 5:23

Vs. 23-28: The apostle prays that they might be sanctified more perfectly, for the best are sanctified but in part while in this world; therefore we should pray for, and press toward, complete holiness. And as we must fall, if God did not carry on his good work in the soul, we should pray to God to perfect his work, till we are presented faultless before the throne of his glory. We should pray for one another; and brethren should thus express brotherly love. This epistle was to be read to all the brethren. Not only are the common people allowed to read the Scriptures, but it is their duty, and what they should be persuaded to do. The word of God should not be kept in an unknown tongue, but transplanted, that as all men are concerned to know the Scriptures, so they all may be able to read them. The Scriptures should be read in all public congregations, for the benefit of the unlearned especially. We need no more to make us happy, than to know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is an ever-flowing and an over-flowing fountain of grace to supply all our wants.