

FIRST THESSALONIANS

*Enduring Hope
in Unstable Times*

Study Guide



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BEFORE YOU BEGIN

How To Use This Guide

We have arranged these materials with three basic elements in mind: personal study, the preaching of the Word, and discussion in community. We believe that where these three combine, personal discipleship will flourish. To get the most out of this guide, begin by reading the introductory material. Then, in the days leading up to each Sunday, study the passage for yourself. During the sermon, listen and take notes. Finally, throughout the following week find time to discuss the questions with others.

Lastly, we have included a glossary of biblical and theological terms in the back. If a word is in **bold**, you will find a short definition in the glossary. Happy studying!

About First Thessalonians

Author: The **Apostle** Paul along with Silas (Silvanus) and Timothy

Date: 49-51 AD (Written in Corinth on Paul's second missionary journey)

Genre: Letter to the church in the Roman province of Thessalonica

Theme Verses: "May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, so that he may establish your hearts blameless in **holiness** before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints." (1 Thess. 3:12-13)

INTRODUCTION

C.S. Lewis once said the best way to avoid making the same mistakes as everyone around you is to read old books. Like a time machine, they can transport you to a world full of strange values. In fact, the older a work is, the stranger it seems, and the more enlightening it can be. We need, Lewis said, “the clean sea breeze of the centuries blowing through our minds, and this can be done only by reading old books.”¹ Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians is one of these ancient works. It feels eccentric. It talks about practices like **holy kisses** (5:26), places like Macedonia and Achaia (1:7), and pastors so gentle they are like nursing mothers (2:7). Yet above all of these, one of the most striking things this two thousand year old letter exposes is that we are far more individualistic than the early church. However, if we allow it, the clean Aegean sea breeze coming off these pages can help us see and push back against this modern problem.

Individualism & The Modern World

Individualism is not new. When sin entered the world through Adam and Eve, it caused humanity to become what Martin Luther called *homo incurvatus in se*, that is, “humanity curved in on itself.” We all share, ever since that fateful day, an incessant draw to prioritize the rights, preferences, and comforts of ourselves above and against anyone else. Cain was the first to give voice to this impulse. After he murdered his brother, Cain answered God’s interrogation, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Gen. 4:9). In other words, “what responsibility do I have for anyone else but myself?” This is the spirit of individualism.

Even though humanity has always been self-seeking, for most of history, people simply could not live as isolated individuals even if they wanted to. One needed others around them, especially family members, to help provide, protect, and raise children. That is, until the rise of the modern age, when cataclysmic changes began to open up the possibility of solo-living:

- As education became more readily available, people were encouraged to think for themselves².
- The rise of industrialization encouraged people to move to cities for higher-paying jobs and the prospect of a better life.
- As ideas such as democracy and human equality grew in popularity, people began to focus more on their individual rights than their responsibilities to their fellow citizens.³
- Rapid advances in technology allowed people the freedom to live alone by decreasing their dependency on neighbors and family members.

While all of these changes of course represent real positive developments in modern society, they also share an unfortunate consequence: they have slowly made individualism not just increasingly popular or socially acceptable, but have elevated it to the fundamental operating principle of our lives.⁴

Individualism & The Church

Unfortunately, the spirit of individualism does not simply exist outside the walls of the church. Christians are just as modern as anyone else. Our posture, then, should be less like the self-righteous Pharisee (“God, I thank you that I am not like these other autonomous, self-focused, individualistic sinners!”) and more like the disciples wondering who would betray Jesus (“Is it I, Lord?”).⁵ We must ask ourselves how individualism has affected us. 1 Thessalonians can help with this. Consider three ways this ancient letter exposes our self-centeredness:

- **Identity.** We tend to identify ourselves by ourselves. We talk about our interests, accomplishments, hobbies, and nine-to-fives. In comparison, how do Paul and his colleagues define themselves? “What is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? For you are our **glory** and joy.” (1 Thess. 2:19-20). They are far more relationally oriented.
- **Authority.** Consider the way Paul counsels and even commands the Thessalonians how to live their lives (4:1-12; 5:12-20). In an individualistic culture, this exercise of authority is anathema. In his landmark book, *Habits of the Heart*, Robert Bellah wrote: “We believe in the dignity, indeed the sacredness, of the individual. Anything that would violate our right to think for ourselves, judge for ourselves, make our own decisions, live our lives as we see fit, is not only morally wrong, it is sacrilegious.”⁶ For the sovereign individual, “I” am my ultimate authority. You can speak into my life but only to the extent that I give you that right.
- **Sexuality.** Individualism even affects what we do in the bedroom. Sex in the modern world is primarily about what I want. Which means the best our society can do, when it comes to creating restrictions, is to require consent. But that’s quite a low bar. As Christine Emba highlights, “consent is a legal criterion, not an ethical one”—it might keep you out of the courtroom, but it says nothing about “how to conduct a relationship that affirms our fundamental personhood and human dignity.”⁷ The difference between our modern sexual ethic and Paul’s would be laughable if our lack of it was not so tragic. He is adamant that everyone “abstain from sexual immorality,” and not “transgress and wrong his brother in this matter” (1 Thess. 4:3-6) because love of God and others is the only true sexual ethic.

Thankfully, Paul does not merely expose our self-infatuation, leaving us out to dry like a beached whale, but he also gives us the resources we need to address it in our hearts.

Thessalonians & Theological Virtues

In almost all of Paul's letters, he refers to three values: faith, hope, and love. These have become known as the Theological Virtues within the Christian tradition. Great minds, such as Thomas Aquinas and C.S. Lewis, have expounded them, and yet, the original architect of this triffecta is the **apostle** Paul. More than any of his other letters, these form the backbone of 1 Thessalonians.

Paul begins by thanking God for their “work of *faith* and labor of *love* and steadfastness of *hope*” (1 Thess. 1:3). Faith (Greek: *pistis*) is mentioned around ten times. Hope in the return of Christ is mentioned in every chapter (1 Thess. 1:10; 2:19–20; 3:13; 4:13–18; 5:1–11, 23–24). Paul also spends extended portions describing his love for them, their love for him, and their love for each other. The Theological Virtues are at the heart of Paul's encouragement and challenge for the Thessalonians, and it just so happens that together, they form a potent antidote for individualism.

- **Faith** – If Luther was right, that sin curves us in on ourselves, then the prescription is receiving what he called “the external word.” Faith is that act of reception. Paul celebrates how the Thessalonians “accepted” the **Apostle's** preaching not as the word of man but as “the word of God” (1 Thess. 2:13). Naturally faith cuts against the grain of an individualistic age because of what it assumes: that we do not possess life in ourselves; that we fundamentally operate out of a place of need; and that the way to find oneself is to look outside oneself. Faith finds rest in God, expecting from him that which only he himself can give: his own life and love.
- **Love** – Truly receiving the love of God cannot do anything less than renovate our hearts. Paul says, “you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another” (1 Thess. 4:9). God himself teaches us in the **gospel** to love one another. How? The **gospel** tells us that Jesus does not just save persons. He saves a people. We are not simply to attend a church because it is good for our individual spiritual lives. We are saved *as church*. We are the body. We are the bride. We are the temple of God. Yes, Cain, you are in fact your brother's keeper.
- **Hope** – In individualism, the hope of life is to actualize oneself, reach one's potential, accomplish personal goals, and thus, find fulfillment. The picture it creates is like that of the free climber, Alex Honnold, standing on the peak of Taipei 101. All alone. But that isolated vision of hope always crumbles into something that resembles C.S. Lewis' depiction of hell in *The Great Divorce*: alienated and self-righteous. Christian hope, on the other hand, is anything but that. It is the pinnacle of relationship. “The true life, full life [is] the victory over all separation; it [is] the restoration and confirmation of that rich fellowship in which man was originally created.”⁸ The Christian hope is communion as the church with our God.

Paul also ends his letter by charging them to “put on the breastplate of *faith* and *love*, and for a helmet the *hope* of salvation” (1 Thess. 5:8). He wants them to see that as they live out the theological virtues, they are also protected by them. They guard our hearts and minds from the weapons of our enemies—the world, the flesh, and the devil—and there is none more presently and potentially dangerous than the flaming arrows of autonomy and self-reliance. May God deepen our faith, enlarge our love, and strengthen our hope as we walk through this letter together.

Preparation & Reflection

Where do you see the spirit of individualism in yourself? What about in the church?

Which of the three theological virtues (faith, hope, and love) do you want to grow more in through 1 Thessalonians? Why?

Take a minute and pray for yourself and our church that God might prepare and teach us as we walk through this book.

1

LOOKING BACK

In the first three chapters, Paul and his colleagues recount with astonishing tenderness their rich relationship with the Thessalonians.

Part One should warm our hearts with its compelling picture of Christian community, especially that between the church and its leaders.

"The person who loves their dream of community will destroy community, but the person who loves those around them will create community."

DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

"It is the first and greatest work of the ministers of Christ to acquaint men with the God who made them and is their happiness, to open to them the treasures of his goodness, and to tell them of the glory that is in his presence, which all his chosen people will enjoy."

RICHARD BAXTER

"You don't lead by hitting people over the head – that's assault, not leadership."

DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER

1 THESSALONIANS 1:1-10

¹ Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,

To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:
Grace to you and peace.

² We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers,

³ remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴ For we know, brothers loved by God,

that he has chosen you, ⁵ because our **gospel** came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. ⁶ And you became imitators of us and of

the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, ⁷ so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. ⁸ For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything.

⁹ For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, ¹⁰ and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

Questions For Discussion

- Why is the local church so vital to the spreading of the **gospel** (v.8-9)?
- Who are you intentionally imitating in this congregation, and who is looking to your life as an example of **holiness** in the midst of suffering?
- A truly converted life requires a radical break from the past (v.9). We may not bow to stone statues and carved idols today, but what are the culturally respectable 'idols' that compete for our ultimate allegiance? What does it look like for us to turn from them in order to exclusively serve the living God?
- If we truly lived according to the expectation that Christ is returning soon to judge the living and the dead (v. 10), how would that transform our personal **holiness** and our urgency in **evangelism**?

“For if it is true that the dead can effect nothing, but the Savior effects such great things every day—drawing to piety, persuading to virtues, teaching about immortality, leading to a desire for heavenly things, revealing the knowledge of the Father, inspiring power against death, showing himself to each, and purging away the godlessness of idols... who then would say [he] is dead?”

ATHANASIUS (296-373)

ON THE POWER OF THE RESURRECTED CHRIST IN CONVERSION

ATHANASIUS (296-373)

ON THE POWER OF THE RESURRECTED CHRIST IN CONVERSION

The Imitation Game

“Without the Way, there is no going, without the Truth, there is no knowing, without the Life, there is no living.” - Thomas à Kempis

The Imitation of Christ, a fifteenth-century text by Thomas à Kempis, centers on pursuing **holiness** by conforming one’s whole life to the model of Christ. It calls the believer to bring every thought, affection, word, and deed into alignment with Jesus’ example, and when reading this book, it’s hard to escape the reality that we imitate what we elevate. In other words, we try to become who we look up to!

Now, while this idea might seem basic, our culture is one that prizes independence and originality such that the notion of having “heroes” is confined to the realm of childhood. Therefore, we rarely stop to consider who our role models are. Yet everyone has them, whether we admit it or not, and the people we look up to reveal what we value. If we look up to a successful businessman, it might show that we value wealth. If we look up to a particular actor, it might show that we value fame. If we look up to influencers, it might show that we value, well, influence. Regardless of who we admire, they reveal what we care about, and as Christians, it’s worth asking, who are we imitating?

As Paul opens his first letter to the Thessalonians, he calls the church to be imitators of both Christ and the apostles (1 Thess 1:6), and this instruction to imitate is central to the **New Testament** understanding of the Christian life (see Phil 3:17, 1 Cor 11:1, Eph 5:1). Though many of us profess a desire to “live like Jesus,” we should consider whether we really mean it. Do we want his lifestyle? Does he really represent what we value? Or is he just a source of comfort and stability in the midst of a life lived primarily for the things of this world?

If we really believe that Christ models the perfect human life, then he is, by definition, worthy of imitating. Therefore, we must cling to the Word of God, for it is there that Christ’s example is revealed. We must also surround ourselves with mature Christians, as Paul calls the Thessalonians to imitate himself and his fellow laborers. We do this

because it is through our faithful brothers and sisters that we see what authentic imitation looks like in our unique cultural contexts. Thus, as we dive deeper into 1 Thessalonians, it is important to keep in mind both the call to Christlikeness and our need for Christian community.

1 THESSALONIANS 2:1-6

¹ For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. ² But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the **gospel** of God in the midst of much conflict. ³ For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, ⁴ but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the **gospel**, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts. ⁵ For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness. ⁶ Nor did we seek **glory** from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ.

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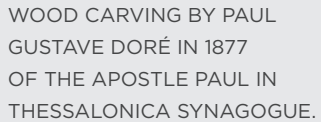
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Questions For Discussion

- Today, as in the early church, we can be tempted to dilute the **gospel** or avoid meaningful witness in an effort to maintain comfort, acclaim, or peace. What does it look like for us to cultivate God-given boldness as Paul demonstrates?
- How should the knowledge that we have been entrusted with God's message of salvation affect how we share it with others? What are the dangers of trying to tweak or modernize the **gospel** to make it more palatable?
- In what ways do we secretly live for the approval of others? How does the knowledge of our belonging to God free us from the exhausting slavery of people-pleasing?
- It is easy to use faith-based language to mask personal ambition, greed, or a desire for control. How can we cultivate a culture of accountability where we help one another watch out for hidden motives?

“Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.” And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women.” - ACTS 17:1-4



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1 THESSALONIANS 2:7-12

⁷ But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. ⁸ So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the **gospel** of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.

⁹ For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the **gospel** of God.

¹⁰ You are witnesses, and God also, how **holy** and **righteous** and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. ¹¹ For you know how, like a father with his children,

¹² we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and **glory**.

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Questions For Discussion

- When you think of a spiritual leader, what kind of posture comes to mind? How can spiritual leaders lead in such a way to make churches feel loved?
- Paul's emphasis on sharing the **gospel** is paired with a call to sacrifice for our fellow believers. How might such a posture manifest in our lives?
- Work can quickly become an **idol** in our culture. What are some practices that help Christians work hard, but for the **glory** of God rather than ourselves?
- Encouragement is a key theme in 1 Thessalonians. Are there people in your life you are encouraging and people who are encouraging you?

"Nothing is colder than a Christian who does not care for the salvation of others." - JOHN CHRYSOSTOM (347-407 AD)

Love And the Heart of Witness

Why are we, as Christians, called to bear witness to the **gospel**, and what should we expect when we do so? In other words, what motivates our witness, and what are our expected outcomes? Most of us have heard the **Great Commission** (Matt 28:16-20) and understand that Christians have an obligation to spread their faith, but not all of us have taken the time to understand exactly what this call entails. Therefore, it's worth considering why we share our faith, how we should bear witness, and what we think will happen when we proclaim the Word of God to a fallen world.

Of course, we share our faith for one main reason, namely love. Just as God's sending of his Son was motivated by love, the Christian call to spread the Word is grounded in love. When addressing the Thessalonians, Paul makes it clear that he and his co-laborers imparted the **gospel** and gave of themselves sacrificially because of "fond affection" (1 Thess 2:8). They did not seek approval (1 Thess 2:4), wealth (1 Thess 2:5), or **glory** (1 Thess 2:6). Instead, they sacrificed, endured disgrace, and spent themselves so that the Thessalonians would live worthily before God and that he would be glorified (1 Thess 2:12). Christian witness is, in short, outwardly focused. We don't do it for our own sakes but for God's sake and for the sake of others.

This motivation is made all the clearer by the methods that Paul mentions in 1 Thess 2. Pleasing words and flattery (1 Thess 2:4-5) are not the core of our proclamation because, ultimately, we are not trying to get something out of the people to whom we witness. Beyond refusing personal gain, Paul states that the apostles labored hard so as not to be a burden to those they served (1 Thess 2:9). In other words, he is calling us to sacrifice

for the sake of the world just as parents sacrifice for their children (1 Thess 2:7, 11), and you are not going to make those kinds of sacrifices if you don't love the people you evangelize.

Finally, it's important to consider what we expect when we witness. Do we think that, with the right formula of words and deeds, people will convert? Do we expect measurable success? Do we expect to be seen positively? We ought not, because love is not conditioned by success or acceptance. If the world put Christ to death when he spoke the truth in love, then we should not expect our witness to guarantee immediate, visible results. Sometimes, we may see the fruits of our labor, for our God is active and moves to redeem his people, but we do not witness because we expect everyone to listen. Rather, we bring the **gospel** because we trust God and love our fellow humans enough to hope that some may be saved.

If you examine your life and find that you are not making efforts to bear witness to the **gospel**, you must ask yourself if love really is your driving motivation in life. If you witness, but are not willing to sacrifice, to be gentle, and to bear reproach for Christ's sake, then you must ask if you really wish to live like him. If you find yourself frustrated by a lack of ministry "success", you must remember that love is not measured by empirical outcomes, but is rooted in God's actions on our behalf before we ever loved him in return (Rom 5:8).

1 THESSALONIANS 2:13-16

¹³ And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers. ¹⁴ For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews, ¹⁵ who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind ¹⁶ by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved—so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them at last!

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Questions For Discussion

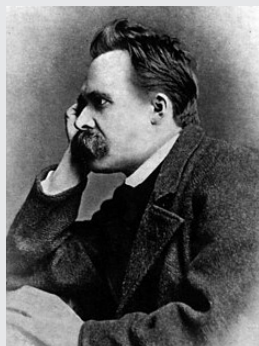
- Paul speaks of how the Word which we received performs its work in you (v. 13). Consider and describe one way that you have seen the Word of God change your heart.
- In these verses, it is mentioned how the church in Thessalonica quickly became imitators of other churches, especially in their suffering (v. 14). Where might we look today to learn how to suffer well?
- For the most part, Christians in Charleston won't face deadly persecution, but what ways can we face persecution in our culture and what should be our response?
- Should we expect to find a way to present the **gospel** that will avoid an antagonistic response? Or should we always expect resistance? How might expecting resistance blind us to improving our ability to share the good news?

Comfort And the Christian Life

"Jesus has now many lovers of his heavenly kingdom, but few bearers of his cross. He hath many seekers of comfort, but few of tribulation."

- Thomas à Kempis

Observing the world in the late 19th century, with its rising unbelief, philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche saw two primary paths forward for humanity in an era when "God is dead." First, he saw the path of the Overman (or *Übermensch*), who would transcend cultural norms and morals to become master of one's own fate. Second, he saw the path of the "last man", for whom the pursuit of safety and



FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE
(1844-1900)

comfort would be paramount. In other words, Nietzsche believed that, in a post-Christian world, humanity could either seek to take up the position once belonging to God or could come to worship comfort as a god, and while Nietzsche was himself not a believer and his proclamation of God's death appears quite misinformed, his analysis of the world still resonates with our situation in the church today.

Now, as Christians, though we will always struggle against self-idolatry, we are at least aware that we are not capable of being God. However, when looking at our culture in the modern West, it is not altogether obvious that we have resisted the temptation to make comfort an idol, even in the church. How many of us live our daily lives with goals centered around our own comfort? It is quite easy to organize our lives around attaining a certain lifestyle with a nice home, access to creature comforts, and the ability to make purchases on a whim. Or you might grind at work to

achieve an early retirement, a nice boat, or a second home. Most of us are able to function as nice people, but become aggressive and ruthless when our comfort and stability are threatened, and that is because we feel entitled to comfort and we pursue it as a birthright.

In pursuit of comfort, we are willing to avoid hard conversations. In pursuit of comfort, we are willing to go with the flow. In pursuit of comfort, we are often unwilling to change when justice demands it. But such a posture is not in line with the **gospel**, and while God is our comfort, he does not call us to be comfortable. In fact, if Jesus is truly our Lord, we should expect suffering and difficulty rather than comfort (2 Tim 3:12).

In 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16, Paul details how the apostles, the Gentile believers in Thessalonica, and the Jewish Christians in Judea all suffered on account of the **gospel**. The wider **New Testament** confirms that this state of affairs is to be expected when we seek to live the Christian life (e.g. Acts 14:22, Phil 1:29). Because they received the Word of God as the Word of God, they suffered. Therefore, in a culture obsessed with comfort and convenience, it is worth asking if we have remained free from the world's influence when it comes to this particular **idol**.

We should not conclude that all comforts of this world are evil, but that they cannot take first place in our hearts. When we stand before the throne of judgment and give an account for what we did with our time on this earth, do we believe that a life devoted to comfort will look all that similar to the example of our Lord? We remind ourselves of this reality, not out of **legalism** or fear, but because God calls us to live for something deeper and more lasting than the things of this world, which will pass away. We are not meant to live as Nietzsche's "last man," but to put on the "new self," (Eph 4:24) trusting that following Christ rather than comfort will lead to a greater joy than the world could ever offer.

1 THESSALONIANS 2:17-3:10

¹⁷ But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, ¹⁸ because we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered us. ¹⁹ For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? ²⁰ For you are our glory and joy.

^{3:1} Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone, ² and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith, ³ that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this. ⁴ For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know. ⁵ For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain.

⁶ But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you— ⁷ for this reason, brothers, in all our distress and affliction we have been comforted about you through your faith. ⁸ For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord. ⁹ For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, ¹⁰ as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith?

"What Paul seems to mean, in this transport of love, is that his joy in this world and his glory in the next are tied up with the Thessalonians, whom Christ through the apostle's ministry has so signally transformed." - JOHN STOTT ON 1 THESSALONIANS 2:19-20

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Questions For Discussion

- How would you describe Paul and Timothy's relationship? How can we engage in relationships that equip and train others to serve in ways we cannot?
- How would you describe Paul's relationship with the Thessalonians? What would it look like for pastors of churches to share a similar relationship?
- How can we help our brothers and sisters so that they do not fall into temptation? Likewise, how can we seek accountability so that we avoid temptation?
- Paul diligently prayed for his fellow Christians. How have you seen others model this discipline? How can you take steps to grow in praying for others?

1 THESSALONIANS 3:11-13

¹¹ Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, ¹² and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, ¹³ so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

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Questions For Discussion

- When our prayers are not answered quickly, what can motivate consistency and diligence? How do we know when to stop praying for a particular thing?
- What do you think it looks like for a church to “increase and abound in love”? What would it look like for that to happen at our church?
- Throughout the letter, Paul has been encouraging and gentle towards the Thessalonian believers. How does this gentle spirit inform and shape our walk as Christians as we pursue **holiness**, both individually and communally?
- Paul’s writing is grounded in his certainty that Christ will return. How does that certainty ground our priorities, sense of value, and the motivations behind our labors?

Who Does The Church Exist For?

Who does the church exist for? At one level, we know that it exists for God as the bride of Christ (2 Cor 11:2, Eph 5:24-7) and as the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:12-27, Col 1:18). Paul himself confirms the church's fundamental orientation toward God in 1 Thessalonians 3:13 when he states that our strengthening is for the sake of being blameless and **holy** in the Lord's presence. However, when this question is raised, the heart of the issue is not the Christ-church relationship, but the church-world relationship.

In other words, is the focus of the church internal or external? Is the church primarily for Christians or is it a missional body with its focus directed towards the world? This question has been at the center of a few major conflicts throughout church history—most notably, the Donatist controversy (4th century) and the Reformation (16th century). Even today, many Christians are familiar with the “seeker sensitive movement,” which was an **evangelical** strategy that aimed to make the church more appealing to non-believers by changing the worship, presentation, language, aesthetics, and atmosphere of church life. Critics, however, have argued that it often waters down the **gospel** and focuses more on attracting new converts, rather than discipling believers. While advocates for such efforts often root their tactics in the desire to reach the unreached and to save souls, others believe that this approach has lost sight of the church's primary purpose, namely the care for the Christian community.

For many Christians, the church's first responsibility is to believers. The worship service is for those in the body and the ordinances serve mainly to enrich and sanctify the life of the church. Though few Christians would deny the importance of outreach, many believers argue that the daily life of the church is centered on the faithful, rather than reaching the world.

So, who is the church for? For itself? For the world? Perhaps, these answers are not mutually exclusive. Paul prays in 1 Thessalonians 3:12 not only that our love for one another would increase but that it would overflow to everyone. Therefore, we are called to be a city set on a hill (Matt 5:14), but the gates of that city must be open and our hospitality must be warm so that all who come seeking Christ may find a home within it. The church is for the faithful, and it aims to see the faithful not only flourish, but multiply.

2

LOOKING AHEAD

In the final two chapters, Paul, Silas, and Timothy address a number of pastoral concerns. They cast a vision of the kind of church they want to see the Thessalonians become as well as address their immediate questions about the return of Christ.

Part Two should captivate our hearts and minds with the holiness and hope God wants to characterize his people.

Holiness is a most beautiful, lovely thing. Men are apt to drink in strange notions of holiness from their childhood, as if it were a melancholy, morose, sour, and unpleasant thing; but there is nothing in it but what is sweet and ravishingly lovely. 'Tis the highest beauty and amiableness, vastly above all other beauties; 'tis a divine beauty."

JONATHAN EDWARDS

"Hence [hope] gives man such a 'long' future that the past seems 'short' however long and rich his life. The theological virtue of hope is the power to wait patiently for a 'not yet' that is the more immeasurably distant from us the more closely we approach it... It alone can bestow on man the certain possession of that aspiration that is at once relaxed and disciplined, that adaptability and readiness, that strong-hearted freshness, that resilient joy, that steady perseverance in trust that so distinguish the young and make them lovable... As Saint Augustine so aptly says: 'God is younger than all else.'"

JOSEF PIEPER

1 THESSALONIANS 4:1-8

¹ Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more. ² For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. ³ For this is the will of God, your **sanctification**: that you abstain from sexual immorality; ⁴ that each one of you know how to control his own body in **holiness** and honor, ⁵ not in the passion of lust like the **Gentiles** who do not know God; ⁶ that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. ⁷ For God has not called us for impurity, but in **holiness**. ⁸ Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.

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Questions For Discussion

- What's one specific way you could encourage a fellow believer by naming the spiritual fruit you see from them?
- Why is sexuality purity and **holiness** at the core of the Christian life?
- What damage can a professing Christian's sexual immorality do to their witness and to the church? Have you seen this play out — in your own life or someone else's?
- How has Christian community helped you pursue **holiness**? What's one way you could lean into that community more this week?
- What truths about God or promises from Scripture do we need to call to mind if we fail in the area of sexual purity and **holiness**?

“When sin lets us alone, we may let sin alone: but as sin is never less quiet than when it seems to be most quiet, and its waters are for the most part deep when they are still, so ought our efforts against it be vigorous at all times, in all conditions, even where there is least suspicion.” - JOHN OWEN (1616-1683)

Sex and Christian Identity

"Chastity is the most unpopular of the Christian virtues." - C.S. Lewis

If we consider the most controversial aspect of Christianity for non-believers, it's hard to imagine that the Bible's understanding of sexuality would not top the list. In fact, this dynamic is not unique to the modern world but has existed from the inception of the church. For example, in the 2nd century, the Roman philosopher Celsus, who critiqued Christianity on multiple fronts, argued that the faith's high valuation of chastity risked destabilizing society. Similarly, in the Middle Ages, the church's strict understanding of monogamy and sexual abstinence before marriage was met with confusion by many of the pagan peoples of Europe. Today, the church's views on sex, sexuality, adultery, and chastity remain at odds with much of the wider culture.

This brief survey is meant to demonstrate one thing in particular, namely the central importance of sexual ethics for Christian identity. When, in 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8, Paul urges the faithful to live in order to please God, his instructions concerning **sanctification** center on the avoidance of sexual immorality. For Paul, sexual immorality reveals a lack of self-control (1 Thess 4:4-5), mistreats our fellow human beings (1 Thess 4:6), and disobeys God's intentions for humanity (1 Thess 4:7-8). In other words, sexual immorality is treated as a holistic problem that damages one's relationship with oneself, with others, and with God.

Christianity takes sex seriously because the Word of God speaks of it so highly. Marriage, sexual union, and adultery all serve as significant biblical metaphors for God's relationship to his people and, from the opening chapters of Genesis, the proper ordering of our sexual lives belongs to God's creational intent (Gen 2:23-4). So, while it might be tiring

1 THESSALONIANS 4:9-12

⁹Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, ¹⁰for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, ¹¹and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, ¹²so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

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Questions For Discussion

- Paul urges the Thessalonians to endeavor to grow in love (v. 9-10). What might it look like to cultivate greater love towards your fellow believers and your fellow human beings in general?
- Why is love among believers such a powerful witness to outsiders? What's one specific way you can show love to a brother or sister in Christ this week?
- Where are you most tempted to meddle in others' business or offer opinions no one asked for? How might this tendency undercut your witness to the **gospel**?
- Why is your lifestyle as important as your words? When, if ever, has your work ethic, contentment, or love been a visible testimony to someone who doesn't know Christ?

"The worldly man treats certain people kindly because he 'likes' them: the Christian, trying to treat everyone kindly, finds himself liking more and more people as he goes on – including people he could not even have imagined himself liking at the beginning."

C.S. LEWIS (1898-1963)

Ambitiously Quiet

Among the most striking commands in 1 Thessalonians appears in 1 Thess 4:11 where Paul calls his audience “to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you.” In a culture that promotes ambition, that idolizes fame, Christians are called to live quietly. The NASB captures the irony in the phrase well, translating it as “Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life,” and this command turns our cultural understanding of ambition on its head. How many parents dream of wealth and accomplishment for their children? How many of us remember being asked from an early age, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” How many young people dream of changing the world, of being heroes? Do any of us dream of a quiet life for ourselves or our children? Surely some do, but that would not likely be the dominant desire in American culture, even within the church.

Now, the call to lead a quiet life does not mean burying one’s head in the sand or avoiding efforts to make the world a better place. The quiet life Paul encourages is not lived passively. It is a life of faithful labor, service to others, and responsible witness in a fallen world (1 Thess 4:12). Such a life also implies two things. First, it means that we should be primarily concerned with our everyday conduct, with the people in front of us, and the community we find ourselves in. Second, it means that our actions are not meant to be self-aggrandizing. It may be that people take note of one’s virtuous behavior, but if one acts righteously to be noticed, then the ambition Paul speaks of has been abandoned. If there is any acclaim we are to seek, it would be that, one day, the Lord might say to each of us, “Well done, my good and faithful servant” (Matt 25:21). If we hope to hear those words, our ambitions must not be directed toward the praise of others. God does not remove ambition. He redeems it and redirects it.

1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-18

¹³ But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. ¹⁴ For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁵ For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.

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Questions For Discussion

- What is the difference between grieving with hope and grieving without it (v.13)?
- Looking at the text, what is the situation that motivated Paul to write this section of the letter?
- How does the promise of eternal life in communion with God impact our efforts to comfort the grieving people in our lives?
- The promise of the physical resurrection is at the core of the Christian hope. When you conceive of life after death, do you usually think of what happens immediately after you die, or what happens at the **Second Coming**? Why is it so important that we hope for a physical resurrection and not just the persistence of our souls?

- 1 CORINTHIANS 15:51-57

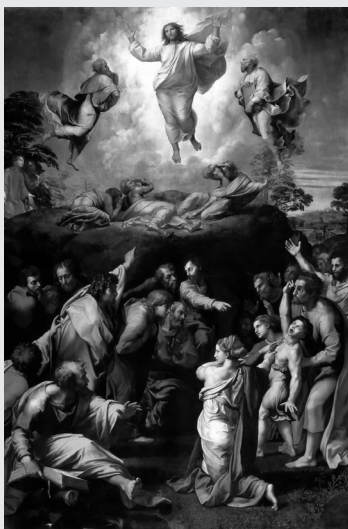
The Rapture?

"We are a body knit together by a common religious profession, by unity of discipline, and by the bond of hope." - Tertullian

First Thessalonians 4:13-18 is perhaps one of the most contentious texts in the whole book. It is a key passage in the debate surrounding the occurrence of a possible "Rapture," a future event wherein the faithful, both living and dead, will be gathered with Christ in the clouds before, during, or after a period of tribulation on earth.

This debate exists within broader, ongoing discussions surrounding Christian eschatology, which is the branch of theology dealing with the end of the world. For those who believe in the Rapture, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, as well as passages like 1 Corinthians 15:51-2, Revelation 3:10, and Matthew 24:40-42, are used to argue that the faithful will be taken up to heaven to be with Jesus when he returns, while the unsaved will remain on earth. Others, who do not hold

to the future occurrence of a rapture, have argued that the imagery of 1 Thessalonians 4 is used to indicate that the faithful will greet Christ and join with him as he enters his earthly "kingdom."



"THE TRANSFIGURATION OF CHRIST" BY RAPHAEL (1483-1520).

THIS WAS THE LAST PAINTING BEFORE HIS DEATH.

Regardless of the position one takes on the Rapture, this issue should not serve as a source of unnecessary division in the church, for conveying the order of end time events is not even the central concern of the text itself. Paul is addressing grieving Christians who fear that the dead will not participate in eternal life since they will not be present when Christ returns (1 Thess 4:13). In response to this fear, he assures them that the dead will rise and be with Christ as well (1 Thess 4:14-15).

All true believers, whether they believe in a Rapture or not, cling to this hope, that the dead in Christ may rise and that our Lord shall return. Though we may have different visions of what these events will look like, our ultimate solidarity is in shared faith that these things will happen. Let that hope be our encouragement as we face a suffering world.

1 THESSALONIANS 5:1-11

¹ Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. ² For you yourselves are fully aware that **the day of the Lord** will come like a thief in the night. ³ While people are saying, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. ⁴ But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. ⁵ For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. ⁶ So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. ⁷ For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. ⁸ But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. ⁹ For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰ who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. ¹¹ Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

Questions For Discussion

- If the **Second Coming** is mysterious, then why does there seem to be a timeless temptation to figure out the details of the End Times? Why do you think these efforts are not encouraged by Paul?
- Paul calls the church to be awake, sober, and alert in anticipation of the return of Christ. How do we live into that call as people living nearly 2000 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus?
- Paul grounds our assurance in our status as children of the day and those not “destined for wrath.” Yet, he also calls us to be alert and sober. How do we hold together the reality of our gracious election in Christ with the call to obedience and expectation?
- What might it look like to encourage fellow believers to live in light of the **Second Coming**?

- HERMAN BAVNICK (1854-1921)

1 THESSALONIANS 5:12-13

¹² We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, ¹³ and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves.

Questions For Discussion

- How does the reality of our mutual brotherhood and sisterhood as Christians impact our understanding of Christian leadership?
- Do you find it more difficult to “respect” or “love” your church leaders? What might happen if you seek to do one without the other: affection without respect or respect without affection?
- According to this passage, what are the primary responsibilities of spiritual leaders? In what sense do these responsibilities apply to all Christians and in what ways do they uniquely apply to leaders?
- What opportunities do you have to be a spiritual leader? Take time and pray for these.

- JOHN CALVIN (1509-1564) ON THE WORK OF PASTORS

Authority in an Age of Distrust

"For although God alone ought to rule and reign in the church, and although he alone ought to have preeminence or rather sole authority, yet because he does not dwell among us in visible presence, he uses the ministry of men to declare openly his will to us by mouth." - John Calvin

For many of us in the church, trust in authority does not come naturally. As Americans, we prize our independence and self-determination. As **Protestants**, we are cautious of strong clerical power. In light of highly-publicized church abuse cases, there has been a decline in the public trust toward church leadership. In a world with so much conflicting information, fostered as it is by the rapid development of technology and online culture, it has become harder to know whom we ought to trust. The crisis of authority exists in our broader culture, but it is felt in the church as well.

However, in 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13, the **apostle** Paul calls us to respect and esteem our leadership. The church cannot function without faithful leaders. Indeed, preaching, teaching, and leadership are considered gifts of the Spirit (Rom 12:6-8). Therefore, whether we like it or not, Christians must recognize that we need faithful leaders and we must be willing to trust them.

Now, it's important to note that true authority is not granted primarily by the title or office. Instead, when Paul makes his appeal in 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13, he grounds the leaders' authority in the fact that they "labor among you" and "because of their work." Thus, Christians are not called to trust human authority blindly, but they are called to trust those who have proven themselves trustworthy. Such confidence might take time to develop, but if we find ourselves categorically opposed to submitting

to leaders or thinking that nobody has a right to tell us what to do, then we are not following the biblical picture of covenant life. God called prophets and he gave Israel priests. Jesus commissioned apostles, and Paul called the flock to esteem and respect those who labor among them. If the church is to be faithful, we must seek to be under godly leaders.

1 THESSALONIANS 5:14-15

¹⁴ And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. ¹⁵ See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.

Questions For Discussion

- How does Paul distinguish between the idle, the fainthearted, and the weak? Why is it important that each group receives a different response?
- Which response comes most naturally to you? Which is the hardest?
- How does your personality or past experience shape the way you care for others?
- Why does Paul add, "Be patient with them all"? What does patience look like when someone isn't changing as quickly as we would like?
- What would it look like this week to respond to those who have wronged us by actively pursuing their good instead of simply avoiding retaliation?

TERTULLIAN (C. 155-220 AD) ON CHRIST'S PATIENCE TOWARD US

This image shows a full page of white paper with horizontal dashed lines, typical of primary-ruled notebook paper. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Forgiveness in a Culture Obsessed with Revenge

Our culture is fascinated with revenge! Movies like *Taken*, *True Grit*, and *Mean Girls* are just a few of many films focused on revenge that have been produced over the last few decades. This dynamic does not just apply to our individual lives, but also our national identity. After Pearl Harbor, the United States conducted a military operation called “Operation Vengeance” where we targeted one of the key Japanese military officials who orchestrated the attack. Similarly, after 9/11, amid the many voices clamoring for revenge, one of the popular songs was “Courtesy of the Red, White, and Blue (Angry American)” by Toby Keith. In the song, he sings with pride how, in response to the 9/11 attacks, we lit up the attackers “like the Fourth of July.”

These cinematic and historical examples demonstrate just how normalized, and even prized, vengeance is in our culture. Now, while there is no doubt that the pursuit of justice is a morally right endeavor, there is something troubling and unhealthy when we fixate on people “getting what’s coming to them.” The apostle Paul makes the Christian posture towards our enemies clear in 1 Thessalonians 5:15 when he says, “See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.” This exhortation is not unique to 1 Thessalonians 5 either, but exists throughout the New Testament.

Whether it be Paul’s call to “never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God” (Rom 12:19), Peter saying “Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling” (1 Pet 3:9), or perhaps most striking of all, Christ’s words on the Cross when, looking at the very people who scourged, mocked, and crucified him, he says, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what

they do” (Luke 23:34), the Bible consistently calls us from vengeance and towards mercy. In short, Christians cannot be people of vengeance. After all, the church only exists because none of us received what we deserved. Rather, Christ took our place and forgave our sins. Therefore, we are a people born of forgiveness and cannot live for revenge.

Someone will object: “Are you saying we should tolerate injustice or that force is not sometimes required to hold back evil?” Of course not, but it does mean that our motivations can never be the destruction or humiliation of those who have injured us. Forgiveness and goodwill are at the heart of the **gospel**. If we start believing some people are beyond forgiveness, then we are at risk of forgetting our need for mercy and what God has already done for us while we were at our worst (Rom 5:8).

1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-18

¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray without ceasing, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

[illegible]

Questions For Discussion

- How do these verses shape your understanding of God's will for your life?
- What do you think it looks like to "always" be in thanksgiving and prayer?
- What are the things that keep you from a posture of rejoicing, thanksgiving, and prayer?
- What shifts can you make in your routine to help you live out the call put forth in these verses?

*Prayer, the church's banquet, angel's age,
God's breath in man returning to his birth,
The soul in paraphrase, heart in pilgrimage,
The Christian plummet sounding heav'n and earth
Engine against th' Almighty, sinner's tow'r,
Reversed thunder, Christ-side-piercing spear,
The six-days world transposing in an hour,
A kind of tune, which all things hear and fear;
Softness, and peace, and joy, and love, and bliss,
Exalted manna, gladness of the best,
Heaven in ordinary, man well drest,
The milky way, the bird of Paradise,
Church-bells beyond the stars heard, the soul's blood,
The land of spices; something understood.*

GEORGE HERBERT (1593-1633), "PRAYER I"

1 THESSALONIANS 5:19-22

¹⁹ Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰ Do not despise prophecies, ²¹ but test everything; hold fast what is good. ²² Abstain from every form of evil.

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Questions For Discussion

- What does it mean to “quench the Spirit”? What are some ways we might unintentionally resist the Spirit’s work today?
- Verse 21 says to “test everything.” How do we follow this command without becoming cynical toward others and the world?
- What does it look like to “hold fast what is good” and “abstain from every form of evil” in our daily lives? Where are some areas where we might need to let go of things that are harmful to us?
- How do these verses encourage both openness and discernment? Why is it important for our church to be receptive to God’s work while carefully evaluating everything by Scripture?

“Let us not think little of our sins because they are slight, but let us fear them because they are many. Drops of rain are small, but because they are many, they fill rivers and submerge houses, and sometimes by their force even carry off mountains.”

CAESARIAN OF ARLES (CA. 470-542)

1 THESSALONIANS 5:23-28

²³ Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

²⁵ Brothers, pray for us.

²⁶ Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss.

²⁷ I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers.

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

Questions For Discussion

- What does Paul's prayer in v. 23–24 teach us about God's role in our **sanctification**? How does God's faithfulness give us confidence in our spiritual growth?
- Paul prays that believers would be **sanctified** completely and kept blameless until Christ returns. What does this reveal about God's ultimate goal for his people, and how should it shape the way we think about growth in **holiness**?
- Why do you think Paul ends the letter by asking for prayer, encouraging warm fellowship, and insisting that the letter be read to the whole church? What does this tell us about the life of a healthy church?
- Why is God's **grace** the appropriate conclusion to this letter, and how does it enable us to live out everything Paul has taught?

*Through many dangers, toils and snares
We have already come
'Twas grace has brought us safe thus far
And grace will lead us home*

*When we've been there ten thousand years
Bright, shining as the sun
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we've first begun*

FROM AMAZING GRACE BY JOHN NEWTON (1725-1807)

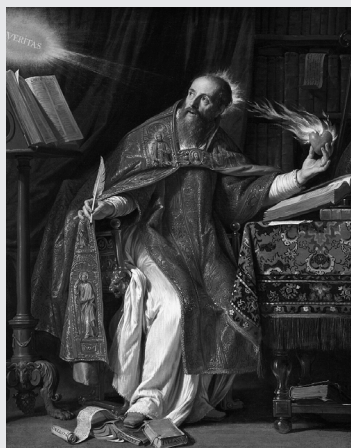
Do You Want Complete Sanctification?

"Lord give me chastity and self-control – but not yet." – Augustine

Reflecting on his youth, St. Augustine remembered a time in which he prayed, "Lord give me chastity and self-control, but not yet." Augustine, at that point, was already desiring to live a godly life, but he did not want to give up the lustful behavior that he knew was out of concert with God's commands. In this prayer, Augustine speaks to a spiritual struggle that characterizes many of our walks with God. We all have sins in our lives, whether it be lust like Augustine, or greed, envy, or pride, that we do not want to surrender.

Most of us recognize that our character and our habits need to change if we are to live our faith authentically, but many of us implicitly think that we can hold on to certain sins, at least for a time, without jeopardizing our witness or relationship with the Lord. However, for those who genuinely love God and want to know him, this lukewarm pursuit of sanctification can only leave us feeling miserable, guilty, and unfulfilled.

Paul states his will for the faithful when he prays, "Now may the Lord God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus" (1 Thess 5:23). We are meant to be made whole and to give everything up



"ST. AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO"

BY PHILIPPE DE CHAMPAIGNE (C. 1645)

to God as Christ surrendered his whole self to the will of his Father, and we do not do this alone, for it is by God's strength that we are sanctified. Whatever sin you are holding on to, whatever worldly pleasure you refuse to surrender, give it God. The One who is powerful enough to split seas and raise the dead can surely make us whole and grant us a joy that the world cannot offer.

GLOSSARY

Apostle – The word in Greek means, “sent ones.” It describes the office in the early church of the twelve men who saw the resurrected Jesus and were sent out to share the gospel.

The Day of the Lord – Also called “the Day of Christ/God,” this refers to the time at the end of history when God will bring final judgment. The first coming of Jesus was the beginning of this “day,” and it will be completed when he returns. For Christians, this will be the moment of final salvation, but for unbelievers, final condemnation.

Evangelicals – The word comes from the Greek word *euangelion* meaning “gospel” or “good news.” Evangelicals, then, are gospel people. In more recent history, this title has been used to describe a religious movement within Protestantism and identified by four main priorities: biblicism (focus on the Bible), crucicentrism (focus on the cross), conversionism (emphasis on life-changing conversion), and activism (expression of the gospel through effort).

Evangelism – The act of sharing the gospel (Greek: *euangelizo*)

Gentiles – A catch-all term for any non-Jews.

Glory – The manifestation of God’s holy presence. The Hebrew word *kabod* is related to the idea of weight, substance, and heaviness. It also carries connotations of beauty and splendor.

Gospel – (Greek: *euangelion*) The good news that God sent his Son, Jesus, to live a perfect life, die on the cross, and rise from the dead so that we can be reconciled to God through faith. For a more detailed description of the gospel, see the book *What is the Gospel?* by Greg Gilbert.

Grace – (Greek: *charis*) God giving us what we do not deserve.

The Great Commission – Jesus’s final command in Matthew 28:18-20 where he sent out his disciples to make more disciples of all nations by going, baptizing, and teaching. This is the mission of the church.

Holy (Holiness) – Conveys something as being set apart. For God, it highlights how he is unlike us (totally pure, loving, and just). For humanity, it refers to being set apart from others for a particular person and/or task.

Idol – Anything other than God you can’t live without and still have joy in your life. In other words, it’s something created that people worship as a god.

Legalism – A wrong way of relating to God that depends solely on obeying his commands in order to receive blessings. Legalism ignores the simplicity of faith (Romans 3:21-31).

New Testament – The collection of 27 books beginning with Matthew and ending in Revelation. The word “testament” means covenant. Therefore, the title communicates that these books have to do with the New Covenant instituted by Jesus Christ.

Protestant – A subset within Christendom from a movement in the sixteenth century, whereby church leaders and members “protested” the theology, liturgy, and leadership in the Roman Catholic Church. It was a “Reformation” in that those leading the movement wanted to reform the church to the standard of scripture. At the center of this conflict were disagreements over what later became known as the five *solas* (Latin for ‘alone’): *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture is the only infallible authority), *Sola Gratia* (salvation is a work of God’s grace alone), *Sola Fide* (salvation is by faith alone, and not works), *Solus Christus* (salvation is in Christ alone), and *Soli Deo Gloria* (for God’s glory alone).

Righteous – The state of being right or just. God is righteous and makes righteous those who trust in Jesus.

Sanctification – The process of becoming holy (from the Latin *sanctus*). In Protestant Christian theology, it often refers to the growth and life change that people undergo after justification occurs.

The Second Coming – When Jesus Christ returns to judge the world, save his people, and make all creation new. It is subsequent to the incarnation which was his first coming. Now, we sit between the first and second comings of Christ.

ENDNOTES

1 C. S. Lewis, "On the Reading of Old Books," in *God in the Dock*, ed. Walter Hooper (1970; Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2014), 220.

2 "Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's understanding without guidance from another... Sapare Aude! 'Have courage to use your own understanding!' - that is the motto of the enlightenment." Immanuel Kant, *An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment*, trans. Ted Humphrey, 1784.

3 Of course, the most well-known example is the famous line from the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

4 Jonathan Leeman said, "the Enlightenment did not bring us radical free agency and contractualism. Genesis 3 did. The Enlightenment legitimized it." Jonathan Leeman, "Individualism's Not the Problem-Community's Not the Solution," *Modern Reformation*, 2008, <https://www.modernreformation.org/resources/articles/individualisms-not-the-problem-communities-not-the-solution#top7>.

5 Carl R. Trueman, "Expressive Individualism and the Church," 9Marks, March 18, 2022, <https://www.9marks.org/article/expressive-individualism-and-the-church/>.

6 Robert Bellah, *Habits of the Heart* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1985). Quoted in Trevin Wax, "Why Is Expressive Individualism a Challenge for the Church?," The Gospel Coalition, October 18, 2018.

7 Christine Emba, "Consent Is Not Enough. We Need a New Sexual Ethic.," *The Washington Post*, March 17, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2022/03/17/sex-ethics-rethinking-consent-culture/>.

8 Herman Bavinck, *The Wonderful Works of God*, trans. Henry Zylstra (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1909; repr., Glenside, Pennsylvania: Westminster Seminary Press, 2019), 531.



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