

1 THESS. 2:17 – 5:28

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V. Reassurance Regarding Separation (2:17 - 3:13)

A. Longing during separation (2:17-20)

1. They longed for the Thessalonians during their forced separation. Christians need to love and be concerned about the brotherhood. (2:17)

2. Paul had planned to return to them, more than once, but Satan thwarted the plans. Something prevented Paul from returning, and he saw in that circumstance the work of Satan. There is a real spiritual battle going on. (2:18)

3. As good fruit of the missionaries' labor for Christ, as evidence of the manner in which they discharged their commission, the Thessalonians will result in a blessing (a "well done faithful servant") for the missionaries at the return of Christ. Therefore, the Thessalonians cannot doubt the missionaries' concern for their spiritual welfare. (2:19-20)

B. Sending of Timothy (3:1-5)

1. Their concern for the Thessalonians' welfare became so great they sent Timothy to them to strengthen and encourage them in the faith so that they would not be shaken by the persecutions they were experiencing. (3:1-3a)

2. They knew that Christians are destined for afflictions, for when the missionaries were there they predicted they would be afflicted, just as it turned out. Paul wants no one to be surprised by persecution, no one to take opposition as a sign of Christianity's failure. (3:3b-4)

3. Paul sent Timothy to learn how their faith was faring, fearing that the tempter had succeeded in pulling them from the faith. Their abandoning the faith was a real possibility, and if they did so, the missionaries' labor would have been for nothing. (3:5)

C. Joy over Timothy's report (3:6-10)

1. Timothy brings good news about the Thessalonians' faith in Christ, their love for God and one another, and their longing to see the missionaries. This evidence of the vitality of the Thessalonians' faith encourages Paul et al., despite their distress and affliction. (3:6-7)

2. The state of the Thessalonians' faith was so important to the missionaries that, having received the good news about it, they say they "now live." They mean that their Christian existence has been given a new sense of strength and joy, that their lives (remember what they had been through – see 1 Cor. 2:3) have been renewed in vigor. (3:8)

3. The news of their faith gave them such joy that they wondered how they could ever thank God enough for it. (3:9)

4. They are praying steadily and earnestly to see the Thessalonians again and to provide what is lacking in their faith. The notion of "brother" meant something to them! (3:10)

D. Prayer for Thessalonians (3:11-13)

1. They pray that God the Father and the Lord Jesus prepare the way for them to come to the Thessalonians (just as they said they have been praying). This is quite possibly directed at the removal of some Satanic obstacle (see 2:18). (3:11)

2. They pray for the Lord Jesus to cause the Thessalonians to increase and to abound in love for one another and for everyone, as they also love the Thessalonians. (3:12)

3. The ultimate goal of this growth in love is to establish their hearts, their inner beings, blameless in the matter of holiness in God's presence at Jesus' coming. (3:13)

a. Love for people is a central aspect of Christian sanctification, of the inner holiness to which God calls Christians, and Paul is praying that they be found blameless in this regard.

b. Paul wants them to be transformed, to be sanctified, to be radically new people, when Jesus returns. When Jesus comes back, his bride, the church, must be distinct from the world. The Christian life is one of continuing growth in godliness.

c. Jesus is coming back (Jn. 14:1-4), and he is coming in glory with the holy angels (Mk. 8:38; 2 Thess. 1:6-7; Rev. 19:14)! Christians live in this blessed hope.

VI. Exhortation and Instruction (4:1 - 5:22)

A. Keeping prior instructions (4:1-2)

1. There is a way Christians must live so as to please God. The fact we are saved by grace does not mean God is indifferent about how we live. The God who saved us calls us to a life of submission and obedience.

2. The missionaries previously instructed them how they must live and those instructions were given through the authority of the Lord Jesus. To disobey those instructions was not to disobey Paul or Silas; it was to disobey the Lord!

3. Even though they were living in accordance with the will of God, the missionaries urge them to do so even more. The Christian life is a constant pursuit of Christlikeness. We are to call each other upward in that pursuit.

B. Sexual purity (4:3-8)

1. God's will for them, an important part of how they are to be sanctified, is that they abstain from fornication (or, more generally, sexual immorality).

a. God specifically forbids sex outside of marriage. The fact you're in love is no exception.

b. It is understood that sexual desire will tempt them in the wrong direction, but rather than giving in to that lustful passion like the Gentiles who do not know God, they must learn to gain control over their bodies in sanctification and honor. The body belongs to the Lord, and they must use it in a way that honors him.

2. The phrase "so as not to wrong or take advantage of his brother in this matter" sounds like a specific application of this principle to something going on in Thessalonica.

3. The Lord will mete out punishment with regard to these things as they were previously told. A person cannot choose to live in sin and have a relationship with God (Gal. 5:19-21).

4. They were not called to impurity but in sanctification, so they must strive to live up to the fact they have been specially set apart for God. To fail to do so is not to reject man but God.

C. Brotherly love (4:9-12)

1. They had been taught by God to love each other. This may refer to teaching of the O.T. and of Jesus, passed to them through the missionaries, and to the work of the Spirit (Gal. 5:19).

2. They not only were loving each other but also were loving the brothers throughout Macedonia. Still, the missionaries urge them to do so even more.

3. Part of loving their brothers was to supply their own needs (so as not to be a burden on their brothers) and to behave properly toward the outsiders (so as not to damage the reputation of their brothers). They did this by diligently tending to their own work instead of being idle busybodies. (Both "live a quiet life" and "attend to your own affairs" here mean looking after one's own business, the opposite of "being a busybody" in 2 Thess. 3:11.)

D. Second Coming (4:13 - 5:11)

1. and the faithful deceased (4:13-18)

a. The Thessalonians had apparently not been adequately instructed on the fate of those who died before the Lord's return. They feared that only those who were alive at his return would share in the resurrection.

b. The missionaries do not want them to be ignorant about those who died so that they may not grieve *like others* who have no hope. Grief is okay; hopeless grief over deceased Christians is out of place.

c. Just as Jesus died and rose again, those who died in Christ will in the same way be raised with him (their resurrection is integrally connected to his resurrection).

d. By the Lord's word, those living at the Second Coming will not precede those who already died. At the splendor of the Lord's coming, those who are dead will rise first, then those who are alive will join with them to meet the Lord in the air! This magnificent entourage accompanies the Lord back to earth to enjoy forever the consummated kingdom (on a radically transformed – a "heavenized" – earth).

e. Is it any wonder he tells them to encourage one another with these words!

2. and specific times (5:1-11)

a. Regarding the timing of the Second Coming, they did not need any instruction. They already understood that the "day of the Lord," the day he returns to judge mankind and to consummate the kingdom he inaugurated, comes as a thief in the night. (5:1-2)

(1) This image suggests that it comes at an unpredictable time and with negative consequences for the unprepared, those who are not on guard.

(2) Jesus used this same imagery when speaking of his return in Mat. 24:42-44 and Lk. 12:39-40 (see also, Rev. 3:3, 16:15). Paul probably is drawing on this teaching, which shows it was circulating in some form prior to 50 A.D.

(3) Paul may here emphasize the unpredictability aspect of the Second Coming because a group within the church may have been seeking a precise time for the event out of a desire to relax their discipleship. He confirms what the majority well knew, namely that there is an element of unpredictability with regard to that day. In 2 Thessalonians he emphasizes the predictability aspect of the Second Coming to provide a second level of reassurance to the church that the event had not already occurred.

b. Whatever signs may precede the Lord's return, they will not be such as to completely remove the element of surprise, especially for unbelievers. (5:3)

(1) Unbelievers will be "fat, dumb, and happy," saying "peace and safety," when destruction comes on them with the same suddenness as labor pains on a pregnant woman.

(2) There will be no escape. For those who are not in Christ, the day of the Lord is going to be a terrible day of judgment (e.g., Mat. 25:31-46).

c. But the effect of that coming is different for Christians. Christians are not in darkness, a state of ignorance about God's work in Christ, that the day of the Lord should overtake them as a thief, in the sense that it should find them unprepared and vulnerable to harm. Rather, Christians are sons of light and sons of the day. (5:4-5)

d. As sons of light and sons of the day, Christians must keep awake and be sober. In other words, they must remain alert to his promised coming, not lapsing in their preparedness. The oblivious states of sleep and drunkenness occur at night, so they are not fitting for children of the day. (5:6-7)

e. Christians are to remain alert and prepared for that day, dressed in the spiritual armor of faith, love, and hope of salvation, because a lack of vigilance may lead to a loss of the salvation for which they are destined through Jesus Christ. We must remain faithful to the end of the race (see, 1 Thess. 3:5; 1 Cor. 15:1-2; Gal. 6:7-9; 2 Tim. 4:6-8; 2 Pet. 2:17-22). (5:8-9)

f. Jesus died on our behalf, so that whether we die before he returns or are alive at that time, we may live together with him (e.g., Rev. 21:22-27). We need to encourage one another with this fact. (5:10-11)

E. Recognition of leaders (5:12-13)

1. They ask them "to know" a certain group of people, those who labor among them, care for them, and admonish them.

a. The group clearly is the spiritual leaders in the congregation. They care for them by laboring hard, labor which involves instructing them in the things of the Lord.

b. "To know" simply may mean to be acquainted with, or it may mean to appreciate or acknowledge.

2. They are to regard these people very highly in love because of the work in which they are engaged. It is the work of nurturing, guiding, and protecting the congregation.

3. The directive to be at peace among themselves suggests that some were quarreling with the leaders out of a lack of proper appreciation for them. (The fresh start in v. 14 suggests that v. 13b goes closely with what precedes.)

F. Various duties (5:14-22)

1. Admonish the idle (5:14) – 2 Thessalonians 3:6-12 clearly shows that some were sponging off the church. This is wrong.

2. Comfort the downcast (5:14) – those worried or sad

3. Help the weak (5:14) – those who are spiritually weak, who are more vulnerable when assailed by hardship or temptation

4. Be patient toward everyone (5:14) – "Whoever may be the object of warning or help, the persons giving it must show the kind of patience which puts up with people and their awkwardness and even opposition to the helper" (Marshall, 152).

5. See to it that no one repays evil for evil (5:15)

a. The community has a responsibility to see that none of its members act this way. We are our brothers' keeper.

b. Rather than paybacks, rather than seeking to injure, they must always pursue what is good for the other person.

6. Rejoice always (5:16) – This is a frequent injunction (Rom. 12:12, 15; 2 Cor. 6:10; Phil 2:18, 3:1, 4:4; 1 Pet. 4:13). Their blessing is so great that it should transcend any circumstance. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22), and Paul elsewhere says the kingdom of God is a matter of joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17).

7. Pray constantly (5:17) – This is another common command (2 Thess. 3:1; Rom. 12:12; Eph. 6:18; Col. 4:2). This doesn't mean without interruption but without giving up, just like a faucet can said to drip constantly. Pray is to be frequent and persistent.

8. Give thanks in everything (5:18) – They are to praise and thank God in whatever situation they find themselves. Even in adversity they know that God is working for the good of those that love him (Rom. 8:28), and they have an inheritance that transcends this world and its circumstances.

9. Do not quench the Spirit

a. They are not to stifle prophecy in themselves (e.g., Jer. 20:9) or in others (e.g., Amos 2:12). Prophets were God's human instruments for delivering his message.

b. The gift of prophecy was an important part of the first century church. I do not believe that gift is any longer in operation.

(1) The gifts are given as the Spirit determines (1 Cor. 12:11). He is free to cease giving one or more gifts if it suits his purpose to do so.

(2) 1 Sam. 3:1, Ps. 74:9, and Lam. 2:9 reveal that prophecy is not constant throughout history. Sometimes the gift is withdrawn. Judaism as a whole considered that prophecy had ceased since the time of Malachi (circa 430 B.C.). That is why intertestamental literature is not part of the O.T. canon.

(3) If it followed the O.T. pattern, the gift of prophecy would cease after completion (which could include some level of circulation and/or acceptance) of canonical literature. Eph. 2:20 points in this direction when it speaks of the apostles and prophets playing a "foundational" role in the establishment of the church (a role 3:5 suggests they filled by being conduits of revelation). This implies that apostles and prophets would not be a permanent feature of church history, a conclusion supported by the fact the apostles unquestionably passed off the scene (they must have seen the resurrected Christ: Acts 1:22-26, 1 Cor. 9:1-2; and Paul says he was the last one to do so: 1 Cor. 15:8).

(4) Historically, there is evidence of church leaders accepting the gift of prophecy into the second century, but by the early third century a general consensus had developed that the gift had ceased. From that time until the 20th century, prophecy was never a part of a major movement in Christianity. See D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987) 166.

(a) Speaking of the *Muratorian Fragment*, a canon list dating from around A.D. 170 and located in Rome, Ronald Heine states, "The Roman church did not argue with the Montanists about true or false prophecy, nor about rational versus ecstatic prophecy. It refused to grant the possibility of any prophecy after the apostles." See David F. Farnell, "The Current Debate about N.T. Prophecy," 149 *Bibliotheca Sacra* 295 (n.88).

(b) In the 4th century, Chrysostom, a church leader, clearly states that the gift of prophecy had ceased long ago (Ibid).

10. Do not despise prophecies (but test everything)

a. When genuine prophecies were delivered, they were not to treat them with contempt. The word of the Lord must be taken very seriously.

b. They were not, however, to be gullible. They must test the prophecies to be sure they were genuine. This is similar to Paul's advice in 1 Cor. 14:29, where perhaps the gift of discernment was involved (1 Cor. 12:10).

11. Hold to what is good and abstain from all evil – a general admonition to pursue moral excellence.

VII. Prayer for Thessalonians (5:23-24)

A. The missionaries pray for the Thessalonians' complete sanctification, that God will bring them to complete goodness and dedication to his service and that they will be blameless at Christ's return. This is the same idea as the prayer of 3:11-13.

B. They are confident that God will do it

VIII. Closing (5:25-28)

A. They solicit prayers

B. Holy kiss – The standard greeting is to be holy.

C. Charge to read letter – development of collection.