

I THESSALONIANS 2:17-20
LEADERSHIP – LOVING

Please turn in your Bibles this morning to I Thessalonians chapter 2 as we continue our study of Paul's letter to the church in Thessalonica. Over the last few weeks we have been digging into I Thessalonians chapter 2 and the focus has been on leadership as Paul ministered to these believers in Thessalonica.

And we saw in I Thessalonians 2:1-6 that leadership needs to be done in faithfulness. Yes, there are going to be difficulties, discouragement, suffering, but don't let that stop you from serving. Speak forth the truths of God found in the Word of God, stand up for what is right and don't bow to the pressure of men but submit to the will of God. Don't change the message to tickle people's ears, but speak forth the truth that will convict the heart! ***FAITHFULNESS IN LEADERSHIP*** is important!

Then, in I Thessalonians 2:7-8 we saw that leadership should be done with gentleness. And here Paul likens himself to a mother who cherishes her own children. The gentleness in raising them. Yes, strong but also gentle! We are not to beat people up, work them over but share the love of God with them that is found in Christ Jesus! ***GENTLENESS IN LEADERSHIP*** is also important!

And last time we looked at I Thessalonians 2:9-16 and we saw that leadership is done with concern. Paul, like a loving father cared for them. He worked so that they would not have to support them. He did not want to be a burden on them. And the life he lived was an example to them of how they should walk. Paul was concerned, like a loving father because he wanted them to grow, to mature in the faith. ***CONCERNED IN LEADERSHIP*** is also important!

Well, this morning we will finish up looking at this topic of leadership as we focus on leadership being done in love and we will see that in I Thessalonians 2:17-20.

Now keep in mind that starting in I Thessalonians 2:17 and really running through the end of chapter 3 of I Thessalonians the focus is seeing these believers and since he couldn't see them at this time, he sent Timothy to find out how they were doing.

Now you may be thinking that you are not a leader, but, as I have said in our study on leadership, we are all leaders in one capacity or another. But here's the thing, as the saying goes, "He who thinks he leads, but has no followers, is only taking a walk."

How true that is. There are those who try to lead by beating people up, putting them down and people are not going to follow a leader like that and if they do, they are masochistic in nature or you just like being abused. I don't know about you, but that is not for me.

If someone is constantly putting me down, beating me up, I am not going to follow them! And that should just make sense. If nobody follows you, then you really are not a leader! And what we will see here, as I have said, is that leadership needs to be done in love.

I am not saying that you can't correct someone who is in error or in sin, but that correction is not done to put down or condemn that person, but it is done with the idea of restoration. That truly is love in leadership!

And make no mistake about it, these four qualities are important if we are going to lead as God desires. With that said, let's begin reading in I Thessalonians chapter 2, beginning in verse 17 and let's see what the Lord has for us as we study through His Word.

I THESSALONIANS 2**VERSE 17**

As you read this you truly see the heart of Paul, his love for these believers. He wanted to be with them, he wanted to remain with them, but he was taken away by circumstances that were beyond his control. What happened that he had to leave them?

Listen to what transpired there in Thessalonica as we read Acts 17:1-10, **“Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, ‘This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.’ And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas. But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, ‘These who have turned the world upside down have come here too. Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king - Jesus.’ And they troubled the crowd and the rulers of the city when they heard these things. So when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go. Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews.”**

Make no mistake about it, Paul's heart was for the Jews and thus he went to them first and then to the Gentiles. And it broke Paul's heart that his fellow Jews were rejecting the Messiah and they were going to die in their sins! Thus, to the Jews he preached Christ crucified, to the Gentiles he preached Christ crucified, he gave them the Gospel! You don't change the Gospel for the audience you have, it is the same for everyone!

And what we see here is that Paul "**... reasoned with them from the Scriptures**" and he was "**explaining**" or opening up the Scriptures to them.

And lastly, we see that Paul was "**... demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead ...**" (Acts 17:3)

The Greek word for "**demonstrating**" is PARATITHEMI, (par-at-ith'-ay-mee) and it is a word that speaks of "'Giving evidence' (NASB; 'proving,' NIV), which means 'to place beside' or 'to set before.'" (Hughes) Paul was presenting the evidence of Jesus being the Messiah to those who were there, bringing the things that He did in His life alongside the Scriptures to show that He was the fulfillment of what the Old Testament Prophets spoke of regarding the Messiah!

Now, as Paul preached the Word of God with them, as Paul shared the Word of God with them, as Paul expounded on the Word of God with them, some of the people were saved, both Jews and Greeks or Gentiles and many women came to the faith!

But not all were saved because people have a choice to make, to either accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior or reject Him. And for those Jews who rejected what Paul said, the ones who were rejecting Jesus, they caused this uproar in Thessalonica.

Jason was a Christian in Thessalonica whose house seems to have been a center for the church. When the evil men from the marketplace did not find Paul and Silas there, they attacked Jason himself, and some brethren who were with him.

What is interesting is that in verse 9 we see Jason and the rest set free. How can that be? It was simple; Jason and some of the other believers had to leave what we might call a security deposit. In other words, if these men, Paul, Silas and Timothy came back to stay with Jason and he did not tell them or report that information to the authorities he would lose this money!

As you can see, things were not going well. And thus, because of the trouble in Thessalonica, the brethren helped Paul and Silas get away into the night and they headed now to Berea, which was about 46 miles southwest of Thessalonica on the eastern slopes of a mountain. And as his custom, Paul and his men head to the Synagogue to share Jesus with the Jews and those who were seeking the God of Israel.

Paul did not want to leave these believers, but, because of the circumstances that took place, he had to leave. But, as Paul said here in I Thessalonians, he may have been absent with them physically speaking but his heart was still there with them. And he couldn't wait to see them again.

And please understand that this love was not based in feelings or emotions but it was based in Jesus Christ and the reason I can say that so confidently is that Paul calls them "**brethren**" or they were family to him, part of the family of God! Yes, there was emotion there, Paul had feelings towards them, but that was all based in Christ and not apart from Him!

It is as Paul said in Ephesians 2:14-18, **“For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.”**

Keep in mind that Paul is speaking of reconciling Jews and Gentiles together because they did not get along. And Paul tells us that this separation was related to the Law, it was the Law that kept them apart.

But we see that Christ has come and abolished the Law of commandments that the Jews used as a source of righteousness and the Gentiles didn't keep! It was a source of division and now that division is taken away, that middle wall of separation has been removed by Christ because we are all saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone!

So, we should get along with the family of God, we are brethren, brothers and sisters in the Lord. Now I am not saying we endorse false doctrine, not at all. And there is plenty of that today. But we should pray for them so that they can be restored.

This is what Christ has done, He has brought us together into the family of God and it is what Jesus prayed for in John 17:20-23 and is fulfilled in the church, or at least it should be. We are told, **“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.”**

Now we can negate that prayer of Jesus by building up those walls between people or groups of people or we can allow the Holy Spirit to work in our lives and fulfill that prayer! You see, those walls are forever broken down! It is as Paul said in Romans 10:12-13, **“For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For ‘whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.’”**

Let me show you what I mean from Paul’s letter to the Corinthians. In I Corinthians 1:10-15 we are told, **“Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe’s household, that there are contentions among you. Now I say this, that each of you says, ‘I am of Paul,’ or ‘I am of Apollos,’ or ‘I am of Cephas,’ or ‘I am of Christ.’ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name.”**

That is not pretty and when the world sees the church behaving like that, they see that we are no different than the world. And if you think about it, we are negating the prayer of Jesus, that we would be one in Christ. One writer put it like this,

It is well known that the church at Corinth had “divisions” over leadership. Some considering Paul their authority, other Apollos, others Peter, and still others accepted only Jesus as their authority. It is possible that these divisions represent competing house churches, some founded by Paul, some by Apollos. But even if there are multiple house churches founded by different leaders, Paul passionately argues that the body of Christ cannot be divided in this way. In fact, these divisions are a sign of worldliness. . .

The real problem behind the “divisions” is that the church continues to act like Christianity is just another philosophy, and teachers are in competition with each other just as the Greek orators competed. They are still acting “just like the world.” This is the challenge of the “divisions” in 1 Corinthians – how does the modern church act “just like the world”? In what ways have we failed to “de-paganize”? I do not think things have improved much since the first century.

- <https://readingacts.com/2011/10/26/1-corinthians-1-4-the-problem-of-division/>

Over the 22 years I have been pastor of this church, we have had people leave and really be mad at me over likes and dislikes, not doctrinal issues. And sometimes they have been pretty nasty to me and this church.

I can honestly say that as much as I don't agree with their actions, I do love them and when I see them I greet them because they are brothers or sisters in the Lord! We tend to live on the emotional level, that our love is conditional, if they love me then I will love them. And yet, God wants us to love people with His agape love, that unconditional love.

I realize that in the flesh, that will never happen because it is not something we can will ourselves to do. It goes against our flesh nature. But God can give us the power to love like He desires but we must appropriate that love into our lives, we must put legs to our faith and walk in what He desires!

I remember very clearly when I left Calvary Chapel of Elk Grove to come up here and be the pastor of this church. It was a joyous time and it was a sad time. It was joyous in that I saw God's promise to me coming to pass. And it was sad because of the family I left there at Calvary Chapel.

I think that was Paul's heart as well. He loved them and he desired to be with them. Now you may be thinking, "What was stopping him from seeing the brethren in Thessalonica?" Well, we don't have to guess because we are told in verse 18 of I Thessalonians chapter 2. Look at what Paul tells us.

VERSE 18

Once again we see Paul's desire to go and see the Thessalonian believers. And we are also told why he was unable to do so. As Paul wrote this letter from Corinth he saw the roadblocks that Satan was putting up preventing him from going there.

Now think about that for a minute. Paul only spent three Sabbaths there in Thessalonica teaching them and now, all he says here is that “**Satan hindered us.**” These were mostly Gentiles and he does not expound on Satan, who he is. Why? Because they were aware because Paul had taught them!

One of the ways Christians are deceived is that they don't know the Word of God and Satan is a master at getting us to read all kinds of books except the Word of God! Don't fall prey to his tactics, his scheming's!

Now this word, “**hindered**” in the Greek is EGKOPTO, (eng'kop'-to) and it was a military term that referred to the breaking up of a road or digging a trench.

What does that mean? Simply, what opposing armies would do to frustrate their enemies progress would be to break up the road, make it impassable for them so that it would be difficult for the armies to move forward, to travel on it.

So, God did not prevent Paul from going to Thessalonica but Satan did and God did allow it. Remember, God is ultimately in control! Now how did Satan prevent Paul from going back to Thessalonica?

We are not told but it could be because of the opposition they faced there, it was just too dangerous. It could have been a medical issue on Paul's part, the “thorn in the flesh” but we are not told for sure!

Now how did Paul know that this was not the Spirit of God preventing him from going? I like what one writer had to say. He wrote, “Perhaps one way is this: when we know that we are in the will of God, any hindrances that arise are not the Spirit’s work but the devil’s. Also, Satan can be expected to hinder whenever God is blessing. But God always overrules Satan’s opposition. In this particular case, Paul’s inability to go to Thessalonica resulted in the writing of this Letter. The Letter, in turn, has resulted in glory to God and blessing to us.” (William MacDonald)

So, God allowed this but He did not cause Satan to hinder Paul from going to Thessalonica. And we need to remember that Satan wants to thwart the work of God and he will use any means at his disposal to do so!

Now let me say this. Yes, Satan wants to thwart the plans of God but I truly believe that as we surrender our lives to the Lord, as we walk by faith, what Satan tried to hinder God will do something even better.

Let me give you this example. When Jesus Christ was placed on the cross of Calvary, when He was crucified, I am sure the Devil and his demons rejoiced. I don’t think they understood what Jesus was doing.

So, looking at this through human eyes, as the disciples did, it was tragic, it was discouraging, all they placed their hope in was now taken away.

But look at what took place. In the death of Jesus on the cross of Calvary He paid in full the penalty for our sins. He restored our fellowship with the Father. He has given to us eternal life. And, three days later He rose from the grave as the Firstfruits of the harvest of many others who will be raised in glory!

Satan thought he won but in the end, he lost! Never forget that. Don't give up and I know it can be difficult as doors close, as situations arise and we lose hope.

In regard to these roadblocks the enemy places in front of us, commentator R. C. H. Lenski wrote,

This by no means excludes divine providence which rules in the midst of our enemies. Satan entered the heart of Judas so that he made plans to betray Jesus, and God permitted the betrayal for his own divine and blessed ends.

So Satan succeeded in frustrating Paul's two plans to return to Thessalonica, but only because this accorded with God's own plans regarding the work Paul was to do. Satan has brought many a martyr to his death, and God permitted it. The death of these martyrs was more blessed for them and for the cause of the gospel than their life would have been.

It is ever so with Satan's successes. No thanks to Satan! His guilt is the greater. It was due to Satan that the Thessalonians suffered just as the original churches in Judea had to suffer (v. 14) although God permitted this suffering.

- R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon* pp. 275-76

Now one more point in regard to these roadblocks of Satan, listen to what Spurgeon has to say. He wrote,

Supposing that we have ascertained that hindrances in our way really come from Satan, WHAT THEN? I have but one piece of advice, and that is, go on, hindrance or no hindrance, in the path of duty as God the Holy Ghost enables you.

- Spurgeon

Did Paul give up? We might but not Paul, he saw ways of getting around those roadblocks by sending Timothy there.

In I Thessalonians 3 we see this take place as Paul sends Timothy to see how they are doing. Notice what Paul said, **“Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone, and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith . . . But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also to see you - therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith.”** I Thessalonians 3:1-2, 6-7.

Never forget that God is in control and at times, when we can lose hope, when we can become discouraged because things are not happening like we think they should, remember what Paul said in I Corinthians 15:58, **“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”**

The Amplified Bible puts this verse like this, **“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be firm (steadfast), immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord [always being superior, excelling, doing more than enough in the service of the Lord], knowing and being continually aware that your labor in the Lord is not futile [it is never wasted or to no purpose].”**

I don't know how many of you remember the movie *Galaxy Quest*, but in the movie one of the lines was, "Never give up. Never surrender." I think that is what Paul is telling us to do. Don't give up, forge ahead. Don't surrender to Satan because greater is He that is in you than he that is in this world!

It is a battle and we have to depend on the Lord. When we try to do it on our own we will fail. But the Lord never fails and I am confident about that.

Let me share this story with you and you will see what I mean about perseverance. We are told,

In 1972, NASA launched the exploratory space probe *Pioneer 10*. According to Leon Jaroff in *Time*, the satellite's primary mission was to reach Jupiter, photograph the planet and its moons, and beam data to earth about Jupiter's magnetic field, radiation belts, and atmosphere. Scientists regarded this as a bold plan, for at that time no earth satellite had ever gone beyond Mars, and they feared the asteroid belt would destroy the satellite before it could reach its target.

But *Pioneer 10* accomplished its mission and much, much more. Swinging past the giant planet in November 1973, Jupiter's immense gravity hurled *Pioneer 10* at a higher rate of speed toward the edge of the solar system. At one billion miles from the sun, *Pioneer 10* passed Saturn. At some two billion miles, it hurtled past Uranus; Neptune at nearly three billion miles; Pluto at almost four billion miles. By 1997, twenty-five years after its launch, *Pioneer 10* was more than six billion miles from the sun.

And despite that immense distance, *Pioneer 10* continued to beam back radio signals to scientists on Earth. 'Perhaps most remarkable,' writes Jaroff, 'those signals emanate from an 8-watt transmitter, which radiates about as much power as a bedroom night light, and takes more than nine hours to reach Earth.'

The Little Satellite That Could was not qualified to do what it did. Engineers designed Pioneer 10 with a useful life of just three years. But it kept going and going. By simple longevity, its tiny 8-watt transmitter radio accomplished more than anyone thought possible.

So it is when we offer ourselves to serve the Lord. God can work even through someone with 8-watt abilities. God cannot work, however, through someone who quits.

- Craig Brian Larson, Pastoral Grit: The Strength to Stand and to Stay

That truly was Paul. Now, did Paul ever make it back to Thessalonica? I believe he did. According to Acts 20:1-5, Paul did return there for a time. Luke tells us, **“After the uproar had ceased, Paul called the disciples to himself, embraced them, and departed to go to Macedonia. Now when he had gone over that region and encouraged them with many words, he came to Greece and stayed three months. And when the Jews plotted against him as he was about to sail to Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia. And Sopater of Berea accompanied him to Asia - also Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians, and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy, and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia. These men, going ahead, waited for us at Troas.”**

It sounds like he did pass through Thessalonica, maybe not staying long but at least seeing these brethren, fellowshipping with them and encouraging them for a time.

Never forget that we should never underestimate Satan’s ability to hinder people from service, fellowship, or worship. Although greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world, like I have said, (1 John 4:4), we have a very real adversary who will do whatever it takes to thwart our ministry. We need to forge head and ask God to guide us!

So, Paul not only loved their company, their fellowship but he loved them as he warned them not to let Satan cause divisions between them in thinking that he did not want to see them anymore. He did but Satan put up roadblocks, so he sent Timothy to them to encourage them and see how they were doing!

Let's read on because the next verse deals with the coming of Jesus for His Bride the Church and you might think that it really doesn't fit with leadership and Paul's love for these brethren, but it does! Listen to what Paul says.

VERSE 19

Here again we see Paul's love for these believers. He may not get to see them again here on earth but one day they will meet as they are gathered together with the Lord. Listen again to what Paul said here, "**For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing?**"

Now we may put many things in there. Some may say, "The Bears winning the Super Bowl!" Others may say it is this thing or that thing. But Paul was not focused on things or even things for himself, he was focused on others, on these believers and what joy it brought to his life knowing that they came to saving faith!

You see, he answers his own question. His hope, his joy, his crown of rejoicing, "**Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?**" Of course it is!

Remember I mentioned how difficult it was to leave the family at Calvary Chapel of Elk Grove when we came up here to Manitowoc. We were very close to the people down there and I didn't know when I would see them again and yet, I knew I would see them again.

You see, there is going to be a grand reunion with them in heaven! So, either here, there or in the air we will meet again and that is what Paul is saying here.

We should have that kind of love for each other and the only way you are going to have that love for each is that you need to fellowship together, you need to talk with each other, you need to be in contact with each other. Let me show you what I mean. We are told,

Mamie made frequent trips to the branch post office. One day she confronted a long line of people who were waiting for service from the postal clerks. Mamie only needed stamps, so a helpful observer asked, “Why don’t you use the stamp machine? You can get all the stamps you need and you won’t have to stand in line.” Mamie said, “I know, but the machine can’t ask me about my arthritis.” People still need human contact.

- Source unknown

I think Paul spent long hours with the Thessalonians when he was there for those three weeks or three Sabbaths. And he taught them, fellowshiped with them, he got to really know them and they got to know Paul!

I can’t tell you how blessed I am here at Calvary. We are not a perfect church, there is no perfect church. But when I see people staying around after service, talking, sharing, praying and-so-on, it blesses me.

That is what we are to be about. Listen to what the early church was about from Acts 2:42, “**And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.**”

The gathered together to study the Word of God. They shared in communion and they prayed together. And the other part that is so important, is that they fellowshiped together, they spent time together. Let me share this with you regarding this fellowship that we as Christians are to enjoy. We are told,

In order to understand the importance of Christian fellowship, we must first understand what Christian fellowship is and what it isn't. The Greek words translated "fellowship" in the New Testament means essentially a partnership to the mutual benefit of those involved. Christian fellowship, then, is the mutually beneficial relationship between Christians, who can't have the identical relationship with those outside the faith.

The mystery and privilege that is Christian fellowship is that it exists because God has enabled it by His grace. Those who believe the gospel are united in the Spirit through Christ to the Father, and that unity is the basis of fellowship. This relationship is described by Jesus in His high-priestly prayer for His followers: "I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me" (John 17:23). The "complete unity" He refers to is the oneness that Christians experience in true fellowship, oneness with one another, with Christ and with the Father. Just as the Father is in Jesus, so is Jesus in us, and we have unity with one another because of the uniqueness of that relationship (1 John 1:3).

This relationship must be the basis of Christian fellowship. We can have friendships and relationships with unbelievers, but true Christian fellowship can only occur within the body of Christ. We are united to one another by common beliefs, purposes and goals. Our hearts and minds are "other-worldly" because we follow Jesus Christ, who said that His kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36). We know that we are strangers in this world, and we long for the time when we will be in our true home, heaven.

The importance of true Christian fellowship is that it reinforces these things in our mind and helps us to focus on Christ and His desires and goals for us. As iron sharpens iron, in true Christian fellowship Christians sharpen one another's faith and stir one another to exercise that faith in love and good works, all to God's glory.

- <https://www.gotquestions.org/Christian-fellowship.html>

Again, if you are not involved in fellowship then stick around after service and talk to someone, introduce yourself to someone you might not know and get to know them. We need to have that love for each other and if you are struggling with that, deal with it. Maybe there is someone you don't want to talk to, then go and talk to them.

Don't let Satan get in the way but let the love of God break down any walls that may have gone up. And I will let you in on a little secret. If you are struggling with getting along with someone right now, you better work on it because you will be spending eternity with them!

And please understand that this is not a threat but it is to spur you on to develop relationships, get to know people because as the human body needs its various parts to function, we need each other!

Now there is one more thing that I would like to talk about before we make our last point in verse 20 and that is the return of Jesus for His Bride, the Church. We call it the Rapture and we will go into great detail about this event as we get to I Thessalonians chapter 4 but I want to focus a little on this subject right now.

Keep in mind that every chapter of I Thessalonians closes with remarks on the Rapture of the Church and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and I Thessalonians chapter 4 goes into great detail about the Rapture of the Church.

Now, in saying that there are many in the church today who are downplaying the Second Coming of Jesus and the Rapture of the Church. They see it is unnecessary to talk about and really counterproductive to what we are supposed to be doing.

I realize that is hard to believe but the rational goes like this, “We have other more important things to discuss – like solving the problem of world hunger, healing of diseases like AIDS and bringing about social justice which will bring equity to the people of the earth. Talk of the Second Coming causes people to long for the future which will hinder them for working hard right now here on the earth.”

That is the most ridicules thing I have heard, well, maybe not the most ridiculous but it is high up there! Let me show you the foolishness of this kind of logic.

When I was in nursing school I longed for the day when I would graduate and work as a nurse. Now me longing to graduate did not cause me to sit around and do nothing waiting for the day when I would graduate.

No, instead I worked hard, kept my grades up and was actively involved in the work until the day I graduated!

Paul put it like this in Titus 2:13-15, **“looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works. Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you.”**

I don’t care what man may say but the Holy Spirit, speaking through Paul, tells us that we are to be **LOOKING** for His return, it is our **HOPE!** And Paul says, **“Let no one despise you.”** And yet, that is what is happening today. People are being put down for looking for His return!

I don't know if you realize this or not, but there are more verses regarding the Second Coming of Jesus than anything else. There are over 500 references regarding the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, maybe a lot more, and yet, we are told it is not important, we should not be talking about it, teaching it, looking forward to it? That is just foolishness and it is wrong. I am sorry, I am going to listen to God over man here and really everywhere but I am looking for His return!

And make no mistake about it, our hope is in the Lord's return and not in man trying to fix this world. That is not going to happen. One writer put it like this in regard to this hope we have. He wrote,

Biblical prophecy provides some of the greatest encouragement and hope available to us today. Just as the Old Testament is saturated with prophecies concerning Christ's first advent, so both testaments are filled with references to the second coming of Christ.

One scholar has estimated that there are 1,845 references to Christ's second coming in the Old Testament, where 17 books give it prominence. In the 260 chapters of the New Testament, there are 318 references to the second advent of Christ - an amazing 1 out of every 30 verses.

Twenty-three of the 27 New Testament books refer to this great event. For every prophecy in the Bible concerning Christ's first advent, there are 8 which look forward to His second!

- Today in the Word, April, 1989, p. 27

And keep in mind that Jesus held the Jewish people responsible for not knowing the time of His visitation in His First Coming and how much more are we accountable with so much more Scripture pointing to His Second Coming? May we be warned and may pastors be warned not to get into a social gospel to fix this world but to continue focusing on the mission of the church, to make disciples of Jesus Christ!

VERSE 20

This last point showing the love that Paul had for these believers in Thessalonica is just reiterating what he already said about them. That they are his glory and joy.

His heart just overflowed with love for these believers and I think it was born out of their love, their walk with the Lord.

Thessalonica was not a good place and now the light of God has shined down upon them and lives were transformed and their witness was strong, it was bold and it was affecting people's lives and Paul was filled with joy over this!

In III John 4 John said, "**I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.**"

John is speaking of his spiritual children, those that he led to the Lord. And yes, God does the saving but John was a part of this work, he was a part of their lives. And thus, he was blessed, like any father, to hear that his spiritual children, in a sense, are walking with the Lord.

In other words, they were not walking aimlessly through life with no direction or just doing as they pleased. But they were walking in the truths of God found in the Word of God.

You see, to walk in the truth means to walk consistent with the truths of God, to live what you say you believe, and they were!

And that is what Paul is saying about these Thessalonian believers, they too were walking in the truths of God found in the Word of God and it blessed Paul, gave him great joy!

Let me put it like this in regard to following the will of God. We are told,

As the golfer approached the first tee, a hazardous hole with a green surrounded by water, he debated if he should use his new golf ball. Deciding that the hole was too treacherous, he pulled out an old ball and placed it on the tee. Just then he heard a voice from above say loudly: “*Use the new ball!*” Frightened, he replaced the old ball with the new one and approached the tee.

Now the voice from above shouted: “*Take a practice swing!*” With this, the golfer stepped backward and took a swing.

Feeling more confident, he approached the tee when the voice again rang out: “*Use the old ball!*”

The will of God, nothing more, nothing less, nothing else.

- Source Unknown

Humorous yes, but practical and true. Listen to what God is showing you and walk accordingly. That is so important for us.

As I begin to close this morning, look at this quality of a leader – **LOVE!** I realize that some feel that showing love like that as a leader is showing weakness and people will walk all over you!

Let me say this. People will walk all over you no matter what you do. And if you want people to follow you as a leader, then you love them as Paul loved these believers!

Paul loved their company and missed them when they were apart. He saw that Satan hindered him seeing them but he loved them too much to just drop out, so he sent Timothy to see them and report back on how they were doing. He had this joy knowing that one day they would gather together with the Lord. And his heart overflowed with joy for these brethren and they knew it!

May we have love like that for the body of Christ, for the brethren.

And so, as we have seen in our study on leaders, as leaders, may we be ***FAITHFUL IN THE WORK***. As leaders may we ***LEAD WITH GENTLENESS***. As leaders may we ***LEAD WITH CONCERN***. And as leaders, may we ***LEAD WITH LOVE!***