

I THESSALONIANS 3:11-13
THROUGH THE BLESSED HOPE!

Please turn in your Bibles this morning to I Thessalonians chapter 3 as we continue our study through Paul's letter to the church in Thessalonica. Keep in mind that Paul established this church on his second missionary journey and as the light of God shined down upon these people who were in darkness, many came to saving faith!

And Paul spent some three weeks there teaching them and establishing these new believers in Christ. And really, that has been our focus here in I Thessalonians chapter 3, how this church or these believers were established in the faith.

This morning we will finish up looking at how the church was established. Now, we have seen so far in this chapter that the church was established by ***GODLY MEN WHO SPOKE FORTH THE WORD OF GOD!*** And that truly is the key. You have to take in a healthy diet, good food, if you want to grow and be healthy and the same is true in our spiritual life. And as young as this church was, Paul did not hold back in teaching them the deep things of God, issues that many in the church today don't even want to talk about let alone teach!

But if you are a man of God you will give to people what they truly need and not necessarily what they want. And that is what Paul, Silas and Timothy did!

Next, we saw that the church was established ***THROUGH PRAYER!*** Paul said, "**For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God, night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith?**" I Thessalonians 3:9-10.

Paul understood the battles that they would face in their new faith in Christ and thus, he lifted them up that they would grow and mature in the faith!

This morning, as we finish up this section on how the church was established, we will be looking at the fact that the church was established ***THROUGH THE BLESSED HOPE!***

And as we will see, the focus is the return of Jesus Christ. And I realize that you are probably wondering how the return of Jesus establishes a church, establishes people in the Lord. And I will show you how that all plays out because if you lose that focus, if you lose sight of the return of Jesus, then it will affect the way you will live out your faith.

And make no mistake about it, many do that today as they try to live like there is no tomorrow and I have news for them, there truly is! Let me share this with you as it will set the stage for what we will be looking at this morning. We are told,

Everyday we're bombarded with propaganda about "the good life." Countless appeals come our way, some subtle and some bold, inviting us to buy into a philosophy of life that's "guaranteed" to make us happy. Usually, they're hedonistic [pleasure-seeking] and materialistic at the core, each one promising us things that will *really* satisfy. But they don't. In fact, if you probe these pushers of "the good life," they probably won't even know what that means.

So, what does it mean to really live?

Some peddlers of prosperity say it takes money to really live. That's it. **Wealth** can buy the good life. But our prosperous, money-hungry culture is plagued with discontent, disappointment, and depression. Others say that real living belongs to the young – not to the young at heart, but to the energetic, attractive, and fit. So people get tummy tucks, hair transplants, or other expensive physical enhancements to reverse the apparent effects of aging. But is looking or even feeling young the same as living? Still others think real living means relaxing, kicking back in peace and quiet, swinging in a hammock and sipping cocktails. But is a drowsy, lazy, and pampered existence the definition of living? Why not the educated life, the adventurous life, the disciplined life, or the wild life?

When left to ourselves, we substitute the artificial for the authentic, the phony for the real – particularly in the mental, emotional, and spiritual realms. Mentally, we substitute knowledge or even information for true wisdom. Emotionally, we substitute feelings or opinions for true facts. Spiritually, we substitute the temporal and earthly for the eternal and heavenly. Yet, when we rely on our own imaginations, it's impossible to answer the question, "What does it mean to really live?"

- Charles Swindoll, Living Insights New Testament Commentary 1 & 2 Thessalonians, pp. 41-42

And this morning, as we go through these verses here in I Thessalonians chapter 3, we will see what it means to really live. You see, I believe it is based upon what we are living for or who we are living for.

Perspective and a correct perspective of things is important. How you look at things will determine how you feel, what you do. Let me show you what I mean. Here we are in Wisconsin and it is July and let's say the temperature outside is 50 degrees!

How do you feel? You feel cold! It is freezing outside! You put on a sweatshirt or even a jacket! How you feel and what you do is affected by the perspective you have of the situation. It is July and it is supposed to be 80 degrees outside, not 50!

Now let's change things up a little. It is January and it is 50 degrees outside! How do you feel? You feel great! It is a heat wave! Thus, you take off the winter jacket and put on a sweatshirt or maybe a light jacket! You see, how you feel and what you do is affected by the perspective you have of the situation. It is January and it is supposed to be 20 degrees outside, not 50!

I believe the same is true in our spiritual lives. We need to have a correct perspective of things and that will then allow you to live that abundant life that the Scriptures speak of. It will help you to live a life that is pleasing to God! You see, how you feel and what you do is affected by the perspective you have of the situation around you.

With that as our background, let's begin reading in I Thessalonians chapter 3 beginning in verse 11 and let's see what the Lord has for us this morning as we study through His Word.

I THESSALONIANS 3

VERSE 11

Paul begins this prayer by asking God to direct his way to Thessalonica, to open a door for him to see them again, and it would seem that the Lord eventually did!

Why did Paul want to go back to this young church? Remember what we read as we opened up our study this morning in I Thessalonians 2:9-10, **“For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God, night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith?”**

Yes, Paul prayed for them night and day, **“exceedingly”** and that was important. Morris picks up on this word, **“exceedingly”** and shows us what depth of prayer was given by Paul for these believers. He wrote, “There are various ways of expressing the thought of abundance, and this double compound is probably the most emphatic of all.” (Morris)

But he also wanted to see them face to face so that he might teach them even more. Yes, his letter will instruct them, but how much the more if he can personally talk with them, answer their questions and-so-on.

And here’s the thing. If you think you have reached your goal, that you are complete or have reached the point where you don’t need to grow anymore, you have an issue of ***PRIDE***, thus, you have not been made perfect yet.

Let’s face it, we have not attained the goal yet, but we press on. And for those who think, “Hey, I have read the Bible a couple of times. I have heard many Bible studies. I don’t need to know it anymore, I have this down.”

Let me say this. You don't! Think about this for a minute. God has given to us His Word so that we can grow in our relationship with Him and with others. And as we read the Word of God and apply the Word of God to our lives we grow in the faith.

Now if you think you have it all down, what you are saying is that you know everything about God, you have attained all that God knows and if you think you are at that point, you might as well ask God to move over and set up another chair next to Him!

You see, God is all-knowing and thus, how can we know everything about Him? We can't and thus, throughout our lives God is revealing more of Himself to us through His Word opened up to us by His Spirit!

And Paul, being a godly man or a man of God, wants to go and visit these believers and instruct them more on the things of God so that they could continue to grow. And yes, Timothy was there and brought back a good report on their progress, but Paul also wanted to see them and encourage them and instruct them on the things of God!

And let me add this. Who we are following will be manifested in our lives. And there are really only two options here. You will either follow the world and the influence the world has on you will be manifested in your life. Or you will follow the Lord according to His Word and the nature of Jesus will flow from your life.

Let me show you what I mean. We are told,

Some years ago, musicians noted that errand boys in a certain part of London all whistled out of tune as they went about their work. It was talked about and someone suggested that it was because the bells of Westminster were slightly out of tune. Something had gone wrong with the chimes and they were discordant [conflicting]. The boys did not know there was anything wrong with the peals, and quite unconsciously they had copied their pitch.

So we tend to copy the people with whom we associate; we borrow thoughts from the books we read and the programs to which we listen, almost without knowing it.

God has given us His Word which is the absolute pitch of life and living. If we learn to sing by it, we shall easily detect the false in all of the music of the world.

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Absolutely. Whoever you are in tune with will be manifested in your life! Paul wanted to make sure that these Thessalonian believers were in tune with the Lord and from what Timothy has said, and the report of others, the fragrance of Jesus flowed from their lives because they were close to Him!

So, we see that Paul is praying that he can go and see them again and he is praying to the Father and to Jesus, One God manifested in three distinct persons and two of them are spoken of here. And look at verse 12 and we will see one of the reasons Paul is praying for them and wanting to see them!

VERSE 12

This is interesting to me. Paul said, “**. . . may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another . . .**” In saying that, is Paul telling us that this church lacked love? Was this church cold to the needs of the brethren?

No, I don't believe they were cold, insensitive to others. And the reason I can say that is because in I Thessalonians 1:3 we are told, “**remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father.**”

We see that they served the Lord with a **“labor of love”** and as they served the Lord out of love they ministered to others with the love of God!

Also, In I Thessalonians 3:6 we are told, **“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.”**

Now let me say this because I believe it is very important for us to understand. In Galatians chapter 5 Paul speaks of walking in the Spirit or walking according to the flesh. And there is a battle to this walk. And Paul speaks of the works of the flesh and how ugly they truly are. In fact, as you look at these works of the flesh they are in opposition to love!

I don't think we need to review the works of the flesh, we deal with it daily. What I want to do here in Galatians chapter 5 is look at the fruit of the Spirit. Paul tells us in Galatians 5:22-26, **“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.”**

Notice that it says **“... the fruit of the Spirit is love ...”** It is singular, not plural. That means Paul is saying that the fruit of the Holy Spirit is *LOVE!* Then what is Paul speaking of when he talks about joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness and-so-on?

I believe that these are the characteristics of that fruit, what it tastes like, how it looks! And I believe that this fruit of love that the Holy Spirit imparts to us grows as we grow in the Lord. It matures as we mature in the Lord!

The key is surrendering to the Lord or as Paul put it in Galatians 5:16, “**I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.**” It is yielding to what the Holy Spirit is showing you and the Holy Spirit is not going to show you how to behave in a manner that is not Christ-like. That is the works of the flesh and it is amazing how quickly that flesh nature can manifest itself.

There is a battle of the wills going on in our lives every single day and it is the battle of the flesh that is warring against the Spirit of God and whoever you yield to, whoever you surrender to, will be manifested in your life! It is as Paul said, “**If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.**” Live out your faith so others can see it and live in such a way that the love of God will be seen flowing from your life!

And for these Thessalonian believers, it was not that they did not have love for the brethren, they did. But Paul wants that love to continue to grow, not to be stagnant or cold! You see, when compared to the love of God, we are all in need of more love!

And keep in mind that this love that Paul is speaking of here is that **AGAPE** love or that unconditional love. It is not human love or emotional love but it is the love of God that just keeps on giving and giving in spite of what is done to you!

“I can’t do that?” You are right. Human love tends to respond to what was done to that person. If you love me then I will love you. If you cross me, look out, I will not get even, I will get ahead!

I found this out the hard way several years ago. I was washing the dishes and my wife walked by and I took the sprayer from the sink, and you know, I sprayed her. As Flip Wilson use to say, “The Devil made me do it!”

I have so much fun. But then Julie said those words I did not want to hear, “I will not get even with you on this one, I will get ahead!” So, I had to hire security – no, but I was a little afraid until I forgot about it. **NEVER DO THAT!**

So, I was taking a shower one day and I always lock that bathroom door, except for that day. And here I am, nice hot shower, shampooing my hair so my eyes are closed.

And I did not hear the door open nor did I see Julie come in, my eyes were closed. And Julie had gotten one of those Big Gulp glasses and filled it with ice water. You know what is coming.

Hot water raining down on me and then, all of a sudden, **ICE COLD WATER!** I did not think I could ever make a noise like that, but I did! I thought I was going to die! And from the other side of the door there is Julie with a big smile on her face!

What’s my point? Be careful what you do to your wife, they will get you back and better! But that is not the main point, although I do lock my shower door now.

AGAPE love would not respond like that, even though I would have done the same thing. You see, **AGAPE** love does not get even, it does not get ahead, it loves in spite of what is being done.

Let me explain what this AGAPE love is all about. This love is as follows,

The Greek word *agape* is often translated “love” in the New Testament. How is “agape love” different from other types of love? The essence of agape love is goodwill, benevolence, and willful delight in the object of love. Unlike our English word *love*, *agape* is not used in the New Testament to refer to romantic or sexual love. Nor does it refer to close friendship or brotherly love, for which the Greek word *philia* is used. Agape love involves faithfulness, commitment, and an act of the will. It is distinguished from the other types of love by its lofty moral nature and strong character. Agape love is beautifully described in 1 Corinthians 13. . . .

[“Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.” (I Corinthians 13:4-8a]

Agape love is always shown by what it does. God’s love is displayed most clearly at the cross. “God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ - by grace you have been saved” (Ephesians 2:4-5, ESV). We did not deserve such a sacrifice, “but God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). God’s agape love is unmerited, gracious, and constantly seeking the benefit of the ones He loves. The Bible says we are the undeserving recipients of His lavish agape love (1 John 3:1). God’s demonstration of agape love led to the sacrifice of the Son of God for those He loves.

We are to love others with agape love, whether they are fellow believers (John 13:34) or bitter enemies (Matthew 5:44). Jesus gave the parable of the Good Samaritan as an example of sacrifice for the sake of others, even for those who may care nothing at all for us. Agape love as modeled by Christ is not based on a feeling; rather, it is a determined act of the will, a joyful resolve to put the welfare of others above our own.

Agape love does not come naturally to us. Because of our fallen nature, we are incapable of producing such a love. If we are to love as God loves, that love - that *agape* - can only come from its Source. This is the love that “has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us” when we became His children (Romans 5:5; cf. Galatians 5:22). “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters” (1 John 3:16). Because of God’s love toward us, we are able to love one another.

- <https://www.gotquestions.org/agape-love.html>

Exactly. As I look at people today I get a clear picture of how the world can’t manifest this kind of love, this **AGAPE** love.

Whether you are for President Trump or not, I have seen how the liberal’s hate him and call him hateful. I was watching the news a few weeks back and at this Trump rally on the West Coast they had many protesters who were against Trump there as well.

And what I saw was a sad and vivid picture of where people are at today. These protesters who are coming against Trump because he is hateful, and they are yelling, “Hate! Hate!” and their faces are snarled up, almost demonic looking as you can see the hate pouring out from them!

Now let me say this. They have an excuse, the love of God has not, as of yet, been poured out into their lives. We pray that they come to saving faith. But what about us? Do we look like that when we come against those who are opposing us?

We shouldn't! We don't have to agree with them, we are not to compromise our faith for them, but we should love them!

Let me ask you this. What is the identifying mark of a Christian? And I am sure we can come up with all kinds of ideas. Maybe quoting Scriptures? No! Or maybe carrying a big King James Bible? No! Wearing Christian tee-shirts? No! Going to church? No! Tithing? No! Then what is it, what is the identifying mark of a Christian?

LOVE – AGAPE LOVE! Jesus put it this way in John 13:34-35, “**A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.**”

As a disciple of Jesus, we are to love others just as Christ loves us and gave His life for us. I know, it does not seem fair, especially the way some people treat us. Please understand that this love is not based upon being fair, it is based in God Himself and as the love of God is poured into our lives, we need to allow that love to not only flow in us but through us and touch the lives of others.

And a Christian can gauge their growth in the Lord not just by the head knowledge they have but how they apply what they know to their lives, how they live out their faith, ***BY THEIR LOVE FOR OTHERS!***

And here is where it gets tricky because we all have reasons why we can't love that person, why we can't say "Hi!" to them, why we can't reach out to them. But listen to what John tells us and as you are listening to these words, may the Spirit of God minister to your hearts and show you, show me, what we need to do.

In I John 4:20-21 we are told, **"If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also."**

Now let me make this point so you don't come to the wrong conclusion here. Our love for others doesn't save us, Jesus does.

Now, in saying that, then what is John's point here? He is saying if you don't manifest the love of God towards others, if you hate them, then maybe the love of God really never touched your life!

I am not saying we don't struggle in this area, we do. But understand that this is a battle of the wills! The will of God and the will of the flesh!

And if you are having a hard time with this, if you can't forgive a brother or sister in the Lord, then remember what Jesus said in Matthew 5:23-24, **"Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift."**

God wants us to heal relationships before we serve Him, why? Because the love He has shown us needs to be extended to others and if we can't, then we are in no position to serve!

Again, listen to what John tells us regarding this love in I John 4:9-11. He wrote, **“In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”**

May we love others with the love that God has given to us, the love with which He loves us with, for by this all will know we are disciples of Christ, by His love flowing through our lives!

Now it is not just believers we are to love. You see, our love needs to go far beyond the family of God or it is shallow.

Jesus tells us in Matthew 5:43-48, **“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.”**

Now, in seeing this kind of love that God wants us to manifest, I think you can understand why Paul said that he was praying for these Thessalonian believers that they would, **“... abound in love to one another and to all ...”**

And this will not reach its full potential until we go home to be with the Lord but don't use that as an excuse. We are to love people with that unconditional love, not because they deserve our love but because God demands us to love others!

But what is this all about? Why is God doing this? Look at verse 13 of I Thessalonians chapter 3.

VERSE 13

Now as you read how we are to live out our faith, it can be discouraging when we see how far short we come. But please understand that when Paul uses the word "**holiness**" here in I Thessalonians it comes from the same Greek word as "*sanctification*" comes from.

And the idea is that of being set apart. Paul wanted their hearts set apart from the world's standards, the world's ideas and unto God!

It is as Paul said in II Corinthians 6:14-18, "**Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people.' Therefore 'Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you.' 'I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty.'**"

And what many are doing today is they are not being set apart by God but they are being molded into what the world wants them to be. Thus, there is very little difference between the saved and unsaved, we have blended in because we have compromised our faith and we are not being transformed by the power of God but conformed to this world's system, this world's ideas!

Now keep in mind justification is immediate, as soon as we repent of our sins we are justified before God. There is no record of our sins any longer because they have been paid in full by Christ. Our sins have been cast as far as the east is from the west and they are to be remembered no more!

But, on the other hand, sanctification is a life-long process that the Lord will complete in us. Let me explain it like this. We are told,

Justification is instantaneous; sanctification is a long growth. Justification is the act of God whereby He takes a man who is dead in trespasses and sins and says, "I create within you the new life of Christ and now I look upon you and see you just as perfect as I see the Lord Jesus Christ."

Justification is the act of God whereby he declares an ungodly man to be perfect while he is still ungodly. It is as extraordinary a thing as if you were able to say that the caterpillar is really a beautiful butterfly. "Oh," you say, "but it isn't! It still looks like a caterpillar." Well, that is exactly what God does with us. He comes to us in our "caterpillar status" and declares us to be "butterflies."

In reality, that is what happens in nature, too; that caterpillar does become a butterfly. For God has given us this remarkable picture of metamorphosis—that which goes into the cocoon as a worm comes out as a butterfly, for it lives part of its life in one state and part in another. We call this process metamorphosis.

It is very interesting to note the Greek word used in Rom 12:2: “Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed (metamorphosed) by the renewing of your mind.”

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I like that. I know the work is going to be completed but God is still working in me and He does not give up.

Listen again to this verse here in I Thessalonians 3:13 because there is something that I would like to focus on. We are told, **“so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.”**

Paul is telling us that this process is completed, this sanctification process when He returns for His Bride, the Church. Now that is for those who are alive when this takes place. When we die now in Christ, we go to be with Him. Our spirit and soul go to be with the Lord and then, at the rapture we will obtain our new bodies.

But I believe what Paul is speaking of here is the rapture and not the Second Coming when the Lord returns to set up His Kingdom and we come with Him!

Now, in knowing that the Lord can return at any moment for His Bride, the Church, it helps us to live lives that will be pleasing to Him. Let’s face it, none of us want to be involved in ungodly behavior when He returns for us, do we?

Imagine, two Christians who can’t get along. They won’t even say “Hi” to each other. And as they pass by you can see anger, hatred on their faces. And as they are walking by each other, bitter at each other, sneering at each other, and then, in the twinkling of an eye they are caught up to meet the Lord in the air!

Are you going to have that same attitude as you go to be with the Lord as you do down here? Absolutely not! Then why are you holding onto it down here? I can't understand that.

For me, over the last 22 years people have left the church for all kinds of likes and dislikes, not for doctrinal issues, and I love them, greet them, I have no problem with them. I may not agree with what they are doing or how they are responding to me, but that does not change my love for them. That is how it should be folks, we are to love one another as Christ loves us!

And yes, this sanctification process will end when we go to be with the Lord, but why not love each other now. There is so much you are missing out on when you harbor hatred and resentment, anger and-so-on. There is such a blessing in letting go and loving people, even if they don't love you back!

And yes, sanctification is a work of God in our lives, but we must be obedient for the work to be accomplished in our lives! We must surrender to God and walk in the Spirit or we will fulfill the lust of the flesh!

I like what Paul says in I Thessalonians 5:23-24, as he tells us, “**Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.**”

Praise the Lord for the work He is doing in us and through us, may we not get in His way or prevent Him from what He wants to do!

Now regarding this “**coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints**” Paul uses the Greek word PAROUSIA, (par-oo-see’-ah) for coming, and again, I believe he is speaking of the rapture of the church here. J. Vernon McGee expounds on this thought as he wrote,

“At the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.” Most schools of thought would agree that this verse indicates that the saints are going to come with Christ when He comes to the earth to establish His Kingdom. But this verse also seems to indicate that He doesn’t reward them until that time when He comes to the earth to establish His Kingdom. Yet many of us believe that believers will come before the judgment seat of Christ *before* that; that is, we believe that when He takes the church out of the world, the world enters the Great Tribulation period, and then he comes to establish His Kingdom at the end of the Great Tribulation period. So the question naturally arises: When is He going to present us “unblameable in holiness before God”? Is it when He takes the church out of the world? Or, will it be at the time He comes to the earth to establish His Kingdom? The answer depends upon our understanding of this phrase, “at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.”

There are different Greek words for “coming” or “appearing.” The first of these words is *epiphaneia*; we get our word *epiphany* from it. The first coming of Christ was an epiphany. It has the idea of a shining through. The King James translation uses the word *appeared*: “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men” (Titus 2:11). The Lord Jesus came in person as a little Babe in Bethlehem more than nineteen hundred years ago. It was a breaking through, a shining through of the Lord. It was His epiphany. This word can be used of His first coming or His coming to take the church out of the world or His coming to set up His Kingdom. All three have the idea of a breaking through, a shining through, and the actual presence of the Lord Jesus.

A second Greek word is *apokalupsis*, which means a “revelation” or an “unveiling.” That is actually the name of the Book of Revelation. One could hardly call His first coming an unveiling, because actually His glory was veiled in human flesh when He was born in Bethlehem. It was like the *shekinah* glory in the tabernacle of the Old Testament which was back in the Holy of Holies where only the high priest was allowed to enter. There was a veil which separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the tabernacle. When the Lord Jesus was here the first time, His glory did not show forth; it was veiled in human flesh. When He comes again, His glory will shine forth. So this is a word that refers to His second coming.

The third Greek word is *parousia*. It literally means “presence” or “being alongside.” It is commonly translated “coming,” but it actually means “presence.” We use *coming* in that same way today. I have been introduced to an audience with the words, “We are thankful for the coming of Dr. McGee.” I wasn’t coming at that time: I was already there. It means that I was present, sitting on the platform, and they were happy that I had come. Sometimes in the King James translation, *parousia* is translated as “presence” and sometimes as “coming.” “Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only ...” (Phil. 2:12). In 1 Thessalonians 2:19 as well as in the verse we are considering, *parousia* is translated “coming.”

Therefore, “at the coming of our Lord Jesus” refers to the fact that believers are going to be *present* with the Lord Jesus at the very moment that we are caught up to meet the Lord in the air. He will take us home to glory, to the place that He has prepared for us. So that this “coming” does not refer to the return of the Lord with His saints to establish His Kingdom, but to our coming to heaven into the presence of the Father. We have the same thought in 1 Thessalonians 2:19: “For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?” We will come into the presence of the Lord Jesus and at that time will be presented “unblameable in holiness before God.”

- J. Vernon McGee, Thru the Bible Commentary, Vol. V, p. 389

Folk's, look at the change in Paul's life as he came to Christ. Prior to his conversion, he was trying to beat people back into the Jewish faith. He was arresting them, getting them thrown in jail, consenting to their death because of their faith in Christ.

But now, in coming to Christ himself, he is loving them into the kingdom of God. No more trying to beat people or imprison them, but to set them free with the love of God!

And this church here in Thessalonica grew because of the love that Paul showed them with his life. And it was established as they waited for the Lord's return, it caused them to live lives that were pleasing to the Lord knowing that He could return at any time!

That is what John tells us in I John 3:1-3, **“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”**

As I close this morning, let me leave you with this to think about. We are told, Queen Victoria once paid a visit to a paper mill. The foreman showed her and her attendant over the works without knowing who his distinguished visitor was. She finally went into the rag-sorting shop where men were employed in picking out the rags from the refuse of the city. Upon inquiring what was done with this dirty mass of rags, she was told that, sorted out, it would make the finest white paper. After her departure, the foreman found out who it was that had paid the visit.

Some time later, Her Majesty received a package of the most delicate white stationery having the Queen’s likeness for a watermark, with the intimation that it was made from the dirty rags she had inspected. That illustrates Christ’s work in us. He takes us, filthy as we are, and makes us into new creatures. Receiving Christ is becoming Christ’s. After receiving Him, we are as different from what we were before as pure white paper is from the filthy rags from which it was made.

- Illustrations of Bible Truths

That is what God has done and is doing in our lives. We are justified before Him in Christ and we are being sanctified. And in knowing that, knowing where we were and where we came from and where we are at in Christ, ***MAY WE LOVE PEOPLE WITH THE LOVE OF CHRIST!***