

I THESSALONIANS 5:14-28
WALK IN OBEDIENCE!

Please turn in your Bibles this morning to I Thessalonians chapter 5 as we continue our study through Paul's letter to the church in Thessalonica. This morning we will finish looking at this letter and next time we will begin Paul's second letter to the church in Thessalonica.

Remember that the last two chapters of I Thessalonians deals with how we, as Christians, are to walk. And we have looked at how we are to walk in *holiness*, in *love*, in *honesty*, in *hope*, *in the light*, in *gratitude*. And this morning, we are going to focus on our walk in *obedience*.

And these verses can be broken down like this. In I Thessalonians 5:14-15 we see *Paul explain how we are to relate to each other, to fellow Christians in the church*.

Then, in I Thessalonians 5:16-18 we see *Paul explain how we are to respond to the circumstances, the situations we face in life because how we do will affect the way we impact others in the church*.

In I Thessalonians 5:19-22 *Paul gives to us a short burst of exhortations*.

And then we see, in I Thessalonians 5:23-28 that *Paul will close out this letter with a short benediction or blessing*.

Our walk is a witness to those around us. How we speak, what we do, how we look. How are you walking? Let me share this with you before we get to our text this morning. We are told,

A young man, who had been active in Christian work, went to a distant city to take a position. Sometime afterward a friend, calling on him, mentioned his former work in the presence of some of his new acquaintances. The young man looked annoyed, and when he and his friend were alone, he said: "I didn't intend that these people should know about my church work."

"I am sure your record wasn't one to be ashamed of," his friend rejoined.

"Oh, no," was the answer, "but I did not want them to expect so much of me." The fact was that he had made up his mind to lower the standard of his Christian living, and did not want those with whom he associated to expect anything better of him.

There is a warning in the incident. While it costs something to win a good reputation, it also costs something to hold fast to it. If there ever comes a time when you feel that you would prefer that those around you do not know that you profess to be a Christian, you need to question yourself closely as to the reason. Peter, who denied his Lord, first sought to have it appear that he belonged, not to the disciples, but to the crowd.

- Practical Bible Illustrations from Yesterday and Today

So, as we finish up this letter, notice all that Paul packs in here regarding our walk in the Lord and how it is seen or should be seen.

With that as our background, let's begin reading in I Thessalonians chapter 5 beginning in verse 14 and let's see what the Lord has for us as we study His Word.

I THESSALONIANS 5**VERSES 14-15**

In these verses Paul speaks of six things that should be seen in the church and as I have said, the focus is how we relate to each other, fellow Christians in the church. This is not just what the pastor is to do but it is what we are all to do.

First of all, the church, believers are to exhort or encourage each other on how we are walking. The idea is that of coming alongside someone to help them to move forward, encourage them, even correct them. Not beat them up, condemn them, put them down!

The first point is that we are to warn those who are “**unruly.**” We might not think much of this but Paul’s choice of Greek words speaks of a soldier who was out of rank and it came to mean anyone who did not perform his duty or follow through with what he was responsible for! It speaks of someone who is “rebellious, out of line.”

There are a few ways to look at this and they are important.

If you are not serving in the body of Christ you are cheating your brothers and sisters in the Lord of the gift that God has given to you. If you are serving and you are just getting by, doing the least you can do, not moving the ministry forward, that is also wrong!

Also, this also speaks of the self-willed person who simply demands to hold his own opinion or preference. These must be warned. One writer put it like this in regard to those who are “**unruly.**” He wrote,

The unruly were those who were out of step with the direction everyone else was headed. Such are those who fail to serve the church with their spiritual gifts (cf. 1 Cor 12:7; 14:12-13), give the church a portion of their wealth (cf. 1 Cor 16:2; 2 Cor 8:7; 9:6-12), or support the church's leadership (cf. 1 Thess 5:12-13; 1 Tim 5:17; Heb 13:7,17). They may have been unsupportive because they did not care, or because they were angry, rebellious, and contentious. Such people, if not dealt with, tend to become bitter. They can become criticizing benchwarmers and eventually rebels who undermine church leadership to justify their insubordination. Both are, obviously, divisive.

- John MacArthur, Jr., I Thessalonians 5:14

Now here me out on this. We are not to be the "*holiness police*" and go around and point out everyone's minor infraction. Yes, false doctrine, false teaching, those who are undermining the leadership in the church are going to cause division. And if you don't deal with it, look out.

But this goes beyond that, as I have said. The only other occurrence of this word form in the New Testament, "*unruly*" or "*disorderly*", ATAKTOS in the Greek, is found in verses 6, 7 and 11 in chapter 3 of Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians.

Paul puts it like this, "**But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks *disorderly* and not according to the tradition which he received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not *disorderly* among you . . . For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a *disorderly* manner, not working at all, but are *busybodies*.**" II Thessalonians 3:6-7, 10-11.

Remember that we are part of the body of Christ and thus, we work together for the betterment of the body. It is not about us, never has been and never will be. But that is a problem today where people come up with teaching that is contrary to the Scriptures, they are doing their own thing, they are not dependable and it affects the entire body!

One of the sad things to me is when someone is involved in a ministry and they just don't show up. They never call anyone, they never try to find a replacement, they just don't show up. We are blessed here because that does not happen too often.

But think about it. What if I just decided not to show up on a Sunday or Thursday, what would you think about that? "But Pastor Joe, you are the pastor you have to be here!" Yes, I am the pastor but I am part of the body of Christ here in Manitowoc and if I don't show up it will affect the rest of the body. The same is true with you and the ministry you are in.

So, we are to warn the "*unruly*", those who are not using their gifts that God has given to them. Those who are doing their own thing, coming up with their own doctrine and causing all kinds of problems. Also, those who have a rebellious attitude, always coming against this and coming against that. And what ends up happening is they become angry, they become bitter. There is no joy in their lives and it affects those around them.

Let's warn them in love and get them back on track is the idea that Paul is putting forth here.

Then there are those who need comfort for they are "**fainthearted**" or literally "small souled."

We might call those who are fainthearted, "*worried sheep*." They are fearful maybe because of persecution, maybe afraid to get involved in a ministry, whatever.

Maybe this is where you are at this morning. The world's problems, life's problems have overwhelmed you and you are trembling under the weight of these things! And it is out of that you can become depressed, anxious, discouraged, physically drained, emotionally drained, you can't go on!

What can we do about this? Paul speaks of giving "**comfort**" to these people. And the idea of this word is that of drawing near or speaking to.

In other words, when church is over don't go running out the door. There are people that you need to draw near to and speak to so that you can bring the comfort of God to them!

But, how easy is it to come up to someone and ask them how they are doing and they respond, "I lost my job. My wife left me. The kids are out of control. I am getting evicted!" And you say, "I'll pray for you!"

There is nothing wrong with praying for someone, we should. But sometimes we just need to listen and as the Lord leads, give to them words of comfort from the Scriptures to help encourage them!

Take the time to listen. Show you care. Don't be looking at someone else as they are talking to you!

Paul said in Romans 12:15-16, "**Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.**"

Again, we are part of the body of Christ and the only way a healthy body is going to function correctly is by being in contact with each other.

Those who are fainthearted, comfort them with the comfort of Christ, encourage them to go forward, to get involved in ministry!

Then Paul speaks of upholding the “**weak.**” The literal translation goes like this, “Hold fast to the weak! Don’t let them fall!”

And this idea here is that of those who were young in the Lord, young in their faith, they had not had time to grow yet. Therefore, hold onto them, don’t let them fall!

Think of it like this. A man has a broken leg and has a cast on it to support him so he can stand up.

That should be the mature Christian, holding up the weaker brother or sister in the Lord so that they can stand and not fall!

Think back when you were young in the faith and those who came alongside you and helped you to grow, to mature in the faith. They helped you to stand strong!

Now that you are older in the Lord, stronger in the Lord, you are to take the time to come alongside the weaker sheep and help them to grow in the Lord. Give them doctrine and encouragement as they strive towards righteousness and away from sin.

Paul put it like this in Romans 15:1-3, “**We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification. For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, ‘The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.’**”

Paul is speaking to those who are strong in the faith, those who walk in the liberty they have in Christ, and they are to bear up, support those who are weak in the faith, those that are bound up by legalism.

This is not to keep them down, but to lift them up, to make the weak strong in the faith. You see, our focus is not self-centered but others-centered, to bring to them the Good News of Jesus Christ, the good things of God.

Paul said in Romans 14:19, “**Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.**” Can you imagine what would happen in the body of Christ if that was the attitude – building people up instead of tearing down?

And then Paul speaks of being “**patient with all.**” I think this fits with what Paul just said about upholding the weak. It is easy to get impatient with them!

We expect them to grow in six days in things that took us six years to grow in! And the Greek word for “**to be patient**” is MAKROTHYMEO and the idea is that of having a long fuse. That you are not quick tempered and ready to explode. And if that is our attitude, if that is the way we respond with a quick temper, then we will end up being angry with the people we are to uphold, the weak!

And I like what Paul says next, well, maybe not like, but that truly is the flesh and we all probably struggle with this at different times in our lives. In I Thessalonians 5:15, the next point, Paul says that we are to “**See that no one renders evil for evil.**” In other words, don’t seek revenge or don’t get even!

Again, this is not easy but if someone does something wrong to you, treats you unfairly, what are you to do? You are to love them, forgive them!

You see, retaliation is not what God has called us to do, even though we may enjoy it or think we are getting back at the person! There is not the gift of retaliation, although we might think there is!

Paul put it this way in Romans 12:17-21, **“Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. Therefore ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”**

God has called us to live peaceably with all men, as much as is possible. Now don't come to the conclusion that God is saying if you don't like someone you have a free pass to not live peaceably with them.

The idea here is that of them not wanting to live peaceably with you and you have done all you can to rectify that situation, but to no avail. I am sure we have all been there before and it is sad but you did what you could do and now you leave it up to God.

Don't let your anger drive you to do something that is wrong but let the Spirit of God lead you into doing what is right!

And make no mistake about it, this kind of living is not something we can do on our own. You see, returning good for good and evil for evil is the normal human response. You don't have to be a Christian to live that way!

And returning evil for good is just demonic!

But returning good for evil, being kind to someone who is being nasty to you, that is Christ-like and that is a witness! But that can only happen as we surrender our lives to the Lord, submit to His rule in our lives. We crucify the flesh or it will resurrect itself and it will be ugly, there will be no peace in the situation!

And the sixth point that Paul makes here in verse 15 of I Thessalonians chapter 5 is that we are to **“always pursue what is good, both for yourselves and for all.”**

When we have a forgiving heart towards others, not only is it good for them, it is good for ourselves.

Peter put it like this in I Peter 3:8-9 as he contrasts vengeance and blessings that come from our lives. He wrote, **“Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing.”**

Peter tells us that we need to be of one mind and that is no problem as long as they agree with me. And that is what usually happens and that is not Peter’s point, that is not the mind he is speaking of!

Paul, in Philippians 2:1-5 tells us, **“Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.”**

What is the mind of Christ that we are to put on? The mind of Christ is one of humility, servanthood, submission, looking out for the welfare of others. How do we accomplish that, how do we put on the mind of Christ?

By allowing the Spirit of God through the Word of God to direct us to walk in His ways, for as Paul said in I Corinthians 2:16b, **“... But we have the mind of Christ.”**

Thus, as we are one with God, as we put on the mind of Christ, there will be unity with the brethren and if not, then it just gets ugly as Paul said in Galatians 5:15, **“But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!”**

What can we do? Paul goes on to say, **“I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.”** Galatians 5:16-18.

You see, there is the answer to our fighting, our anger, or whatever, walk in the Spirit and the Fruit of the Spirit which is love, will flow from your life and not the ugliness that comes from the works of the flesh!

One of the challenges we face in this area of loving the brethren is when we have been wronged, someone treats us unfairly and the natural response is to repay evil with evil, distance yourself from them but the supernatural response is to love them and bless them, why?

Because God has commanded us to love the brethren and if you can't, you need to do a heart check and ask God to help you!

As you love the brethren there is a built-in blessing from God for you, don't miss it! And think about it, God has blessed you by forgiving you of all your sins and thus, learn to forgive others as God has forgiven you!

In other words – ***ALWAYS PURSUE WHAT IS GOOD BOTH FOR YOURSELVES AND FOR ALL.***

Six important points that Paul brought forth in these two verses.

WARN THE UNRULY

COMFORT THE FAINTHEARTED

UPHOLD THE WEAK

BE PATIENT WITH ALL

DON'T GET EVEN

PURSUE WHAT IS GOOD

Now, as we move into I Thessalonians 5:16-18 Paul is going to explain how we are to respond to circumstances that come into our lives. He will deal with the situations we face and how we respond will impact others because they are watching us, both Christians and non-Christians!

VERSES 16-18

Paul starts out by saying that we are to “**Rejoice always.**” Are you kidding me? No, I am not kidding. You see, we are not only to rejoice in happy things but in sorrows also because God is in control and our joy is not based in the circumstances, but in God. You see, circumstances will change, but God doesn't!

Now please understand what I am saying here. I am not saying that if someone dies, rejoice in that. But we rejoice in the Lord, what He is going to do through this situation. I hope you understand that!

I also know that there are many that have a hard time rejoicing. Spurgeon put it like this, “I am bound to mention among the curiosities of the churches, that I have known many deeply spiritual Christian people who have been afraid to rejoice Some take such a view of religion that it is to them a sacred duty to be gloomy.”

He also said, “Turn this book over and see if there be any precept that the Lord has given you in which he has said, ‘Groan in the Lord always, and again I say groan.’ You may groan if you like. You have Christian liberty for that; but, at the same time, do believe that you have larger liberty to rejoice, for so it is put before you.”

That is funny to me, “*Groan in the Lord always, and again I say groan.*” But it is also sad when Christians act this way. Again, not a spiritual gift!

Remember Habakkuk. He came to understand that rejoicing in the Lord is not based upon the situation you are in, but upon the Lord. He said, “**Though the fig tree may not blossom, Nor fruit be on the vines; Though the labor of the olive may fail, And the fields yield no food; Though the flock may be cut off from the fold, And there be no herd in the stalls - Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The LORD God is my strength; He will make my feet like deer’s feet, And He will make me walk on my high hills.**” Habakkuk 3:17-19.

You see, it doesn’t matter on the situations that come upon us, we rejoice in the Lord, the God who has given to us everlasting salvation, I will rejoice in Him!

I think we lose sight of the fact that God is on the throne, He is in control and He will see us through no matter what the situation is. Remember what Paul said in Romans 8:28, “**And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.**”

Yes, circumstances will change and sometimes very quickly. But God does not change and thus, we can rest in Him and His Word to us!

The next point that Paul makes here is that we are to **“Pray without ceasing.”** “Pastor Joe, I work, I can’t do that!”

The point that Paul is making here when he says that we are to pray without ceasing is this. It simply means our lives should be in tune with God throughout the day, our lines of communication are always open to God so that He can direct us throughout the day!

Of course, we can’t bow our heads, close our eyes, and fold our hands *without ceasing*, but those are *customs* of prayer, not prayer itself.

Like I have said, prayer is communication with God, and we can live each minute of the day in a constant, flowing, conversation with God.

When asked how much time he spent in prayer, George Mueller’s reply was this, “Hours every day. But I live in the spirit of prayer. I pray as I walk and when I lie down and when I arise. And the answers are always coming.”

Listen to what we are told in Luke 18:1, **“Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart.”**

Lord, help us to be men and women of prayer, praying always, in communication with you all the time!

And the third point that Paul speaks of here is that **“in everything give thanks.”** Again, you may be thinking, “Are you kidding me? Give thanks in everything!”

How in the world can I give thanks in everything?

The only way we can is by knowing and believing that, “**And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.**” Romans 8:28.

The Amplified Bible puts this verse, Romans 8:28 like this, “**We are assured and know that [God being a partner in their labor] all things work together and are [fitting into a plan] for good to and for those who love God and are called according to [His] design and purpose.**”

Notice that it does not say “*We see that all things work together for good.*” We don’t always see that. I look at situations and I wonder, “What good can come of this? It looks like a hopeless situation!”

Paul also doesn’t say that “*We feel that all things work together for good.*” “Feelings. . . whoa oh oh oh, feelings” can be very deceptive! I don’t always feel things are going to work out!

Then how can I give thanks in everything? Because “*I know that all things work together for good.*” How do I know? Because God’s Word tells me it will and I can trust what God has said to me, and you can trust what God has said to you!

And please understand that we will not always know the good that will come out of a difficult situation? We must learn to trust God by faith, to rest our weight fully upon Him! Like I have said, God is still on the throne, He is still in control, and nothing happens without His knowledge!

Also, keep in mind that it says ***IN*** everything and not ***FOR*** everything.

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

In her book *The Hiding Place*, Corrie Ten Boom tells of a time she discovered that God was working even in the most horrific circumstances.

Corrie and her sister Betsie had been imprisoned by the Nazis for hiding Jews behind the wall of their Holland home, and Nazi prison conditions pretty well unbearable.

Corrie writes:

“Barracks 8 was in the quarantine compound. Next to us - perhaps as a deliberate warning to newcomers - were located the punishment barracks. From there, all day long and often into the night, came the sounds of hell itself. They were not the sounds of anger, or of any human emotion, but of a cruelty altogether detached: blows landing in regular rhythm, screams keeping pace. We would stand in our ten-deep ranks with our hands trembling at our sides, longing to jam them against our ears, to make the sounds stop.

“It grew harder and harder. Even within these four walls there was too much misery, too much seemingly pointless suffering. Every day something else failed to make sense, something else grew too heavy.”

Yet, in the midst of the suffering, the women prisoners around Corrie and Betsie found comfort in the little Bible studies they held in the barracks. Corrie writes they gathered around the Bible “like waifs clustered around a blazing fire . . . The blacker the night around us grew, the brighter and truer and more beautiful burned the Word of God.”

When they were moved to Barracks 28, Corrie was horrified by the fact that their reeking, straw-bed platforms swarmed with fleas. How could they live in such a place?

It was Betsie who discovered God’s answer:

““*Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus.*” That’s it, Corrie! That’s His answer. “*Give thanks in all circumstances!*” That’s what we can do. We can start right now to thank God for every single thing about this new barracks!’

“I stared at her; then around me at the dark, foul-aired room . . .”

They thanked God for the fact they were together. They thanked God they had a Bible. They even thanked God for the horrible crowds of prisoners, that more people would be able to hear God’s Word. And then, Betsie thanked God for the fleas.

“The fleas! This was too much. ‘Betsie, there’s no way even God can make me grateful for a flea.’

““Give thanks in all circumstances,”” she quoted. ‘It doesn’t say, “*in pleasant circumstances.*” Fleas are part of this place where God has put us.’

“And so we stood between tiers of bunks and gave thanks for fleas. But this time I was sure Betsie was wrong.”

It turned out that Betsie was not wrong; the fleas were a nuisance, but a blessing after all. The women were able to have Bible studies in the barracks with a great deal of freedom, never bothered by supervisors coming in and harassing them. They finally discovered that it was the fleas that kept those supervisors out.

Through those fleas, God protected the women from abuse and harassment. Dozens of desperate women were free to hear the comforting, hope-giving Word of God. Through those fleas, God protected the women from much worse things and made sure they had their deepest, truest needs met.

It is as Jeremiah 29:11 says and this is from the New Living Translation, “**For I know the plans I have for you,’ says the Lord. ‘They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.’**” May we never forget that!

Why is this so important to us, to rejoice always, pray without ceasing and in everything give thanks? Because it is the will of God for our lives. It is not that we have to do these things but we get to do them and what a blessing it is as we obey the Lord!

VERSES 19-22

Paul makes four points here. We are not to quench the Spirit. We are not to despise prophecies. We are to test all things and hold onto that which is good. And we are to abstain from every form of evil.

Let’s look at these and see how they can be applied to our lives.

First of all, this word “**quench**” means “to put out as with a light or a fire.” It also means, “to extinguish, put out, stifle, smother, or suppress.”

How do we quench the Spirits work in our lives? What is the Holy Spirit doing in our lives once we get saved? He is making us more like Him, it is the sanctification process. So, we can quench the Spirits work in our lives by disobeying Him, rejecting what He wants us to do.

And when we do that it is like throwing a bucket of water on a fire, it will be quenched.

Remember as Stephen was arrested for preaching Christ and he stood before the Jewish council and shared not only their history but also Jesus.

And in Acts 7:51-53 Stephen said, **“You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it.”**

And their response was, **“When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth.”** Acts 7:54.

You see, even these unbelieving Jews were quenching the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives as the Holy Spirit was drawing them to Jesus. They resisted the work of the Holy Spirit to bring them to Jesus and hardened their hearts to what the Holy Spirit was doing.

We too can do the same by hardening our hearts to what the Holy Spirit is saying to us. May we not go down that path but be open and willing to obey!

Poole put it like this, “And there is a quenching of the Spirit in others as well as ourselves; people may quench it in their ministers by discouraging them, and in one another by bad examples, or reproaching the zeal and forwardness that they see in them.”

And as you read though these verses you can see that the work of the Spirit can be quenched when we destroy the unity and love by bickering, backbiting, putting people in the body down, slander. That is what Paul was speaking of in I Thessalonians 5:12-18.

May we be careful that we don't quench the Spirit's work in our own lives and in the lives of others. May we be a fan that not only blows upon our own lives and causes us to burn more brightly, but we blow upon the lives of others and spur them on, help them to burn brightly!

Next, Paul speaks of not despising prophecies. And the idea with this word **“despise”** is “to make nothing of something: to look down upon or discard or set aside.”

Now, for some of you, when you heard this word “prophecy” you think of the ultra-charismatic people who have these new revelations from God, that most of the time are contrary to Scripture.

That is not what Paul is speaking of here. This word speaks of foretelling or forth-telling. In other words, speaking of something that will happen down the road or just speaking forth the Words of God.

Let me be clear on this. The Scriptures are complete. God is not adding new doctrine and the Bible tells us not to add to the Scriptures or take away from the Scriptures.

But God continues to speak to us today. But, like I have said, there are not new revelations from God but God does speak to us and He guides us.

As I share the word of God, or forth-telling, God is speaking to you. And God can use others to speak to you. We need to be open, we need to listen to what God is saying.

Now, in saying that, if someone comes up to you and tells you that “God said you are to go to Iran and preach the Gospel” what should you do?

Don’t go to Iran! Pray about it. God is going to speak to your heart if He wants you to do that and He will confirm what He has spoken to you through others.

And make no mistake about it, people will come up with the wildest things that they believe God has told them. What are we to do?

Paul tells us, “**Test all things; hold fast what is good.**” Do you see the warning here? Test all things, make sure they are of God, make sure they are true.

How do we do that? By bringing them before the light of God’s Word and if what is said goes contrary to God’s Word, then what was spoken was in error, it was not from God!

Folks, I am never worried or concerned that you check out what I am saying to see if it lines up with the Bible, what the Scriptures say. I want you to do that. You see, spiritual discernment is truly lacking in the church today and I believe it is because Christians are lazy; they want to be spoon-fed and they are not willing to study the Scriptures themselves to find out what is right and what is wrong.

We are to be teachable and not despise prophecies, but we are not to be gullible!

Thus, we are to hold onto what is good and abstain, stay away from that which is evil.

That is Paul's next point!

And the idea here is the appearance of evil. The church in Thessalonica had a tremendous witness of their love for their Lord and they had separated themselves from the world. Thus, they stuck out like a sore thumb you might say. They shined brightly because they did not blend in with the world

What is interesting today is that the church wants to be like the world. They want to blend in so that they world is comfortable with them.

Let me show you what I mean. And this is not an exhaustive list but it will give you an idea how the church is becoming like the world and that is not a good thing. We are not shinning for Jesus, we are blending into the world.

Teaching that the Bible is not inspired and inerrant.

Using books instead of the Bible in Bible study

Teaching that there is more than one way to God besides Jesus

Being embarrassed to say that Jesus is the only way to salvation

Teaching that there is no absolute right and wrong.

Being careful to not offend anyone at the expense of biblical truth.

Pastors preaching moralism instead of Christ centered messages

Approving of homosexuality

Approving of women elders

Not condemning the sins of society

Psychology as an authority on human nature.

Use of politically correct terms of the world from the pulpit where those terms replace biblical values and truths
 Going to church as a social habit
 Prayer as a last resort
 Missionaries not sent out or supported
 Divorce statistics as common as secular society
 Evolution

Let me say this. If that is what a church is doing, they will never reach the world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We are to be a bright light in a world that is in darkness. The world does not need more darkness, it needs light!

And as people look at our own lives, what do they see? Some Christians feel that living together before marriage is okay. I have even heard some say that they were doing it for economic purposes but they are not sleeping together. There is that appearance of evil and we are not to do that!

And I think a great way to determine if I should do something or not, if you should do something or not is to ask yourself, "If Jesus was standing right next to me would He approve of what I was wearing, who I am with, where I am going, what I am doing, what I am saying?" And I will tell you this, He is!

Thus, abstain from every form of evil! Instead of focusing on what is evil and having that become part of your life, listen to what Paul, in Philippians 4:8-9, tells us what we are to focus upon, which will help us stay away from evil.

Paul said, "**Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy - meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.**"

Thus, as Christians we are to honor His Spirit, obey His Word and exercise spiritual discernment as well as abstaining from every form of evil! All are important things for us to do!

VERSES 23-28

Paul speaks of the Lord sanctifying us. It is a word that means to be set part. You might think of it as becoming something distinct, different. A good example would be a dress. A dress is just that a dress. But a wedding dress, you might say, is sanctified because it is set apart for a special, glorious purpose. And that is what God is doing in us, to be set apart to Him.

And I love that the Lord is going to complete this work. In fact, Paul says the Lord will completely sanctify us! And Hiebert gives to us some insight to what this word means. He writes, “The adjective (*holoeleis*), occurring only here in the New Testament, is a compound of *holos*, ‘whole, entire,’ and *telos*, ‘end.’ Its basic connotation is ‘wholly attaining the end, reaching the intended goal,’ hence has the force of no part being left unreached.”

And if you think about it, that was Paul’s point in I Thessalonians chapters 4 and 5, our sanctification or how we as Christians are to walk. And it is not something that we do on our own, we can’t. But God, who is working in us, as we surrender to Him, is working. Don’t rely on your own efforts, give it to the Lord, ask him to help you!

Morris sums it up like this, “The way in which he effects the transition . . . indicates that it is only in the power of the God on whom he calls that his exhortations can be brought to fruition. ‘I have been urging you to do certain things, *but* it is only in God’s strength that you will be able to do them.”

And remember what Paul said in Philippians 1:6, “**being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.**”

God saved you, He sanctified you, and He will bring you to glory, you can take that to the bank!

Now we do have a free will and in regard to our sanctification, we need to listen and obey as His Spirit leads us or we can ignore what the Spirit is saying to us and the result is that we will quench the Spirit's work in our life.

Peter put it this way in I Peter 2:9-12, **“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.”**

God will complete His work in us but don't wait till you get to heaven, let Him work in you now! And remember, **“He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.”** Praise God!

And in verse 25 Paul calls for prayer, that the Thessalonian believers would pray for them. I also covet your prayers for me and the leaders of this church. We appreciate them and we need them!

Clarke points out that, “God requires that his people should pray for his ministers; and it is not to be wondered at, if they who pray not for their preachers should receive no benefit from their teaching.”

And then Paul speaks of greeting each other with a holy kiss. They still do that in the Middle East today. But in our culture, we give each other a hug in the Lord.

And as Paul closes this letter he lets them know that this letter was not to be framed, it was not to be honored, but it is to be read among them brethren! How important is that for us today! We need to read through not only this letter but the entire Word of God, from Genesis to Revelation as it is God's Word to us. And may we not only read it but live it!

Paul started out this letter with the grace of God and now he finishes this letter with the grace of God. Folks, we are saved by grace, we are sustained by grace, and we will be taken up into glory by the grace of God or His unmerited favor towards us. In other words, you don't have to work for His love, just receive it into your life! Grace means we can stop working for His love and start receiving it.

One writer put it like this, "Whatever God has to say to us – and in all the New Testament letters there are things that search the heart and make it quake – begins and ends with grace All that God has been to man in Jesus Christ is summed up in it: all His gentleness and beauty, all His tenderness and patience, all the holy passion of His love, is gathered up in grace. What more could one soul wish for another than that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ should be with it?" (Denney, cited in Morris)

Next time we will begin looking at Paul's second letter to the church in Thessalonica. But as we finish up this letter, let me close with these words. We are told,

The closing requests Paul made to the Thessalonians match what all dedicated pastors desire from their own churches: that their people pray for them, that their people demonstrate affection to them and to one another, and that their people hear, read, study, and apply God's Word. The evangelical church now resides in a time when so many people assume that it can accomplish its mission by man-centered methods, programs, and strategies. Those same people minimize the need to seriously and faithfully pray for their pastors, or the necessity to regularly rely on the divine, all-sufficient resources contained in Scripture. It is a lie from Satan that pastors can do without the divinely energized prayers of their people, but it is God's truth that, through those prayers, He will powerfully enable pastors to fulfill their callings and help build His church.

- John MacArthur, New Testament Commentary

And I will close with this. **"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen."**