

I THESSALONIANS 5

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to I Thessalonians chapter 5 as we continue our study through the Word of God, and we will be finishing up this letter to the church in Thessalonica this evening.

And we have seen so far in this letter,

How the church was born – I Thessalonians 1

How the church grew – I Thessalonians 2

How the church was established – I Thessalonians 3

And then, in these last two chapters of I Thessalonians Paul gives us some very practical lessons of how the church is to walk. This is, in a sense, where the rubber meets the road! They are as follows,

In holiness – I Thessalonians 4:1-8

In love – I Thessalonians 4:9-10

In honesty – I Thessalonians 4:11-12

In hope – I Thessalonians 4:13-18

We looked at that last time and this evening, as we finish up this letter, we will be looking at how the church is to walk,

In light – I Thessalonians 5:1-11

In gratitude – I Thessalonians 5:12-13

In obedience – I Thessalonians 5:14-28

And as I have said so many times before, doctrine is important, healthy doctrine is vital for our spiritual lives. But if we don't do anything with the information that God has given us, then what is the point?

We are to live out our faith and we live out our faith in accordance to the Word of God, it is our guidebook on how we are to live.

And Paul is encouraging this young church to walk this way and the Holy Spirit is doing that with us as we continue through this letter to the Thessalonians!

So with that as our introduction, let's begin reading in I Thessalonians chapter 5, beginning in verse 1, and let's see what the Lord has for us this evening as we study His Word.

I THESSALONIANS 5

VERSES 1-3

Keep in mind that I Thessalonians 5:1-11 deal with this idea of walking in the light, the light that God has given to us so we can see where we are going.

And here we see Paul use the word "**time**" or *CHRONOS* in the Greek. And this word speaks of the general idea of time being in seconds, minutes, hours and-so-on.

Then he speaks of "**seasons**" or *KAIROS* in the Greek. This word carries with it the idea of a specific time or opportunity.

And you may be wondering what is the point that Paul is making here. Let me put it like this, because I think you will see how this all plays out. What Paul is basically saying is, *“Whether we’re talking about the general time or a specific moment, brethren, I don’t have to write to you about this again. I don’t know the exact time because as I’ve already told you the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night (suddenly and without warning - starting with the Rapture).”*

And keep in mind that back in I Thessalonians 4:13-18 Paul spoke of the Rapture of the church or the sudden removal of believers from this earth as we will meet the Lord in the air.

And now, here in I Thessalonians chapter 5 Paul is not speaking specifically of the Rapture of the church but the Day of the Lord, which is not one specific day but a period of time.

You see, there is the Rapture of the church and the Day of the Lord, I think the Rapture happens and the Day of the Lord begins, so they are right next to each other in the timeframe.

And keep in mind that the **“day of the Lord”** is not a *literal day*, as I have said, but a period of time that will start with the Rapture and will end with the destruction of the present material universe by God before He creates a *“New Heavens and a New Earth.”*

We see this spoken of in II Peter 3:10-13, **“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.”**

We see this phrase, the Day of the Lord in many passages in the Scriptures, but to just give you a few.

In Malachi 4:1-6 it is speaking of the Second Coming of Christ.

In Zechariah 14:1-8 it is speaking of the Tribulation Period leading into the Kingdom Age.

And, as we have seen in II Peter 3:10-13 we see the creation of a new heavens and a new earth, eternal.

All this is part of that period of time known as the *Day of the Lord* that the Scriptures speak of. So again, not a single day but a period of time.

And I want you to notice here that as Paul opens up this chapter he speaks of “you” and he is speaking to believers.

But then Paul says “they” and he is no longer speaking to believers, but to the unsaved. It is when they say “Peace and safety” that sudden destruction will come upon them!

Why is that important?

Because we will not be here, the church will be caught up prior to the start of the Tribulation Period, we will meet the Lord in the air!

And, as the church age comes to an end, God deals with the nation of Israel once again to finish the last 7-year period of time that He spoke of in Daniel chapter 9.

Also, during the Tribulation Period God will pour out His wrath on a Christ rejecting world, His judgment will be poured out!

Let me give you a quick summary of how this will be played out.

I believe that as the church is removed and the world is trying to recover from a nuclear war in the Middle East as Russia and her Muslim allies come down against Israel, you can read of this in Ezekiel chapters 38 and 39, God destroys this invading army but the world is in chaos!

All kinds of problems are going on and out of that chaos, it allows a man to be thrust on the scene and placed into a world power position because he has the answers not only to the problems of war, but economic, environmental, and-so-on.

This man is known as the Antichrist and for the first 3½ years there is a pseudo peace and safety in the world before sudden destruction is unleashed!

Those last 3½ years known as the Great Tribulation are horrible; no one will be able to escape what is coming!

In fact, it is put in a double negative to stress the fact that trying to flee will be futile! And Paul likens the Tribulation period to a woman in labor. Her pains may start out light and far apart but as the birth of the baby gets closer the pains become harder and closer together until the baby is born, there is no escaping it!

So too with the Tribulation Period and what is birthed from this labor is the Kingdom Age as Jesus Christ rules and reigns on this earth for 1,000 years!

What is sad today is that many churches don't even want to deal with end times or eschatology! They won't teach on Revelation, or many of the prophetic books. And I don't know how they go about that since over 25% of the Bible is prophetic in nature. And maybe that is why they teach topically, so they don't have to deal with this topic of end times.

But I don't think we have the option not to teach on these things. Now you may be taken back by that but let me show you what I mean.

In Matthew 16:1-3 we are told, **“Then the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and testing Him asked that He would show them a sign from heaven. He answered and said to them, ‘When it is evening you say, “It will be fair weather, for the sky is red”; and in the morning, “It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening.” Hypocrites! You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times. A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.’ And He left them and departed.”**

Also, in Luke 19:41-44 we are told, **“Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, ‘If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation.’”**

Jesus rebuked them because they did not know what time it was on God’s prophetic time clock!

The day of the coming of the Messiah was at hand, He stood before them and they did not see Him!

Folks, we are living in the days when the Lord could return at any moment for His church, His bride!

We need to wake up and take notice of the days we are living in, for the trumpet is being prepared to sound!

When you look at what is going on in the Middle East and how Russia, Turkey and Iran are in Syria, I wonder how close we are to that battle spoken of in Ezekiel chapters 38 and 39?

When you look at the governments of the world and how they are pushing for a one world government, using all kinds of things like climate change to join the nations together, I wonder how close we are to the coming of the Lord?

When you look at how there is this push, by the Pope, for a one world religion, and many Protestant churches are with him on this, I wonder how close we are to the coming of the Lord?

And I can go on and on, but you get the idea, this day should not overtake us or surprise us, because we are walking in the light and we can see where we are going and where this world is going! Paul is going to speak on that as we read on.

VERSES 4-5

Why should we not be overtaken by this day of judgment?

Because we are no longer children of darkness, we are children of light in Christ and thus, we will not be overtaken by the Day of the Lord in regard to His judgment because we will be removed before it begins.

I do realize that some Christians believe we will go through part or all of the Tribulation Period, but I don't think the Scriptures support that.

Jesus said in Revelation 3:10, "**Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.**"

You see, we are not earth dwellers, our citizenship is in heaven and we will be kept out of this judgment that is to come upon the earth dwellers!

Not only that, but as we read on here in I Thessalonians chapter 5, Paul tells us that we are not appointed for the wrath of God. Why is that? Because Jesus already bore our judgment upon the cross of Calvary. And thus, Paul tells us, **“For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.”** I Thessalonians 5:9. I think that is very clear!

Also, before God destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah for their wickedness, righteous Lot was removed.

In Genesis 19:22 the angel said to Lot, **“Hurry, escape there. For I cannot do anything until you arrive there.’ Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar.”**

The judgment of God could not be poured out until righteous Lot was removed!

And in II Peter 2:6-9 we are told of this incident, **“and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly; and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds) - then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment.”**

Thus, before God pours out His judgment upon a Christ rejecting world, His people, His bride will be removed!

We are not in darkness any longer, but we are children of light and thus, may we walk accordingly!

VERSES 6-8

Please understand that the word that Paul uses here for “**sleep**” is not the same word he used in I Thessalonians 4:13, when he was speaking of the death of a believer. Hiebert sums it up like this. He wrote, “The word *sleep* is here used metaphorically to denote indifference to spiritual realities on the part of believers. It is a different word than that in 4:13-15 for the sleep of death. It covers all sorts of moral and spiritual laxity or insensibility.”

In other words, what Paul is saying here is that it is not time to be apathetic, lethargic in our spiritual lives. We need to be alert; we need to be watching.

Yes, the unsaved have an eat, drink and be merry mentality because they are willfully ignorant of the judgment that is to come.

But we are not of the night but of the day and may we act accordingly for in this world of spiritual darkness, we are a light to shine forth Jesus!

Paul, in II Corinthians 3:3-6 tells us, “**clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart. And we have such trust through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.**”

As people look at our lives what are they reading? You see, we are living epistles or letters of Christ and as people read us, examine our lives, they should see Jesus!

Because we are in a spiritual battle, we must put on our spiritual armor and Paul speaks of the breastplate of faith and love.

The breastplate covered the vital organs of the soldier.

Faith speaks of trusting in God, that we don't have to worry because God is in control of all things. That inward reality is then manifested outward in our actions – they are done in love!

You see, our faith in God is seen in our love towards Him and then is manifested in our love towards others.

Then there is the helmet of salvation which protects our mind.

In the context here, Paul is not speaking of salvation or sanctification but our future glorification – God will complete the work He has begun in us!

One write gives us this warning and exhortation. He wrote,

When faith is weak, love grows cold. When love grows cold, hope is lost. When hope in God's promise of future glory is weak, believers are vulnerable to temptation and sin. Only those who keep the breastplate of faith and love, and the helmet of the hope of salvation firmly in place can resist effectively the onslaught of the forces of darkness.

- John MacArthur

Absolutely, we stand strong in the Lord and His promises to us, and we wait for His coming for His bride, the church.

It is as John said, **“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.”**

I John 3:1-3.

Knowing the Lord can return at any moment helps us to walk in holiness. Take that away, and it is what we see in the church today, everyone doing what is right in their own eyes because there is no King on the throne of their hearts and they are not expecting Him to return!

Now when I say “*everyone*” I am not saying every Christian of course. But there is this downward spiraling in the church today away from God and His Word and we are reaping what we have sown!

VERSES 9-10

Now I do understand that some don’t believe in the Rapture of the church and they say that we are using it as an escape. They may even call the Rapture “The Great Escape Theory!”

I am not offended by that; all I can say is – *AMEN!*

Do you really think I want to go through the Tribulation Period and experience the wrath of God upon my life? Of course not and I look forward to the Lord coming for His bride, the church!

And please understand this. Before we were saved, we were condemned and awaiting God’s judgment but now that we are children of God, we are no longer appointed for judgment but salvation through Christ.

Paul put it this way in II Corinthians 5:21, “**For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.**”

That is the basis for our salvation; we are saved by Grace through faith and not by the Law through works.

Jesus said in John 5:24, **“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.”**

Now you can say that Jesus is speaking of eternal judgment and that is true, but during the Tribulation Period we see the judgment of God come upon a Christ rejecting world, and you can't negate that.

If Jesus bore the penalty for our sin, if He took the punishment for our sin, why would God pour His wrath upon us again? He wouldn't and He doesn't!

Now when Paul speaks of being awake in Christ or asleep in Christ, is he speaking of those who are alive and those who have died in Christ or those who are spiritually awake and those who are lethargic in their faith?

Both do fit because our salvation is based on His finished work, not what we have done or didn't do.

The thing is this, if you are spiritually lethargic you are missing out on so much! God's desire for you is to be awake and used by Him for His glory and thus, Paul admonishes us in Romans 13:11-14, **“And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.”**

It is time to awake, may we heed the warning!

VERSE 11

I like this. Paul ends this section telling them to bring the comfort of God to people.

Today, it is the professionals who are to do this, they have to have a degree or title!

That is so wrong. I like the way Hiebert put it. He wrote, “It is clear that in the primitive churches the care of souls was not delegated to an individual officer, or even the more gifted brethren among them; it was a work in which every believer might have a share.”

That is the way it should be. We should bring comfort to people and not yell at them, put them down, beat them up. I can’t understand that, and it is not Scriptural. Yes, there are times that you need to rebuke someone, but it is done with the idea of restoration and not destruction!

And here, as Paul is finished talking about the Day of the Lord, he tells them to comfort each other and build each other up!

Remember what Paul just said, “**But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation.**” I Thessalonians 5:8.

Folks, no matter how bad things might get, let us never lose faith, love or hope because that is what we are to bring to others!

Now that finishes up the section on how the church is to walk in the light and not in darkness. And now Paul moves on to the church walking in gratitude in I Thessalonians 5:12-13.

VERSES 12-13

Several years back we had a pastor from India visit us and he said something that shocked me.

He was amazed at how disrespectful some Christians are to their leaders, their pastors in America, it is not like that in India.

I think he made a powerful point.

And please understand that they are not respected for their title, but he speaks of their labor in service.

And then he then speaks of them shepherding the flock.

And then they admonish or gently reprove or caution or warn the sheep.

I have found that this does not go too well for the most part, people don't want to be admonished or reprov'd!

And these are not three different roles done by three different people, this is what a leader is to do!

Clarke put it like this, "Christian ministers, who preach the whole truth, and labour in the word and doctrine, are entitled to more than respect; the apostle commands them to be esteemed, abundantly, and superabundantly; and this is to be done in love."

Paul makes this point once again as he tells us in Hebrews 13:17, "**Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.**"

In fact, here in I Thessalonians 5:13, when Paul says that we are to "**esteem them very highly in love**" and in the Greek it means to "*hold them in the highest regard in the love of God.*"

They are laboring for the Lord and as they do you are being blessed, so hold them up in the love of God!

And I love how Paul closes this section. "**Be at peace among yourselves.**" Don't fight, don't try to usurp positions, love each other, serve each other and be at peace.

In other words, walk in gratitude for the leaders that God has given you!

Now, in I Thessalonians 5:14-28, the rest of this letter, Paul will show how the church is to walk in obedience.

VERSES 14-15

Here is something that some are afraid to do, deal with those who are unruly or out of order.

And, as the problem is ignored, it will grow worse and worse until there is an explosion or a division within the body or with friends, it has to be dealt with.

You see, as believers we are to exhort or encourage someone who is not walking as they should walk. We admonish them to get right. We come alongside them and encourage them to move forward.

Paul speaks of those who are unruly, and he is speaking of warning those who are unruly.

This Greek word was used 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!

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!

Then there are those who need comfort for they are afraid, maybe because of persecution, maybe afraid to get involved in a ministry, whatever.

Some may be sick physically or sick in sin and they need to be lifted up, helped along.

Also, we are to be patient with some?

No, with all as God has been so patient with each of us!

Now if someone does something wrong to you, treats you unfairly, what are you to do?

No, you don't lay hands on them!

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!

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.”**

Let me put it like this.

If you render or give evil for evil, that is a normal human behavior. Someone does evil to me, I am going to do evil to them, is the idea.

On the other end, if someone does good to you and you respond by doing good to them, that again is a normal human behavior. You are rendering good for good.

You don't need to be a Christian to do that!

Also, if you render evil for good or you hurt someone who has done good to you, that is just demonic, it is very wrong!

But, as a Christian we are to do good to those who do evil to us, spitefully treat us. It is the nature of Christ and it is a witness of Christ to others!

You see, we are not of the darkness, but of the light!

Jesus put it this way in Luke 17:3-4, **“Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, ‘I repent,’ you shall forgive him.”**

And I love how the apostles responded to what Jesus said, they replied, **“...‘Increase our faith.’”** Luke 17:5.

In other words, they were basically saying, ***“That is a tough one Lord, forgiving like that! Increase our faith!”***

May we ask the Lord for help also in that area!

And in closing this section may we think good of people and not evil.

We have become jaded in this country; we don't trust anyone, and we tend to think the worse of people.

I try not to, and yes, I have been burned many times over the years, but I would rather error on the side of grace, I would rather think good of people and not evil!

In other words, **“always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.”**

Walk in obedience!

VERSES 16-18

Notice that Paul doesn't say to rejoice when things are going well but to rejoice always!

That is a tough one. How can we do that?

Because, as Christians our joy is not based on outward circumstances but in the Lord and He never changes.

He is in control, He knows what He is doing and thus, I rejoice even though I may not understand why this is happening, but I rejoice in the Lord.

Now you may struggle with that as Habakkuk did. But he found out that his joy could not, should not be based on the outward situation, but on the inward reality of the Lord!

Habakkuk 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.

No matter what, Habakkuk was not going to let the outward situations, the outward circumstances, take away his joy because his joy was in the Lord, the God of his salvation!

Spurgeon gives us this perspective if we are struggling with rejoicing always. He wrote, “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.”

Next, Paul tells us that we are to pray without ceasing which 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!

I know, some wonder how can we pray without ceasing? They struggle with this.

One author said, *“Christians are to pray continually. We can’t bow our heads, close our eyes, and fold our hands without ceasing, but those are customs of prayer, not prayer itself. Prayer is communication with God, and we can live each minute of the day in a constant, flowing, conversation with God.”*

Exactly.

When asked how much time he spent in prayer, George Mueller’s reply was, *“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.”*

Next, Paul talks about giving thanks in everything!

How in the world can I give thanks in everything?

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

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.”**

Does that mean we will always know the good that will come out of a difficult situation?

No, we must learn to trust God by faith, to rest our weight fully upon Him!

God is still on the throne, He is still in control, and nothing happens without His knowledge!

Spurgeon said, *“When joy and prayer are married their first-born child is gratitude.”*

I think he nails that one. When we are rejoicing and in communication with God, we will have a heart of gratitude for all He has done, is doing and will do in our lives!

And here is the key to all of this; rejoicing always, praying without ceasing, giving thanks in everything to God, it is God's will for our lives and it is not that we have to do it, but we get to do it!

Let me sum it up like this, because, as Paul said, this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for our lives.

After each one of these exhortations – rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks – we are told to do this because it is the will of God.

The thought isn't "this is God's will, so you must do it."

The thought is rather "this is God's will, so you can do it."

It isn't easy to rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and in everything give thanks, but we can do it because it is God's will.

VERSES 19-22

We can quench the Spirits work in our lives by disobeying Him, rejecting what He wants us to do.

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.

They resisted the work of the Holy Spirit to bring them to Jesus and hardened their hearts.

But what about us as Christians, can we quench the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives? You bet we can and that is who Paul is writing to, Christians in Thessalonica.

We can harden our hearts to what the Holy Spirit is saying to us.

And in the context here, we can quench the Spirit when we destroy the unity and love of the Spirit through bickering, gossip, slander, and of course, when we refuse to obey the Spirit in what He has commanded us to do in the local church as mentioned by Paul here in this chapter, and as we read in I Thessalonians 5:12-18.

Then Paul tells us not to despise prophecies. God continues to speak to us today.

But let me be clear on this. There are not new revelations from God, but God does speak to us and He guides us.

Now, in saying that, here is the warning.

We must test all things to see if they are true or not.

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 not willing to study the Scriptures themselves to find out what is right and what is wrong.

One writer spoke about this lack of discernment and gives us this warning of the danger that is out there if we do not use the spiritual discernment that God has given to us. He wrote,

One pastor correctly wrote, “The worst forms of wickedness consist of perversions of the truth, of spiritual lies, although today many look upon these forms with indifference and regard them rather harmless” (R. C. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon* [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961], p. 363). Many in today’s church are indifferent about separating divine truth from error because they lack spiritual discernment.

Why Is There a Lack of Spiritual Discernment?

Weak Doctrine

One of the main causes is the church’s weakening of doctrinal clarity and conviction. Many have only a shallow knowledge of God’s Word because the church has yielded the trade and skill of understanding it to people who are ill-equipped to do so. In *A Call to Discernment* Christian counselor Dr. Jay Adams wrote, “Self-styled ‘experts’ in psychology, sociology, and education who hold Ph.D.’s in their fields and Sunday school degrees in Bible pontificate on Christian teaching and life on radio and elsewhere, setting themselves up as spokesmen for God. . . . Their teaching and use of the Bible (when it is used) often bear little resemblance to what the Scriptures, properly interpreted, really say.

“What is the upshot of all this? One obvious result is the modern tendency to use theological language loosely. . . . Not only are biblical terms used imprecisely, thereby spreading confusion throughout the church, but erroneous teachings of every kind are readily tolerated. This is because so few people have the discernment necessary to identify and refute such errors.

And if they do sense that something is wrong, their powers of discernment are too weak to put their fingers precisely on the point where the error lies. Or, if they do point out the error, other people denounce them as heresy hunters” ([Eugene, Oreg.: Harvest House, 1987], pp. 35-36).

The diluting of biblical doctrine has conditioned today’s church to desire only what will make it feel comfortable and satisfied. English minister Martyn Lloyd-Jones said, “Precise thinking, and definition, and dogma have been at a serious discount. The whole emphasis has been placed upon religion as a power which can do things for us and which can make us happy. The emotional and feeling side of religion has been over-emphasized at the expense of the intellectual. Far too often people have thought of the Christian religion merely as something which gives a constant series of miraculous deliverances from all sorts and kinds of ills. . . . The impression has often been given that we have but to ask God for whatever we may chance to need and we shall be satisfied. . . . We have been so intent upon ourselves and our moods and feelings and inward states, that when we are confronted by an external problem that nevertheless affects us profoundly, we do not know how to think or where to begin (cited by Ian Murray in David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: *The Fight of Faith*, vol. 2 [Carlisle, Penn.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1990], p. 24).

Because experience and emotion have been elevated above divine revelation, many who call themselves Christians have no biblical basis for doing so. For example, during an interview on a supposedly Christian radio station, the program host asked me, “How does a person become a Christian?” I replied, “He must realize that he is a sinner and that he cannot save himself, repent from his sin, and cast himself on the mercy of God. He must believe that Jesus Christ is God’s Son, whose death paid the price for his sins and whose resurrection proves his justification.”

The host asked, “You don’t believe that everyone who is a Christian must believe that, do you?” I replied, “Yes!” The host responded, “I certainly didn’t deal with any of my sins when I became a Christian.” I asked, “What do you base your salvation on?” The host replied, “I was into drugs and alcohol, living with my boyfriend, and into Science of Mind for six years. One day I just got Jesus’ phone number and knew where He was.” Obviously not everyone who talks about Christ necessarily knows Him.

Some say that doctrine divides. That’s true! If you set aside biblical truth and remain silent for fear of offending people, opposition will disappear, but so will some other things like truth, holiness, and God Himself. Jude 1:3-4 says we are to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain persons have crept in unnoticed . . . who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.” Diluting doctrine only ends up making things easier for those who stealthily seek to victimize the church.

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We are to test all things and hold fast to what is good, what is true.

Also, we are to abstain from evil, which just makes sense doesn't it?

Of course it does!

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!

All are important things for us to do!

VERSES 23-24

The word **“sanctify”** means to be set apart. And God has set us apart, we are to be different than the world and we are to be like Christ!

And here we see the emphasis on the word **“completely.”**

Hiebert puts it like this,

“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 as you can see, we can't sanctify ourselves. Paul made it clear that sanctification is God's work in us. He puts this emphasis in the words *Himself*, in *be preserved*, in *He who calls you is faithful*, and in *who will do it*.

This emphasis completes Paul's previous exhortations.

In all that he told the Christian to *do* in I Thessalonians 4:1 through 5:22, he never intended that they *do* those things in their own power. More Christians are defeated on account of self-reliance than on account of Satanic attack.

Morris adds to this point by saying, "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.'"

When we are justified, that is an instantaneous process when we receive Christ. But the sanctification process is lifelong, and it is a work of God who has begun this work in us, and He will finish it!

You see, God's goal for us is complete sanctification, which should be our goal as well, but which is impossible for *us* to attain here on earth.

Paul put it like this in Philippians 1:6 as he said, "**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!

VERSES 25-26

Folks, as Paul coveted the prayers of the Thessalonian believers, I also covet your prayers for me. I appreciate and need them!

Now what is this holy kiss?

Keep in mind that in the Middle East they still greet each other with a kiss on the cheek. We tend to shake hands or give each other a hug in the Lord!

Also, keep in mind that the men kissed the men on the cheek and the women kissed the women on the cheek. It was a greeting.

On this Hiebert wrote, “Apparently at this time the sexes were segregated in the assembly and the men kissed the men and the women the women . . . When the kiss came to be exchanged between men and women it became the occasion for their critics to charge the Christians with impurity. The resultant embarrassments gave rise to numerous regulations concerning the practice by the early church councils.”

VERSES 27-28

This letter was not to be framed and honored but read to the brethren.

May we continue to read through this letter as we have done and learn lessons of faith that God has for us. And not just this letter, but the whole counsel of God from Genesis through Revelation!

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!

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