

ADDRESSES ON THE First and Second Epistles of THESSALONIANS

By H. A. IRONSIDE, Litt.D.

AUTHOR OF
LECTURES ON THE BOOK OF ACTS;
LECTURES ON ROMANS;
LECTURES ON THE REVELATION;
IN THE HEAVENLIES;
ETC., ETC.

FIRST EDITION, JANUARY 1947

Printed in the Philippines

Printed by:



Ortigas Center Post Office

P.O. Box 1996

1659 Pasig City, M.M.

Tel. #656-8561

Email: lifelinephilippines@postone.com

CONTENTS

1 1 1

VOLUME ONE

ADDRESS	PAGE
PREFATORY NOTE	7
1. SERVING AND WAITING	9
2. A CHRIST-LIKE MINISTRY	21
3. STEADFASTNESS IN THE FAITH	31
4. THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH	41
5. THE DAY OF THE LORD	53
6. SANCTIFICATION COMPLETE AT THE LORD'S RETURN	65

VOLUME TWO

1. DIVINE RETRIBUTION AT THE LORD'S RETURN	77
2. THE RISE OF THE ANTICHRIST	88
3. EVERLASTING CONSOLATION	102
4. CHRISTIANITY IN PRACTICE	110

PREFATORY NOTE

These addresses on the Thessalonian Epistles consist of expository messages on these two letters, given over a period of ten weeks on the Lord's Days at the Moody Memorial Church in Chicago. They were stenographically reported, but have been abbreviated somewhat by the elimination of considerable matter that was not deemed suitable for the general reader, and also because of repetition which can hardly be avoided in addressing changing audiences but would be needlessly redundant in a book. Even as it is, some things are repeated because of certain truths treated or alluded to in both Epistles. It is hoped that these will not mar the effectiveness of the attempt to elucidate the great lessons that St. Paul was used of God to present to this particular church.

—H. A. IRONSIDE.

Chicago
February, 1946

FIRST EPISTLE TO THE THESSALONIANS

ADDRESS ONE

SERVING AND WAITING

‘ ‘ ‘

“Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father; knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God. For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the Word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost: so that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. For from you sounded out the Word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing. For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come”—1 Thess. 1: 1-10.

‘ ‘ ‘

THE Thessalonian Epistles are the earliest of Paul's writings, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, which the Lord in His grace has preserved for the edification of the Church. It is evident that they were written from Corinth after Paul had left Berea because of persecution. Timothy and Silas, at his request, had remained behind

and gone on to Thessalonica. They then came to Paul to report on the condition of the young church. According to Luke's account in the book of Acts, Paul had preached the gospel on three successive Sabbath days in the Jewish synagogue at Thessalonica. How much longer he remained in the city we are not told, but it could not have been very long. The results of his short visit were remarkable. Quite a group were brought to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Some of these were Jews, but the majority were evidently Gentiles who had been brought to see the folly of idolatry and led to put their trust in the living God as manifested in His Son.

Paul was deeply concerned about these young converts. They seemed to be as sheep without a shepherd, though of course he realized the great Shepherd was ever watching over them. Paul tells us he had no rest in his spirit while he waited for the coming of Timothy and Silas, because he feared lest Satan might take advantage of those so recently brought to Christ. The word, however, that came to him was most encouraging and led to the writing of this letter.

It is an interesting fact that the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ is referred to in some way in every chapter of this Epistle. Although the letter was addressed to babes in Christ, the apostle realized the importance of giving them clear instruc-

tion regarding this great theme. Often today we are told that the second advent is a doctrine with which generally Christians are not to be occupied. Many ministers never preach on it at all; many have no clear convictions regarding it. In the classroom of theological seminaries this doctrine often becomes just a theme for an academic discussion. But to Paul it was a tremendously important and exceedingly practical truth which needed emphasis because of its bearing on the hearts and lives of God's beloved people.

The first chapter tells how the gospel was received in Thessalonica. It closes by picturing for us a group of happy believers earnestly serving God while waiting expectantly for the return of Jesus Christ.

We have the apostolic salutation in the first verse: "Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ." Note that Paul's fellow-laborers are linked with him in this greeting which he extends to these young converts. The expression, "The Church . . . which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ," is peculiar to the Thessalonian letters. Of course, it refers to the same Church which elsewhere is spoken of as *the Body of Christ*. But here the emphasis is upon the new

relationship into which these young Christians had come. They were now linked up in infinite grace with God the Father; they were His children. They owed it all to the Lord Jesus Christ, who had given Himself for them.

It is not the grace that saves from judgment of which Paul speaks but grace that sustains from day to day. Neither is it peace with God that he has in view. That was settled already. He refers to the peace of God which is the abiding portion of all who trust in the loving Father and seek to walk in obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Vers. 2 to 4 are introductory. "We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father; knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God."

It is remarkable how often the apostle speaks of bearing up God's people in prayer. He was a man of intense activity: preaching, visiting from house to house, often working at tent-making for his daily bread; and yet he found time to intercede with God in behalf of all the churches which he was used of the Lord to found, as well as remembering in prayer those of whom he learned, though they had not seen his face, as in the case of the Colossians. He links together in the third verse the three graces

of which he was to write later in the Corinthian Epistle: faith, hope, and love. Here the order is different, and he speaks not simply of these graces as such, but of the spiritual realities connected with them: the work of faith, the labor of love, the patience of hope. Faith, we are told elsewhere, worketh by love. James insists that faith without works is dead. These young converts manifested their faith by their work.

Love to be real must be self-sacrificing. Therefore we read here of the labor of love. It is one thing to talk about loving our brethren, loving Israel, loving lost souls in general, but our love is not genuine unless we are willing to labor earnestly for the blessing of those for whom we profess to have this deep concern.

The hope of the believer is the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but here the apostle speaks of the patience of hope. Often we may well long for the day when trial and tribulation will be ended, and Christ will take us to be with Himself; but we are not to be impatient as we await that glad consummation. He Himself is the Man of Patience, seated upon the throne of God. "The husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain." During all the centuries since He ascended to heaven, as we count time on earth, He has waited patiently for the end of the Church's

testimony. Then the Lord will descend in the air to call His own to be with Him. Thereupon that change which the poet has expressed will be true of all believers:

"He and I in that bright glory
One deep joy shall share:
Mine to be forever with Him,
His, that I am there."

The fourth verse is particularly interesting: "Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God." How did he know this? Had he been permitted to look into the books of eternity and there behold their names written before the foundation of the world? Had God revealed to him His divine sovereign decrees? Not at all! He saw in their lives such evidence of the new birth that he had no question concerning their election. Paul knew that the fruit of the Spirit which was manifested in their lives was not of nature, but was the outflowing of the new life in the power of the Holy Ghost. It is in this way that our election may be made manifest.

In verses 5 to 10 the apostle epitomizes the effects of his ministry among these Thessalonians. "Our gospel," he says, "came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake." The gospel of course must come in word. It is the business of the

servants of Christ to proclaim the Word of the truth of the gospel to a lost world. "It has pleased God by the foolishness (the simplicity) of preaching to save them that believe." But the mere statement of gospel truth, apart from the power of the Holy Spirit, is not likely to produce such results as were seen in Thessalonica. It is true that God in His sovereignty may use His own Word, no matter who proclaims it, or even if it is found on the printed page; He has often done so. His general method however is to empower devoted men to set forth the Word with clearness and in the energy of the Holy Spirit. Then the results are assured. The Lord Jesus told His disciples, as recorded in Acts 1:18, "Ye shall receive the power of the Holy Ghost coming upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto Me" (*marginal reading*). Speaking in the power of the Holy Spirit is something that should never be ignored. To mistake human eloquence or oratory for preaching in the power of the Spirit of God is a great mistake. Someone has well said that, "Preaching is eloquence touched with fire." It was in this way that Paul and his companions proclaimed the gospel as they went from place to place, and the result of such a proclamation was not only that people were led to trust in Christ, but they also received "much assurance." It is a lamentable fact that a great deal that passes for gospel preaching today would never give assurance

of salvation to anyone. Sermons may be theologically correct, but they make no true application to the needs of the hearers, and are, as someone has said, "clear as crystal, but cold as ice." When the Word is preached in simplicity and in the energy of the Holy Spirit, those who believe it receive the full assurance of faith.

The last part of the verse is exceedingly significant. "Ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake." They were careful to walk before God in holiness of life and in righteousness toward their fellow-men. A holy minister is a tremendous weapon in the hands of God for the pulling down of strongholds of sin. Emerson said of another, "What you are speaks so loudly that I cannot hear what you say." What a pitiable thing if this should ever be true, as, alas, it has often been true of ministers of Christ. Integrity of life, devotedness of heart, holiness of spirit should characterize the proclaimers of the gospel of grace.

The self-denying ways of Paul and his companions made a deep impression on these Thessalonians. He writes, "Ye became followers of us (imitators of us), and of the Lord, having received the Word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost." It may seem strange that he speaks here of himself and his companions before he speaks of the Lord, but we need to remember that

these Thessalonians had never heard of the Lord, probably never would have heard of Him, if Paul and his companions had not gone to them. It was what these Thessalonians saw in Paul and his companions that led them to be interested in the things of the Lord, and so having trusted in Christ they took His servants as their examples, and in imitating them they were really following the Lord.

They received the Word in much affliction and yet in joy. This sounds paradoxical, and indeed it is; but the Christian may be sorrowful yet always rejoicing. The affliction to which the apostle refers may have been twofold. There was of course deep contrition as they recognized their sinfulness and mourned over their years of ungodliness and idolatry. Then, too, they knew that to decide for Christ would mean, in many instances, separation from loved ones, grievous misunderstandings, and even bitter persecution. But they were prepared for all this. They counted the cost and considered that Christ would mean far more to them than temporal comfort or worldly prosperity, and so they joyfully received the message which told them of sins forgiven and the hope of heaven.

So great was the change in their lives that others soon noticed it. They "were ensamples," as we are told, "to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia." Thessalonica was one of the chief cities of Macedonia; Achaia was the neighboring province. To

one city after another the word went forth of what had happened in Thessalonica, where Paul had labored so earnestly. They who had been converted through his preaching became, in turn, preachers themselves. From these preachers sounded out the Word of the Lord. Not only in Macedonia but in other places as well, the news was spread of what had taken place. It was not necessary for anyone to insist on the reality of their conversion; their lives made it evident that they were in touch with God.

In the last two verses we have two words which cover the whole Christian life—"serve" and "wait." Note the connection. "They themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God! and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come." This was real conversion. They turned to God, and in turning to God they turned from idols. We have a different order in Acts 14: 15. In speaking to the men of Iconium, Paul says, We "preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God." The two passages are not contradictory; both suggest true repentance upon which conversion rests. To repent is to change the mind: that is, to reverse one's attitude; and so these who had been idolators turned to the true and living God;

they were through with idolatry. Today when men trust in Christ and bow before God in repentance they turn from the things of a godless world and yield themselves to the One who died to redeem them. Following the conversion of these Thessalonians, as intimated above, two words set forth their new attitude. They sought to *serve* the living and true God while they *waited* for His Son from heaven. We are sometimes told that occupation with the second coming of the Lord has a tendency to throttle Christian activities. People become dreamers, become taken up with prophetic questions, and they are interested no longer in living for God or seeking to win others for Christ. Frankly, my own experience teaches me the contrary to be true. The more this blessed truth grips the soul, the more one would be concerned not only about serving God but also winning others to Christ. It was true of these young believers. They lived day by day in the expectation of Christ's return; they looked for Him—the risen and ascended One—to come back again as their Deliverer from coming wrath. The wrath referred to here, I take it, is not eternal judgment. From that they have already been delivered. But he refers to the wrath that is coming upon the world. This wrath is still in the future. But the Lord has promised to take away His own before the trumpets of wrath begin to sound and the judgments of the great tribulation

fall upon the world. It is evident, to some extent at least, that Paul had intimated that such a time of trouble was in the future, but he also told them that Jesus would come to snatch His own away ere that wrath is let loose. His coming for His own is still the hope of His saints.

ADDRESS TWO

A CHRIST-LIKE MINISTRY

1 1 1

"For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain: but even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention. For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile: but as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts. For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness; God is witness: nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: so being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us. For remember, brethren, our labor and travail: for laboring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God. Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe: as ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, that ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto His kingdom and glory"—1 Thess. 2: 1-12.

1 1 1

IN these twelve verses the apostle reviews the ministry of himself and his companions, in the city of Thessalonica. He reminds the believers how he had come to them from Philippi where he had been "shamefully entreated." In the sixteenth chapter of the book of Acts, we find the record of that shameful treatment, and we learn that Paul

and Silas were unjustly arrested, beaten with thongs and cast into a dungeon. Their feet were put in the stocks; and there in the night they prayed and sang praises unto God. Someone has said that the gospel entered Europe in a sacred concert! There were two artists, one was Paul and the other Silas, possibly a tenor and a bass! What hymns they sang we are not told, but the concert was given, and it was so effective that it brought down the house! There was a great earthquake and down came the jail. That was the result of the first gospel concert of which we have any record in the New Testament. The day following the conversion of the jailer the city authorities sent to Paul and Silas and wanted to release them, but Paul said, "They have beaten us openly, uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison; and now do they thrust us out privily?" So Paul, for the gospel's sake, in order that no dishonor might be connected with the message, refused to go out in that way. He demanded, "Let them come themselves and fetch us out." To this the magistrates eventually agreed.

When Paul and Silas were released from prison they left Philippi after a farewell meeting with the brethren in Lydia's house. They went on down the highway to the city of Thessalonica and there preached the Word, and many were brought to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The apostle, in verse 3, mentions the holiness of life which should characterize the one who proclaims the message of God. He says, "For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile." He was not careless as to his own life. It is most important that the man who preaches the gospel should live the gospel. There should be no hidden evil, nothing unclean in his life, nothing that grieves the Holy Spirit of God. Paul was very careful as to this. He declared that there was no deceit, no uncleanness, nor any guile with him and his companions. They were perfectly open about everything; they had no hidden schemes. They did not go out preaching in order to make money, but to exalt Christ and to win souls.

We recognize the fact that the ministers of Christ have to live, and the Bible says, "They that preach the gospel should live of the gospel." But when ministers preach Christ simply as a means of livelihood they have missed their path altogether. The Lord will support those who faithfully carry on His work, but if they make personal gain their object, their ministry becomes obnoxious to God. So Paul repudiated any selfish motive in his own preaching. He says, "But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel." That is a striking expression! Not man's choice but God's. It was God's permission and Paul looked upon it as a privilege—this business of preaching the gospel. He

says, "As we were allowed of God (permitted by God) to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts." Notice this: they were put in trust with the gospel, and that is the one great message which the servant of Christ has to give to a lost world. We find people suggesting all kinds of themes to ministers on which to preach; and it is true that a minister of Christ should be interested in everything that is for the betterment of mankind; but on the other hand, his business is to preach just the gospel and the Word of the Lord. If we can only get men saved, then all else will soon be straightened out. If we can get men right with the Lord, there will be no trouble with other things. And so Paul's object was not to give a political address, nor some scientific lecture. He had but one object, and that was that men might know the gospel of the grace of God. "For I am determined," he says to the Corinthians, "not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified."

Notice how strongly he speaks in verses 5 and 6, as to his single-hearted devotion to God: "For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness; God is witness: nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ." Paul and his com-

panions were absolutely disinterested, so far as their own welfare was concerned. They did not think primarily of that but of the welfare of others and of the glory of God. This is the right attitude for every missionary and every minister of Christ.

In verse 7 he says, "But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her own children." This is the better reading: There might be a difference in the way a nurse would treat the children of someone else, and in the way she would treat her own children. Paul looked upon these Thessalonian believers, these young Christians who had so recently come to know Christ, as his own children in the faith. He exerted himself in every possible way to build them up in Christ. He might have said, "Now that you are converted, the least you can do is to be concerned about my support," but he did not do that. He would not bring the gospel down to that low level. And so we know that on many occasions when the end of his financial resources came, he turned to tent-making in order to provide for himself and his companions. When the saints realized their responsibility and counted it a privilege to care for Paul, he was willing to accept it, but he never put them to this test.

"So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us." He literally laid himself out

for them. He asks them to recall what had actually taken place. He says, "For ye remember, brethren, our labor and travail: for laboring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God." The word "travail" refers to birth-pangs. In writing to the Galatians, Paul says, "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you." Oh, if we only knew more of this earnest purpose that characterized Paul, this agony of soul, in order that people might be brought to Christ, how many more we might see confess His name! The trouble is, we take things in such a matter-of-fact way. It was otherwise with Paul. He was so deadly in earnest that he went through real agony of soul if people did not come to Christ, for he felt keenly responsible for them.

He could say without fear of contradiction: "Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe: as ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, that ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto His kingdom and glory." He followed Christ that they might see in him what it meant to be a true servant of the Lord.

"For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of

God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe. For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews: Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men: Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins always: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost" (vers. 13-16).

In verses 13-16 he reminds them of the result of his work among them: "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the Word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe. For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews: who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men: forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins away: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost." Notice what the gospel had done for these Thessalonians. They saw such evidence of reality in Paul's life that they felt constrained to give heed to his message, and as they listened it went home to their hearts, and it exercised their conscience and they believed the message. Note that they became Christians and received the gospel not as "the word of men," but

as the Word of the living God, and it worked effectually in them. It is by the Word that we are brought to repentance, and by that Word they were regenerated; as Peter says, "Being born again . . . by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth forever." It is the Word of the gospel that brings the message home to the hearts and consciences of men, and by that same truth they are sanctified. Jesus said, "Sanctify them by Thy truth, Thy Word is truth." It was this truth received into the hearts of these Thessalonians that led them to take that same stand. Those who were Jewish by birth had to turn away from their own loved ones; they had to turn away from their dearest friends, endure bitter persecution and bear the reproach of Christ. Those who turned from heathenism always suffered from their heathen relatives and former friends, just as the Christian Jews in Judea suffered from their Jewish friends and relatives. There is no limit to what religious prejudice will really do when men's eyes become blinded. The unconverted Jews tried to hinder the apostle Paul from going to the Gentiles with the message of salvation through faith in Christ; and so they gave evidence that wrath had come upon them to the uttermost. God is going to deal with those who reject His Son and seek to hinder those who believe in Him.

"But we, brethren, being taken from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavored the more abundantly to see your

face with great desire. Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us. 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? For ye are our glory and joy" (vers. 17-20).

In verses 17-20 the apostle expresses the earnest desire of his heart to see these young converts again, and he tells them how he looks forward with joy to their manifestation at the judgment-seat of Christ. He says, "But we, brethren, being taken from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavored the more abundantly to see your face with great desire. Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us." He wanted to get back but Satan hindered. How may we know when Satan hinders or God hinders? Satan hindered the apostle by stirring up such persecutions against him that he could not get back to Thessalonica at that time. All the efforts of the devil, however, would avail nothing if God did not permit him to work. We do well to distinguish between God's direct will and that which God allows—His permissive will. Very often people suffer from Satan and his emissaries, but it is always by God's permission. We may therefore take all things as from God Himself.

"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? For ye are our glory and joy." Even if he never saw them again

on earth he would see them in that day when the Lord returns. In that day they will be his crown of rejoicing. This would be the abundant reward because of the preaching, self-sacrifice, and devotedness of his life. Every soul we lead to Christ goes to make up our crown of rejoicing. Would not it be a sad thing, when you meet the Lord, if you have no crown of rejoicing, because you have failed to lead someone to Him on earth? Have you ever talked to people about your Saviour? Have you written letters to friends, telling how the Lord has saved you? Have you given the gospel message to others? Oh, the joy of winning men and women, yes, and little children, to Christ! When in that day we stand in His presence, how precious to be able to say, "Behold I and the children whom Thou hast given me"! What a host will surround the apostle Paul in that day of manifestation! Do you know someone to lead to Christ? If you have never led anyone to Him, won't you go out this day determined, by the grace of God, to point someone to the Saviour who means so much to you?

ADDRESS THREE

STEADFASTNESS IN THE FAITH

1 1 1

"Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone; and sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellow-laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith: that no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto. For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know. For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labor be in vain. But now when Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings of your faith and charity, and that ye have good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us, as we also to see you: therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our afflictions and distress by your faith: for now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord. For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God; night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith? Now God Himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you. And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: to the end He may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints"—1 Thess. 3: 1-13.

1 1 1

AS we have noticed, this letter links very intimately with chapters 16 and 17 of the Book of Acts. In chapter 16 we have Paul's visit to Philippi, and because of persecution there he went on to Thessalonica, where he did a great work in a short time. However, persecution broke out, and the brethren sent Paul to Berea. Here he

found a company of open-minded Jews who were ready to listen to and walk in the light of Holy Scripture, for we read, "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the Word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore, many of them believed." These Bereans may well be models for all of us. Sometimes we hear things that are new to us, and we reject them without investigation. In this Epistle we are told to prove all things and hold fast that which is good. The test, of course, is by Holy Scripture. No matter what doctrine is taught we are to compare it with the Word of God: if it is according to Scripture we are to receive it; if it is contrary to Scripture then we are just as responsible to reject it. The Jews who had resisted Paul at Thessalonica came down to Berea and stirred up the people against him there, and the Berean brethren sent him to Athens. Paul left Silas and Timothy behind. We are not told in the Book of Acts that he asked them to return to Thessalonica to see how these young converts were progressing. But when he went on to Athens his heart was in deep exercise, and he remained there alone and sent Timothy to Thessalonica to find out whether these young converts were making progress in the things of the Lord; or whether they had become despondent and discouraged.

Notice how Paul speaks of his fellow-laborers. I always revel in the delightful way in which he refers to them. He says, "Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellow-laborer in the gospel of Christ." What more could be said of any servant of the Lord: a beloved brother in Christ, a dear fellow-laborer—Timothy was all this to Paul. So he sent Timothy to establish and comfort these young Christians concerning their faith. They needed comfort; they were in the midst of a godless, pagan world. It meant a great deal in those days to come out for Christ. Sometimes it does not seem to mean so much now, and yet we find people afraid to take this step. These people came out from idolatry; they were surrounded by bitter enemies; yet they surrendered their lives to the Lord and bore a bright testimony for Him. Paul was concerned lest they should become discouraged; so he sent Timothy to exhort them that no one should be moved by these afflictions, because, after all, this was what they were to expect, what all Christians are to expect in the world. He adds, "For yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto." How often people, who become Christians, wonder if perhaps they have made a mistake when trouble and sorrow come upon them; they wonder whether or not God has actually forgiven their sins, and if they are really born again. But hear the word of the apostle: "For verily, when we were

with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know." Our Lord Jesus said to His disciples before He went away, "These things I have spoken unto you, that in Me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). Elsewhere Paul tells us we must pass through much tribulation to enter into the kingdom of God. Do not be discouraged, dear suffering Christians; do not question your Father's love because you are passing through sorrows, or have to face disappointing circumstances. The Apostle Peter says, "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:7)..

"For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know. For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labor be in vain." There is always the possibility that people will make a Christian profession without genuine repentance and implicit faith in Christ. Sometimes it is easy to go along with a crowd when many are turning to the Lord; it is easy under such circumstances to make a pro-

fession, but with no real work of God in the soul. Paul feared lest there might be some who had made such a profession of Christ, but who were not truly regenerated, so he sent Timothy to know their faith.

In verses 6 to 10 we learn of the good report brought. "But now when Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings of your faith and charity": that is, your faith and love. One can well understand what it must have meant to Paul to be in Athens in utter loneliness for some time. He had walked about the streets of that great city; his heart stirred within him as he beheld idolatry on every side. An ancient Greek writer has said, "In Athens it is easier to find a god than a man." Evidences of idolatry were everywhere, and not a single light shining for Christ until Paul entered that city, and he did not find many interested until he was urged to go up to Mars Hill. This he did, and we have that address recorded in Acts 17. However, all the time, there was this anxiety, this concern for these young Christians at Thessalonica, but when Timothy came he reported that they were going on beautifully; they were living for God: in fact, many had turned preachers! "Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith." When this word came to Paul it gladdened his heart, because he was so definitely linked in spirit with these young converts that he could say, "For now we live,

if ye stand fast in the Lord." I think every real soul-winner knows something of the meaning of those words. When we have the joy of bringing sinners to Christ, how it cheers the heart, but how much it means afterward to learn that they are going on brightly and maintaining a consistent testimony. Oh, how it refreshed Paul's soul to get this good word as to these young converts! Exuberantly he wrote, "Now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord." Young believers sometimes imagine that those who are older and stand in the place of guides and teachers, are often too severe if they warn concerning worldly things that militate against a real Christian testimony, but if they would only understand how fervent is the love of God put into the hearts of those who are soul-winners and have pastoral or shepherd hearts, they would not wonder that sometimes leaders have to say very strong things in order to impress upon the young the importance of being wholly yielded to Christ. Let me assure you of this: in that coming day when we stand at the judgment-seat of Christ, no one will be sorry because he was so completely yielded to the Lord; but in that day there will be many, I am sure, who would give worlds, if they possessed them, if they had only been more devoted, more truly separated from the world, more out-and-out for their Saviour in this scene below. This is what Paul wanted to see in his converts; it is what

all faithful ministers of Christ long to see in the souls of those who profess faith in His name.

Paul opened his heart to them. He says, "For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God; night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith." Preaching the gospel was no mere profession with Paul. He did not go from town to town, holding a series of meetings, and pass on and forget his converts. He carried them in his heart, and always hoped that he might return to them to give them additional instruction in the faith and lead them further along in the ways of Christ; and he remembered them in prayer night and day, that they might continue in the will of God and learn to walk faithfully as the truth was opened up to them.

Verses 11 to 13 express his prayerful desire for these young Christians. I am sure these words might well be looked upon as a prayer for every Christian down to the end of this dispensation: namely, "God Himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you. And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: to the end He may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father." When? Will we ever reach that place

here on earth? The apostle does not say that we will; he does not even suggest that. As long as we are down here there will always be higher heights to reach, deeper depths to sound; there will always be sins over which we will need to have victory. But it is the will of God that by prayer we shall continually make progress here on earth until at last we stand before our blessed Lord at the judgment-seat when we shall be "found unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints."

We have already noticed that the second coming of the Lord is presented in some aspect in each chapter of this Epistle. In the first chapter he tells us how they had turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and wait for His Son from heaven. That was their daily attitude; they lived in constant expectation of the return of the Lord Jesus Christ from heaven, and that should be our attitude also. When we rise in the morning we should say, "The Lord Jesus may be back before night;" and when we commit ourselves to God ere retiring we should remind ourselves, "Before morning comes I may hear His voice and see His face." This should be the attitude of every Christian: ever waiting for the Son from heaven. In the second chapter we find that all these whom we win to Christ will be our crown of rejoicing when the

Lord returns to call His saints to be with Himself. At His return He will sit upon the Bema, and believers (no unsaved ones will be there) will stand before that judgment-seat; and all our works will be made manifest. Everything that was of God—everything which was the result of the Spirit's working in and through the believer, everything that was in accordance with the will of God—will bring its reward. The reward is pictured as a crown: the crown of life for those who have suffered for Christ's sake; the crown of righteousness for those who loved His appearing; the crown of glory for those who fed the lambs and the sheep of His flock; the incorruptible crown for those who press on steadfastly in the Christian race; and, as mentioned here, the crown of rejoicing for those who win souls. These Thessalonian believers would constitute Paul's crown of rejoicing in that day when he himself should receive his reward. He will see gathered there all those whom he had led to Christ. Then they would be established and unblameable in holiness before God.

Until that great day, however, we are to press on; we are to put away every known sin, and purge our lives from all filthiness. If one says, "I have already attained to perfect holiness," you may know he is simply deceiving himself, for Scripture says, "If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us" (1 John 1:10).

Holiness will be attained only when we meet our Saviour, gaze on His face, and in that glorious moment become like Him; for we shall see Him as He is.

ADDRESS FOUR

THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH

1 1 1

THIS fourth chapter consists of two parts: the first consisting of a series of exhortations, and the second having to do with the second coming of our Lord for His Church. Let us consider the first section:

“Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more. For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: that every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour; not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God: that no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified. For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness. He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us His holy Spirit. But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more; and that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you; that ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing”—1 Thess. 4: 1-12.

In this section the apostle sets forth the walk that pleases God. Notice the opening verse: “Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more.” During his ministry among them Paul had been careful to

dwell on the practical side of Christianity. Sometimes we are apt to neglect this. We become so taken up with the doctrinal side that we do not sufficiently stress that which has to do with our responsibility as believers. Both lines of truth are important. Here there is special warning against sins of impurity. Immorality was so common among the heathen that even Christians were apt to look upon it with a measure of indifference, or even complacency. You remember what one of our poets has written:

“Vice is a monster of such frightful mien,
That to be hated needs but to be seen;
Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,
We first endure, then pity, then embrace.”

Among pagan nations the vilest kind of lasciviousness was connected even with the worship of their false gods. Ours is a God infinitely holy, and we who know Him are called to be careful to avoid every tendency to uncleanness. “For,” says the apostle, “this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication.” We often find this verse quoted in part only, particularly by those who misunderstand the meaning of sanctification; they think of it as though it were a second definite work of grace in the soul that follows justification. Building on a false premise they attempt to find scriptural endorsement by reading, “This is the will of God, even your sanctification.”

But the apostle is speaking here of God's will that believers should walk in separation from all that is vile and immoral, from the lasciviousness and licentiousness which had characterized many of them while still unsaved. It is the will of God that believers should walk in purity; that they should look upon the body as devoted to Him. "That everyone of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor; not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God." We might say, "Well, we live in a civilized land where men have learned the difference between clean and unclean living; we do not need such an exhortation as this." But a little acquaintance with conditions in and out of the professing church will emphasize the importance of the admonition given here. There is always the temptation to lower the Christian standard in regard to things that are immoral and unclean. We need to be constantly reminded of the importance of living pure lives.

It is impossible to sin in the manner of which Paul writes without wronging others; you cannot do it. These are sins that cannot be committed alone; others are injured by such unholy deeds. The apostle, therefore, warns these Thessalonians, "That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified. For God hath not called us unto unclean-

ness, but unto holiness." The believer's body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and it is to be devoted to the glory of our blessed Lord. If men despise such admonitions, they despise not man but God, who has given us His Spirit.

"But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another." Love is the manifestation of that new nature given to all who are born of God. It was seen in these young converts in a marked degree. "And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more." In this as in every other grace there should be continuous progress.

Next we have a very practical word: "And that ye *study* to be quiet, and to do your own business." The word translated "study" means to be "ambitious." We are to be ambitious to do our own business: that is, to mind our own business! There are many who seem to have an ambition to mind any other business but their own. This always makes for strife and dissension. "And to work with your own hands, as we commanded you; that ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing." In other words, the Christian is not to be dependent upon others, but he is to secure his own livelihood by every possible honest means; he is to be self-supporting,

rather than looking to his brethren to sustain and maintain him in idleness.

Following these exhortations, the apostle turns to consider a matter that was troubling these young Christians. Some of their number had died since he had left them: what about these departed ones when Christ comes again? Timothy had informed Paul that the Thessalonians were concerned over this question. When Paul was with them he had told them that Jesus was coming again to set up His kingdom on this earth, and they had leaped to the conclusion that those who had died before the Lord's return might not share in His kingdom, but that only those who were living at His return would welcome Him and have a part in it. Paul writes these words to correct and instruct them:

"But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words" (vers. 13-18).

Observe that the apostle is here making known a new revelation that the Lord had unfolded to him. They knew that when Christ returns to reign as

King, those who are ready to receive Him will enter with Him into His kingdom, but the thing that troubled them was this: these who have died are no longer in the world, so how can they reign with Him? They looked for Christ to come back to this earth as He promised; they believed His word and expected Him to return to set up His kingdom, but what about those who have died before He comes back again? Paul says, "I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep." When he uses the expression "asleep," he means "dead." When he speaks of Jesus, he says "died;" but when he speaks of believers, he says they "sleep." Christ died; He went into death and all that it involved when He took our place in judgment on the cross, but now we who trust in Him shall never see death. If we enter the realm of that which we call death, our bodies will be just asleep until the Lord Jesus returns. The spirit leaves the body and goes to be with Christ: "Absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8). Several times in this passage the apostle uses the expression "sleep" as applied to believers who have died. "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope." He does not rebuke believers for sorrowing when they lose their loved ones in Christ, but we are not to sorrow as others who will have

no reunion at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again"—and we do; we are not Christians if we do not! This is the foundation truth of Christianity. "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures." In Romans 4: 25 we read, "Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." The body of Jesus came up from the tomb: in that body He ascended into heaven; and in that body He now sits on the throne of God. We believe He died, rose again, and has ascended into heaven. "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Romans 10: 9, 10). Where this is not believed, no one has the right to the name "Christian." "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him." Or, as it might be better translated, "Them which have been put to sleep by Jesus will God lead forth with Him." It is the blessed Lord Himself who takes His tired, weary saints and puts them to sleep until that glorious resurrection morning when they will

be awakened at the sound of His voice. Then God will lead them forth with Him. Of what is He speaking? When the Lord Jesus Christ returns to establish His kingdom, He will come with all His saints. How can He do that if some are in heaven and some are on the earth? This is what Paul makes clear. When He comes He will raise the dead and change the living, and they will be caught up together unto Him in the clouds, "to meet the Lord in the air." Then God will lead them forth with the Lord Jesus when He descends in power and glory. "For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord (it was a new revelation), that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent (or, precede) them which are asleep."

There is not one word, so far as I can find, in the three Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—of this aspect of the Lord's coming for His saints. Whenever we have the Lord's own words concerning His second coming in the Synoptics, it is the coming of the Son of God with His saints to the earth to set up His kingdom that is in view. John tells us that ere the Lord went away He gave a brief word to the apostles in the upper room which links with what we have here. He said, "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:3).

They knew He was coming again to set up His kingdom; He had told them that before, but now He gave them information as to a secret which He had kept in His heart till this time. He said, "I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." It is this aspect of His coming that was given by revelation to the Apostle Paul and through him to us. "That we which are alive (and there will be a generation of Christians living on the earth in their natural bodies when the Lord comes again) shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air." We have no way of knowing when this blessed event will take place. It might please Him to defer His coming until we have left this scene, but we are to live in daily expectation of His return. "We which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep." The English word "prevent" has quite changed its meaning in the last three hundred or more years. When this Bible was translated in 1611, "to prevent" meant "to go before." David, you remember, when he was speaking of his morning prayer in Psalm 119: 147, said, "I prevented the dawning of the morning." He did not mean he prevented the sun from rising, but that he was up and praying before the sun rose. The word "prevent" now means "to hinder." What the apostle said was, "We which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not *precede*

them which are asleep." We who are alive shall not enter the kingdom one moment ahead of them; we shall all go in together. "For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout." I like those words — *The Lord Himself!* He is the one for whom I am waiting! The angels said, "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). It is the Lord Himself for whom we look. He "shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God." The archangel in the Old Testament is connected with the Jewish people in a very special way. "And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of Thy people" (Dan. 12:1). When the Lord Jesus comes, in fulfilment of these words, not only the saints of this age but also the saints of all past ages will be included. So the voice of Michael the archangel will be heard at the same time that the Lord gives that awakening shout. When the trump of God sounds, then "the dead in Christ shall rise first." Literally, it might be translated, "the dead in Christ shall *stand up* first." Millions whose bodies are sleeping in the earth will hear His voice. Lazarus heard it when he was in the tomb, and he immediately sprang to life. So all the saved who have died will stand up, come back to life, in the first resurrection. Then we which are alive and remain

in the body shall be "caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air." The definite article before clouds obscures the sense. We shall be caught up in clouds. I do not think it means that we are going to ascend to the fleecy clouds above our earth. Even our airmen go higher than that. But we shall go up in clouds; there will be so many millions of us! This is what we call the Rapture of the Church, when we shall be rapt away to meet the Lord in the air. The word "meet" really means to go out to meet one in order to return with him, as in Acts 28: 15. We shall stand before His judgment-seat in our glorified bodies to receive rewards according to the deeds done in this life. Then when He descends to take His kingdom—as in Revelation 19: 14 (where He is seen under the symbol of a Rider on a white horse) we read, "And the armies which were in heaven followed Him upon white horses"—so we are coming with Him to share in His glory in that triumphal day. This is our hope; this is the hope of the Church.

Notice that word "together." We have had fellowship *together* down here; we have been workers *together* under our Lord's authority, and when He returns we will be caught up *together* to meet the Lord in the air. People ask me sometimes, "Shall we know one another in heaven?" Know one another! Why we have never known as we shall know then. "Then shall I know even as also I am

known" (1 Cor. 13:12). We shall know as God Himself has known us.

"And so shall we ever be with the Lord." You might ask, "What comes afterward?" There are wonderful events to be unfolded through the ages to come, but whatever comes afterward we shall always be with the Lord. "Wherefore," said the apostle, "comfort one another with these words."

Do they bring comfort to your heart? They should if you are living for Him. If you are not, there will be no comfort in them for you.

ADDRESS FIVE

THE DAY OF THE LORD

1 1 1

"But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation. For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do"—1 Thess. 5: 1-11.

1 1 1

AFTER unfolding the truth concerning the rapture—which will take place when our blessed Lord rises from the Father's throne, descends in the air and gives that awakening shout, and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we which are alive and remain will be changed, and we will be all caught up together to meet Him in the air—the apostle turns to consider the Day of the Lord.

Following the catching away of the saints there will come upon this world the darkest period it has ever known—that which is designated in many places in the Old Testament as the "day of the

Lord;" and also the "time of trouble," or "great tribulation," as it is called in both the Old and New Testaments. Concerning this we are told, "But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night." The subject of the day of the Lord, then, is included in that expression "of the times and the seasons." May I say that times and seasons—prophetic times and seasons—never have to do with the hope of the Lord's return for His Church. The times and seasons have to do always with events preceding and culminating in the Lord's coming to set up His kingdom here on the earth. It has led always, and will ever lead, to confusion to try to work out the time when the Lord will return for His own. The times and the seasons have nothing to do with that. We get this expression twice elsewhere in the Scriptures, once in the Book of Daniel, and once in the Book of Acts. In the Book of Daniel, 2: 19-22, we are told, "Then was the secret revealed unto Daniel in a night vision (this was the secret concerning Nebuchadnezzar's dream). Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven. Daniel answered and said, Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are His: and He changeth the times and the seasons: He removeth kings, and setteth up kings: He giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding:

He revealeth the deep and secret things: He knoweth what is in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with Him." It is clear that the times and the seasons had to do with affairs upon the earth. God changes the times and the seasons. If He has determined to visit judgment upon a nation and that nation repents and turns to God, He will postpone the judgment, as in the case of Nineveh when Jonah was commanded to go to Nineveh and announce judgment to fall in forty days; but Nineveh repented, and God changed the times and the seasons, and the destruction was put off for something like two centuries. Then at last her doom came because of her further rejection of the Word of the Lord. God dealt in the same way with Israel and Judah on divers occasions: postponing judgment upon repentance.

In the first chapter of the Book of Acts the disciples asked the Lord, "Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" They were speaking of times and seasons which God had predicted in the Old Testament—the time when the kingdom would be restored to Israel; but Jesus said to His disciples: "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part

of the earth" (vers. 6-8). Nothing could be plainer than the Lord's words. It is not for us to know the times and the seasons. Our business is to preach the gospel; going from people to people and from nation to nation until the entire world has heard. So here in the fifth chapter of 1 Thessalonians, the apostle says, "But of the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night." The Lord had spoken already of these things. They had learned from Paul's instruction when he was with them that the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night. The Old Testament predicts that. But the day of the Lord has to do with the times and the seasons, and therefore it could never take place so long as the Church of God is still in the world.

This expression "the day of the Lord" refers then, not as some have supposed to the descent of the Lord in the air to call His Church away, but to the manifestation of the Lord in visible glory to set up His kingdom. It has to do also with events to take place after the rapture of the Church, prior to the revelation of the Lord in judgment. Let us look at some Old Testament scriptures which will make this clear. I have selected only four or five:

Turn first to the Book of Amos, 5:18-20. "Woe unto you that desire the day of the Lord! To what end is it for you? the day of the Lord is darkness,

and not light. As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him. Shall not the day of the Lord be darkness, and not light? even very dark, and no brightness in it?" There were those in Israel who hoped the day of the Lord was but a step ahead and then they would be out of their troubles; but the prophet said, "The day of the Lord will not be light for you; it will be darkness," as if to flee from one danger meant only to go into a greater one; as we say, "from the frying-pan into the fire." Or as a man fleeing "from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him." It will be a time of judgment. God will deal with the world, including apostate Israel as well as the Gentiles, because of folly and sin; and in that sense, it is not to be desired by those who are still living in their sins. It means judgment and sore distress for the people who will be living on the earth in that day.

Look at another scripture, Zephaniah 1:14-18: "The great day of the Lord is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the Lord: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness." It is a somber picture indeed which sets

forth in detail the conditions that will prevail here upon the earth in that day of the Lord.

The Prophet Joel adds his testimony. We read in 2:1-3: "Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the Lord cometh, for it is nigh at hand; a day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains: a great people and a strong; there hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations. A fire devoureth before them; and behind them a flame burneth: the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness; yea, and nothing shall escape them." Our Lord Jesus refers to this time when He says: "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened" (Matthew 24:21, 22). We should not have any difficulty about this in view of the terrible events that have taken place so recently. Since the discovery and use of the atomic bomb we can readily see that another world war might entail the destruction of all flesh. The Lord says, "And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake

those days shall be shortened." Here "the elect" refers to the remnant in Israel and those of the nations who will be waiting for the Lord in that day.

We turn to the Prophet Jeremiah, 30:7, and read: "Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it." It will be noticed in this passage that it is "Jacob's trouble," that is, Israel's, "but he shall be saved out of it." The prophets show us that God will have upon the earth a remnant from Israel that will turn to the Lord, and He will use them as witnesses to the Gentile world; and as a result many will be prepared to welcome the Lord when He descends to take His kingdom. ..

Another scripture that brings this truth before us is found in Malachi 4:1: "For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch": that is, the ungodly Gentile world and apostate Judaism. They will all be destroyed in that day. The prophet says to those who turn to the Lord, "But unto you that fear My name shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in His wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall." The day of the Lord is the time when—the day of grace having ended—

God will visit the world in judgment, and that day will come upon the earth as a thief in the night.

The first great event that will startle the world, prior to that day of wrath, will be the disappearance of millions of people who have known and loved the Lord Jesus Christ. At one instant they will be on the earth: some perhaps sleeping, some suffering in hospitals and other places, enduring pain, grief, and distress; others will be gathered together for worship. But in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, these redeemed ones will be changed and will disappear. The world will waken to find them gone.

I remember reading years ago of a gentleman who said that one day in every month he went to a certain city, a place where there were great steel mills. These mills were going constantly, pounding, pounding, pounding, and he wondered how people could sleep; but the citizens were so used to the noise that it did not bother them. He could get no sleep during the one night a month which he spent in that town. Then one time, in the middle of the night, something happened to the electric power, and in a moment the mills stopped. Suddenly the whole town woke up. They were so used to the noise that it put them to sleep. Well, the world has heard the gospel down through the centuries and still sleeps on. But some day the Church of God will be gone, and the gospel as now preached will

be silenced. Then the world will wake up to find that it is just entering upon the day of the Lord. The day of the Lord will so come as a thief in the night: "For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape."

The apostle turns to comfort believers. He says, "But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief." For those who are saved, who are waiting expectantly for the coming of the Lord, His return will not be as a thief that cometh in the night. "Ye are all the children of light and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness." We used to be children of darkness, but God has brought us out of darkness into light, and so we are no more children of darkness. The world sleeps; but we should be alert, awake, ever seeking to serve the Lord Jesus, making His truth known to others, and seeking to get people ready to welcome Him when He returns. "Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night." Oh, that Christian people everywhere might be awakened out of their lethargy and out of their carelessness and frivolity, and brought to realize the seriousness of the times in which we live! What a solemn thing it is to be a Christian in a world like

this, in view of the fact that we will soon give an account of our works to the Great Judge. "But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation." Faith and love to protect our hearts, garrisoned by confidence in God, even as the world is drifting on to this time of great trouble of which we have been reading. We will not be here to share in that day of wrath. We have the helmet, the hope of salvation. It is our final salvation that is in view. "For God hath not appointed us to wrath." The world is drifting on to this; and some day the wrath of God will be poured out from heaven, and Satan will be cast down to earth having great wrath. The wrath of the devil will be manifest in opposition to the wrath of God. But "God hath not appointed us to wrath (we will not be here) but to obtain salvation (deliverance out of this world) by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him." That is, whether we live till He returns or die before He comes, "We should live together with Him." When this hour of judgment strikes we will not be here to go through it; we will be taken away in accordance with the promise to the church of Philadelphia: "Because thou hast kept the word of My patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth"

(Rev. 3: 10). As Christians we do not dwell on the earth; our citizenship is in heaven from whence we look for the Saviour who is coming to snatch us away from the wrath to come.

The apostle concludes this section by saying, "Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do." For those who are not yet saved there is no comfort in this message. There can be none unless they come to Christ. Some living now may be numbered among those who will be caught up when the Lord comes to take His saints to be with Himself before the day of judgment begins for this world. "Now is the day of salvation." While the gospel is preached, God wants all to believe and live. If men persistently reject His Son then only judgment awaits them. It is their own fault if they are left behind in that great day, because God has made a way of escape, and they have failed to avail themselves of it. For those who are saved and are expecting and waiting for the Lord's return, what comfort it is to know that we shall have no part in the woes of this world in that terrible hour! We will be with Him in the Father's house. When He descends to the earth to set up His kingdom we shall come with Him, and He will appoint His redeemed ones to places of authority over this lower universe to reign with Him: "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world: and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy

to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels?" (1 Cor. 6: 2, 3). So we should be looking expectantly, not for the day of Jehovah, but for the coming of the Lord Jesus to take us to be with Him and to be like Him forever. We are told in Hebrews 9: 27, 28. "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation."

"We're watching for Jesus who entered within
The Holiest of all when He put away sin:
A place in the glory He's gone to prepare,
Where we shall be with Him; but will you be there?"

ADDRESS SIX

SANCTIFICATION COMPLETE AT THE LORD'S RETURN

1 1 1

"And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves. Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men. See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men. Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil. And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it. Brethren, pray for us. Greet all the brethren with an holy kiss. I charge you by the Lord that this Epistle be read unto all the holy brethren. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen."—1 Thess. 5: 12-28.

1 1 1

THIS section of the Epistle consists largely of exhortations based upon truth revealed already. In verses 12, 13 we have a word of admonition for those who are members of the Body of Christ, concerning their attitude toward those whom God has set in their midst as guides in spiritual things. The apostle says, "We beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you." It is God who calls men to be His servants, and

entrusts to them various gifts of teaching, preaching, or administration, and gives these servants to His people in order to build them up and lead them on in Christ. True pastors are spiritual shepherds who are responsible to care for the sheep and lambs of Christ's flock. Such are to be recognized and revered as they seek to fulfil their ministry. "Esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake." It is not a question of simply approving their personality, but it is a question of recognizing that God has entrusted to them the ministry of teaching, preaching, and exhorting the saints.

We have an added word which we as Christians need to remember always, "And be at peace among yourselves." It is so easy to allow little things to set one Christian against another, and thus bring in strife and a spirit of quarrelsomeness among God's people. When we realize that anything like this is in our hearts we should take it immediately to the Lord in humiliation and self-judgment, and seek grace not to say or do anything wilfully that is likely to cause contention among God's children.

In vers. 14-22 we have twelve distinct exhortations. They are so plain and clear that one does not need to use many words in an attempt to explain them; they are self-explanatory. First the apostle says, "Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly." There is always the probability that some will be found in a local church or as-

sembly of saints who are naturally rebellious, always wanting to run things to suit themselves. Some people have a splendid disposition as long as they can have everything their own way, but just cross them and the old nature soon manifests itself. Such are to be warned, because they are hindrances to blessing.

Next, we read "Comfort the feebleminded," or "faint-hearted," as others would render it. All are not courageous and quick to act. We must be considerate toward those who are lacking in confidence and boldness. "Support the weak." Instead of censuring these we should assist them and bear with their infirmities. There is an inclination to condemn those who are not so strong in faith, or in other ways, as we may fancy ourselves to be. But that is not the spirit of Christ. "Be patient toward all men." There are many things which try our patience, even in Christian circles; much that might arouse ill-temper, but we are called to be considerate on all occasions. "See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men." The Christian is not to retaliate. Savonarola said years ago, "A Christian's life consists in doing good and suffering evil." The Lord has taught us what our attitude should be when we come up against evil: "And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy

cloke forbid not to take thy coat also." The Apostle Paul has said, "Recompense to no man evil for evil" (Romans 12: 17). We are even to return good for evil.

The sixth exhortation is, "Rejoice evermore." He who knows Christ can rejoice even in the midst of sorrow. "The joy of the Lord is your strength." If his joy disappears we may be sure that something is wrong; something needs to be put right. George Mueller, that great apostle of faith of the nineteenth century, said on one occasion, "I never allow myself to begin the day without facing before God anything that has left me unhappy or distressed, because I want to be before Him always in the spirit of joyfulness." We may blame others for our lack of this, but the truth of the matter is if our joy has gone we have no one to blame but ourselves. It shows that we are out of fellowship with God. Our blessed Lord has set the example here. In spite of the fact that He was rejected by men His spirit was always one of joyfulness and gladness as He communed with His Father.

In the seventh instance we are exhorted to "Pray without ceasing." I cannot always be uttering words of prayer, but I can be in the attitude of prayer continually: that is, I am to be ever in the spirit of dependence upon God. "Prayer is the soul's sincere desire, uttered or unexpressed." We are to go through life with our hearts looking up to God no

matter how much we may be occupied with other affairs.

The next exhortation is one we all need to have in mind: "In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." "Thankfulness" and "holiness" go together. It was when men began to be unthankful that they turned away from God and went into idolatry. "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). Giving thanks should do away with all complaint. We have seen people go to the dinner-table and give thanks for the food God has provided, and their eyes are hardly open before they begin to complain about it all. The very lips which a few moments before gave thanks for the meal are now finding fault with it! Yet there are vast numbers of poverty-stricken people in the world to whom that very food would seem most delicious and even luxurious. Giving thanks "in every thing" is to recognize that all our circumstances come from God. One may ask, "But does not Satan bring evil things into my life?" Yes; it was Satan who was permitted to afflict Job, but Job looked beyond Satan to the One who had allowed the enemy that liberty; and he said "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" and, "Shall we receive good at the hand of the Lord and shall we not re-

ceive evil" (Job 1:21; 2:10). If I remember that it is the Lord who permits the unpleasant things for my good then I should be enabled to thank Him for them all. I should seek to learn the lessons He has for me.

"Quench not the Spirit." The unsaved may resist the Spirit, but it is only believers who quench the Spirit. We may also grieve the Spirit. He is a Divine Personality, and He dwells within our hearts. To quench the Spirit is to fail to respond to His guidance.

The tenth exhortation is, "Despise not prophecies." That is, we are to be ready to recognize the messages of God when His servants speak. In 1 Cor. 14:3 we read, "He that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort." One who prophesies is not necessarily a foreteller but a forthteller, one who tells forth the mind of God; and of course that always will be based on the Word of God.

Next we have, "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good." That is, prove the different lines of teaching. The only test is the Word of God. We are to prove all we hear by the Scriptures, and then hold fast to that which is good, and reject all else.

The last of these exhortations is one which we are prone to forget because of the independence of our spirits: "Abstain from all appearance of evil." You may have some habit; or you may be doing

something by which you mean no harm, and you may say that no one has a right to judge you in regard to it, but a weaker person may think of it as an evil. We are to remember that others are looking to us and taking note how we behave. We are to abstain from all that looks like evil—from the very appearance of evil, or literally, from every form of evil.

Now we come to a text which has troubled many people. "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." To sanctify, as we have seen, means to set apart, to separate from that which is evil. A Christian is to be separated from worldly things, from all that is unholy. Some have taken for granted that sanctification means the absolute eradication of all inbred sin. But as we saw in considering chapter 4:3, there is not one scripture which treats sanctification from that standpoint. Sanctification is presented in three very different ways in Scripture. Every believer is sanctified by the Holy Spirit; that is a work which begins before we ever come to a definite knowledge of salvation. We read in the first Epistle of Peter that we are "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." In 2 Thessalonians 2:13 we read, "But

we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." In these scriptures we have God's purpose in the past—election and His choice. It is by sanctification of the Spirit that this is carried out in time. It was the Spirit of God working within us that showed us our need of a Saviour and led us to trust in Christ. Then the Spirit comes to dwell within us. He continues the work of sanctification all through our Christian lives.

Positional sanctification is absolutely complete from the moment we believe. We are then set apart to God in all the value of His precious blood. This sanctification is perfect. "By one offering He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified." Nothing can ever be taken from it; nothing can be added to it. Christ Himself is our sanctification, and we are complete in Him.

The third aspect is sanctification by the Word. Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them through Thy truth: Thy Word is truth." As we read and study the Word of God it opens up the wonderful truths which are there, and we learn from that Word what is in accordance with His will. As we obey the Word we are practically sanctified. This sanctification will never be complete until we reach the end of our pilgrimage. We are sanctified in Christ Jesus the

moment we believe in Him, but as we feed upon the Word and apply it practically to our lives we are being sanctified by the truth.

People often tell me that they are sanctified completely. When I put the question to them, "Have you ever read through your Bible?" they often say, "No; I am afraid I cannot say that I have read it through all the way, but I have read a good deal of it." Then I reply, "How can you be sanctified completely if you have never read through your Bible, when sanctification is by the Word?"

When will our sanctification be complete? Note what we read here, "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Then we shall be wholly sanctified. "We know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2). Our entire spirit, the highest part of man; our soul, the seat of our emotional nature; and our bodies, then glorified, will be sanctified completely in that day, and we shall be altogether conformed to our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is the precious promise of ver. 24. "Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it." Do you know Him now as your own personal Saviour? Do you yearn for the day when you will be absolutely free from grief, pain, and sins? Do you long to become like Him? Well, God has called you for that

purpose. Think of His infinite faithfulness: He guarantees to bring us to that desired end in Christ Jesus. "He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1: 6).

And now in the last four verses we have the concluding exhortation and salutation. "Brethren, pray for us." That is, pray for us as servants of Christ, missionaries of the cross, teachers of the Word of God. Those who stand in places of public testimony need the prayers of God's people, because they are so likely to fail in some way. They need prayer that they may be able to maintain a consistent testimony for the glory of Christ as they seek to minister the Word of God.

"Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss." The kiss was the customary way to greet one another. The emphasis here is not on the word "kiss" but on the word "holy"—"Greet one another with a *holy* kiss." If our method is to greet with a hand-shake, then it should be a holy hand-shake. You have seen two men talking unkindly about a third, and one of the two will look up and see the third man coming suddenly and unexpectedly toward them. He grasps the third man's hand and says, "Oh, dear brother, I am so glad to see you!" That is an unholy hand-shake. Or there may be two women—God forbid!—but they are criticising another woman who appears suddenly, and one of the two will run up to

her and give her a good hearty kiss. That is a "Judas kiss." What the apostle is stressing here is the importance of reality as we greet one another. Let your attitude toward each other be holy, and you will never be embarrassed by the sudden meeting of a third person.

"I charge you by the Lord that this Epistle be read unto all the holy brethren." God has constituted believers holy before Him in Christ, and so He dares to use that term. The Epistle closes with the usual Pauline salutation or benediction, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all."

SECOND EPISTLE TO THE THESSALONIANS

ADDRESS ONE

DIVINE RETRIBUTION AT THE LORD'S RETURN

1 1 1

*Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth; so that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure: which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer: seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power; when He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day. Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of His goodness, and the work of faith with power: that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ"—2 Thess. 1: 1-12.

1 1 1

THE two letters to the Thessalonians, the first of which we have considered already, were written to the Church at Thessalonica from the city of Corinth, where Paul had gone after leaving Berea. The first letter dealt largely with the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ for His saints. It

is evident that some Christians in Thessalonica misunderstood the teaching given by the apostle in connection with this subject. They seemed to have come to the conclusion that since the Lord's coming might take place at any moment it was useless to work for a living. Then, too, inasmuch as they were called upon to go through some very trying and distressing experiences the notion had gotten abroad among them that they were already entering the great tribulation. The apostle, hearing of these strange misunderstandings of the truth which he had sought to set forth, wrote this second letter in order to correct these unwholesome views and to bring before them more definitely and clearly what was really involved as to their responsibility while they, as Christians, waited for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This first chapter naturally divides into three sections. In the first two verses we have the apostolic salutation. In vers. 3-10 the apostle seeks to comfort, cheer, and encourage these believers who were enduring great suffering and persecution for Christ's sake. He tells them that it is a token of the righteous judgment of God that His saints are counted worthy to suffer persecution for His Name; for they will be rewarded when they return with the Lord in the day when He will be manifested to execute judgment upon those who rejected Him and persecuted His people. In vers. 11, 12 we have the

apostle's prayer for the saints that God might fulfil His good pleasure in them.

Note the salutation in vers. 1, 2: "Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." The address here is the same as in the first letter to the Thessalonians, and it is in these two letters only that you find the church, a local church, spoken of in this way: "the Church which is in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." The emphasis is upon family relationship. These were young believers, but they knew God as Father. They were children, and Jesus Christ was their Lord. The apostle wishes them "Grace . . . and peace." Grace is needed for every step of the way, and as we learn to trust in the living Father we enjoy the peace of God which garrisons the heart and gives quiet confidence as we pursue our pilgrim journey through this troubled scene.

Beginning with ver. 3 Paul undertakes to console and hearten the saints amidst their trials and perplexities. He says, "We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth." Our English word "love" is generally, I think, to be preferred to the older rendering "charity," because

in some way, in the course of years, there has been attached to the word "charity" the thought of almsgiving rather than that of sincere affection. It is the latter of which Paul is speaking here. Yet real love is ever charitable, in the sense of kind consideration for others.

There are two things for which he gives the church credit: a growing faith and abounding love. It is a wonderful thing when Christians are characterized in this way. We often find believers, who have been on the road for many years, constantly looking back to early days. They are asking in the words of the old hymn:

"Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I saw the Lord?
Where is that soul-refreshing view
Of Jesus and His Word?"

They think of early raptures as they sing:

"O happy day that fixed my choice
On Thee, my Saviour and my God!"

But so many are not able to say at the present moment as in the last part of the verse:

"Well may this glowing heart rejoice,
And tell its raptures all abroad."

It is a pitiable thing when a Christian's present state is lower than it was years ago when he was first converted. The Lord had to say to the Ephe-

sian Church, "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." It was otherwise with these Thessalonian believers. Some little time had elapsed since they were converted, but their faith was growing exceedingly, and they were abounding in love. May we not search our own hearts to see if these things are true of us, and ask ourselves, Is our faith growing exceedingly? Have we more confidence in God today than we had when we came to Him in the beginning of our Christian life? Have we so proved and tested Him through the years that we can count on Him now in a larger and fuller way than we did when we were first brought to know Him? If this is not true then it is evident that we are in a backslidden condition. Declension has set in. We need to turn to God and cry unto Him, "Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation," the joy of early days. It is written, "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day" (Proverbs 4:18). Those who have known the Lord for years ought to be stronger in faith than ever before; we should be more characterized by abounding love each passing day.

As Paul noticed these evidences of the grace of God working in these believers, he said, "So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure." They were passing

through a time of great suffering, tribulation and bitter anguish for Christ's sake; but they manifested the grace of God in their lives in a wonderful way. How they could be so joyous and so restful in spite of the persecutions which they were enduring was something their enemies could not understand. The apostle speaks elsewhere, in writing to the Philippians, of believers going on in holy, happy unity. The unbelievers could not understand it. They said, "How is it that these Christians do not seem to be moved by our efforts to upset them? They go right on rejoicing, returning love for hatred, kindness for malice, praying for those who persecuted them. We cannot understand it." This should ever be characteristic of those who are redeemed by the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer." We are made heirs of the kingdom by the new birth, but we prove our worthiness of that kingdom by the readiness with which we endure suffering for Christ's sake down here. We are told that if we suffer with Him we shall also reign with Him. All believers suffer with Him in some sense. All do not suffer for Him in the same way. One could not be a Christian at all, could not be indwelt with the Holy Spirit, and not suffer with Christ. The very fact that we belong to Him and have received a new and divine

nature makes us suffer as we go through this world which has rejected Him. But to suffer for Him is something more than that. It is to take so definite a stand for Him that we become the objects of the world's hatred, and it is as we are thus prepared to endure grief and wrong in faithfulness to Christ that we have the opportunity to prove ourselves worthy of the kingdom of God to which we belong by the new birth.

The apostle goes on to speak of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in retributive judgment, and he shows that a great distinction will be made in that day between those who knew and loved the Saviour and those who refused to believe the gospel, who persisted in their sins and wickedness in utter indifference to the God who created them. He says, "It is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you." We are to love our enemies; we are to bless them that curse us, and pray for them that despitefully use us. But in His own due time God will deal with those who have persecuted His Church. At the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ to set up His glorious kingdom He will visit such with judgment who are living on this earth. Those who have died are reserved until the last great assize. When He descends to recompense tribulation to them that have troubled His people He will take care of those they have sought to injure, "To you who are troubled rest

with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels;" that is, when He is manifested in the clouds with power and in great glory, He will recompense tribulation, trouble, and anguish to those who have deserved His wrath, but He will recompense with rest, joy, and comfort all who are His own. When thus shown with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ," this is not the coming of the Lord for His own, of which we read in chapter 4 of the first Epistle. This is the manifestation, the day of the Lord, of chapter 5. It is the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ to the world as we get in Revelation 1:7, "Behold, He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him." He then comes as Judge to destroy out of the earth those who have spurned His grace. This great event will usher in that glorious era when the Lord Jesus will reign in righteousness from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth. He shall be revealed in flaming fire, taking vengeance and visiting with retributive judgment them that know not God, and those who obey not the gospel. These are two classes of people: Those who know not God are the heathen who have lived in ignorance of the gospel but in definite rebellion against God their Creator; the second class

will be those who have heard but have rejected the truth.

People ask, "Is God going to deal in judgment with the heathen? Is He going to send them to hell for rejecting Jesus Christ when they have never heard of Christ?" No; He is not going to send them to hell for rejecting Jesus Christ, but He is going to judge them for their own sins. We read in the first chapter to the Romans that they have been given up to uncleanness, because they have sinned against their own conscience and against the God they once knew. So whether or not the Word has ever been taken to them by missionaries, they are sinning against the light which God has given them. When the Lord Jesus returns He will visit judgment on all them that know not God. The guiltier class or whom He will pour out His wrath are those who obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is something which those who live in this favored land should look upon with intense solemnity. When I hear people talking so glibly about the heathen and what God will do with them, I feel they had far better be thinking about themselves. What will God do with those who have heard the message over and over again and have spurned it, who have known of Christ all their lives and have rejected His love and grace? One of the saddest things I know is to see young men and young women growing up in Christian homes where they have had an example of piety

in a godly father or mother, where family worship has been maintained; and yet they go out of those Christian homes to live careless, indifferent lives; sometimes using the stupid expression that they had religion enough when they were young and do not want it now. How it tells out the rebellion of the heart and hardness of conscience! For such there is nothing but judgment unless there be repentance, a breaking down before God, a confession of sins and turning to the Christ who has been rejected.

When the Lord Jesus comes in the clouds, in flaming fire, He will visit with judgment those who have sinned with no knowledge of Christ; but with more intense wrath those who have sinned against the light and knowledge that God has given them concerning His beloved Son. They "shall be punished," we read, "with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power." What solemn words! What terrible warnings God has given us in order that men might face the question of their guilt and turn to Him in repentance. It is like the often-seen railroad warning—"Stop! Look! Listen!" How sad to be found in one's sin "When He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day." What a great separation there will be: those gathered about Christ who have believed the message, trusted Him as Saviour, maintained a

testimony for Him on earth, but who were misunderstood and persecuted for His name's sake—they will rejoice with Him in that day of His power. On the other hand, those who have spurned His loving-kindness will experience the awfulness of retributive judgment in that day.

Closing the chapter we have the apostle's prayer for the saints. We may well take these very expressions on our own lips and pray that we may have grace to act accordingly: "Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of His goodness, and the work of faith with power." It is a privilege to be allowed to walk with Him through a world that rejects Him; it is a privilege to bear His name when that name is despised by the godless. How many of us look upon it as a privilege to be thus counted worthy of this calling? As our love abounds there will be increased power in the life to witness for Christ and to glorify Him. "That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ."

This is the Christian's path of rejection as he goes through the world with a glorious prospect ahead of joy with Christ at His return; but for the unsaved there is nothing but judgment in that day when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God and obey not the gospel.

ADDRESS TWO

THE RISE OF THE ANTICHRIST

1 1 1

"Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto Him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only He who now letteth will let, until He be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming: even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness"—2 Thess. 2: 1-12.

1 1 1

AS we undertake to consider the special line of truth brought before us in this chapter we need again to remind ourselves that the great outstanding theme of the first Epistle is the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ to receive His own to be with Him before that awful period of judgment which will come upon the earth, designated in the Old Testament as "The day of the Lord," "A time

of trouble," and "The time of Jacob's trouble." Our Lord Jesus spoke of it as "the great tribulation." The Thessalonian believers were looking forward to the appearing of the Lord. It was this aspect of His coming which had made the deepest impression on their hearts. They were looking for Him to return to earth to execute judgment on the wicked, and to set up His kingdom in this very scene where He had been rejected and crucified. In his first letter Paul shows that first He will come in the air for His saints.

Sometimes believers have very poor memories, and these Thessalonians seemed to have forgotten this truth which Paul had endeavored to make so clear. When they found themselves going through a period of bitter persecution and trouble they began to wonder if the day of the Lord had begun: that is, they thought they might be already in the great tribulation. They lost sight altogether of the truth that had been revealed concerning the catching up first of the Church. It would seem that someone had misled them into believing that they had entered into the throes of that time of Jehovah's wrath. Presumably it had been asserted that a special revelation from God had been given as to this, and so many of the brethren had been deceived. It would seem also as though someone had forged a letter in the name of the Apostle Paul in which he had definitely declared that the day of the Lord

really had begun, and the Church was going through the great tribulation. It was in order to correct this that the apostle wrote this second letter. In the first chapter, as we have seen, he set forth the truth of the Lord's judgment to take place at His manifestation when He shall be "revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." Believers of this Church age will have been "caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air," ere this, but will appear with Him in glory when He descends as here depicted.

In the present section the apostle emphasizes this, and stresses the fact that the day of the Lord cannot begin while the Church is still on the earth. He says, "Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto Him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand." He would have them remember that our hope is that of being gathered together unto the Lord, ere these judgments fall upon the earth. Even though some professed to speak by the Spirit, or to have discovered such teaching in the Word, or even to have received a letter from him asserting it, they were not to give heed to the theory that they were entering the great tribulation era.

"The day of Christ" is a faulty rendering. The best manuscript authority gives "the day of the Lord." The two refer to very different events. "The day of Christ" is the day of manifestation when believers receive their rewards at the judgment-seat of Christ. This is immediately after the rapture. "The day of the Lord," as we have tried to make clear, is the day when Jehovah's judgments will be poured out, culminating in the literal return of the Lord Jesus to this world where He will set up the kingdom of God in manifested glory. The day of Christ is always imminent. There are no signs to be looked for: we are to wait for the Son from heaven, who may return at any time. But that day of which we read here refers not to this precious and glorious event, but to the next stage of Christ's second advent and those judgments immediately preceding it.

Almost invariably when the Church is called upon to go through a time of great suffering, there are those who leap to the conclusion that it must be the beginning of "the hour of temptation which is come upon the whole world to try them that dwell on the earth." In our own generation we have passed through two world wars, and in each of these awful conflicts, great suffering came to a large part of the professing Church of Christ. Following on this many teachers began to assert that we were entering the great tribulation. Some have held that the

Church must go through the entire tribulation period which, according to the Book of Daniel, is to take place in the last and unfulfilled seventieth week of the great prophecy of chapter 9. This seven-week period is divided in Scripture into two parts: it is all a time of tribulation, but the first three-and-one-half years will be given up to preliminary and largely providential judgment; the last three-and-one-half years cover the great tribulation proper when the wrath of the Lamb and the wrath of God will be poured out upon the world, and Satan himself will be cast down from the heavens, having great wrath. Some who realize that the Church is to be saved from the wrath, and therefore cannot fall in with the idea that it will go through the entire seven-week period of judgment, nevertheless have held and taught that it will go into at least the first half of the week. This, however, would involve two companies of saints on earth at the same time: the heavenly company, the Church which is the Body of Christ, and the remnant of Israel who are to be gathered out from the apostate nation at the beginning of that time. This is unthinkable if one but weighs the scriptures relating to each company. God has both a heavenly and an earthly election. For instance, in our Lord's great prophetic discourse as recorded in Matthew 24, the elect to be gathered out from all the nations, when He descends to set up His kingdom, is Israel;

and those of the Gentiles who will come up out of the great tribulation, having washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. The elect of the Epistles are a heavenly company the church of the firstborn whose names are written in heaven.

It is for us as Christians to realize that ours is indeed a heavenly hope. We are not to be occupied with events and conditions down here, but we should be looking for our blessed Lord Himself to snatch us away from the wrath to come.

The day of the Lord cannot begin until after this has taken place. That is why the apostle says, "We beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto Him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand." We have already noticed that it should be "the day of the Lord." Actually the thought that was in their minds was that the day of the Lord had begun already.

Paul says, "For that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition." The man of sin is undoubtedly the same as the personal Antichrist of whom the Apostle John speaks in his epistles, and who is known also as the king who "shall do according to his own will" in Daniel's great proph-

ecy. The day of the Lord cannot come until he has been made manifest; he will not be made manifest prior to the rapture. But after the Church has been caught away then the apostasy of Christendom and Judaism will be complete: the vast throng of unconverted professors left on earth will throw off all pretension of allegiance to Christ and to God. That will be the complete falling away or apostasy, which will be the preparation for the reception of the Antichrist. "Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God." We, therefore, are never instructed to look for the rising up of this sinister personage who occupies such a large place in those prophecies that relate to the last days. When Israel will be gathered back to their own land in unbelief the words of the Lord Jesus, spoken when He was here before, will be fulfilled. He said, "I am come in My Father's name, and ye receive Me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive" (John 5: 43). This one who comes in his own name is the man of sin, the son of perdition. It is evident that this man of sin proclaims himself the incarnation of God; he exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped. The temple in which he will sit will be that which the returning Jews will build in the land of Palestine. Antichrist will take his place there, and to

him will be rendered the worship that belongs to God alone.

I have already referred to Daniel's prophecy, but let me here quote the passage in question, "And the king shall do according to his will; and he shall exalt himself, and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak marvellous things against the God of gods, and shall prosper till the indignation be accomplished: for that that is determined shall be done. Neither shall he regard the God of his fathers, nor the desire of women, nor regard any god: for he shall magnify himself above all." This mysterious king will be a Jew. We get that from the fact that he is said not to regard the God of his fathers. In Scripture this refers invariably to the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. The desire of women undoubtedly refers to Messiah Himself. Every Jewish woman hoped to be the mother of the Deliverer of Israel. So the man of sin will be the son of Jewish parents; he will present himself to Israel as God manifest in the flesh, the Messiah for whom they have waited.

It is evident that Paul had given certain instruction concerning this when he was in Thessalonica, for he says, "Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?" Of course, in the short time that he was in that city he could not make everything clear, and even though he had done so, much would be forgotten. When circum-

stances arose that filled them with fear and dread they became so occupied with these conditions that they lost the hope of the return of Christ Himself to take His people away before the judgments began.

In the verses that follow the apostle put something before these Thessalonian Christians which every believer ought to understand, and yet it has been misunderstood by a great many prophetic students and even teachers. He says, "And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only He who now letteth will let, until He be taken out of the way." This is another case where words have changed their meaning in the course of the centuries. When our English version was made "let" meant "to hinder;" now it means "to permit." What the apostle was really saying is this: "Ye know what restrains that he might be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness doth already work: only there is One who now hindereth, until He be taken out of the way." Observe he suggests that they should "know what hindereth." Some have supposed that he referred to the Roman Empire whose downfall he had told the Thessalonians privately would take place before the second coming of Christ. It has been said that he spoke in a cryptic way, because to have made clearer his teaching as to this matter would have endan-

gered both himself and other Christians and subjected them to suspicion on the part of the ruling powers. Others have thought that he was referring to orderly government as such; in other words, that a state of anarchy must prevail throughout the world before the manifestation of the Antichrist and the revelation of the Lord from heaven. But all such speculation seems needless in view of the fact that Paul was writing not merely for the Thesalonians or other believers living at that time, but also for Christians to the end of the dispensation. He speaks to us all when he says, "Ye know what restraineth." Let me put the question definitely: My reader, are you a Christian? If so, you ought to know what restrains the full manifestation of evil. Do you know? I have put this question to Christian audiences many times, and I have never failed to get the answer. Yes, it is the Holy Spirit who restrains. This is exactly what we are told in Isaiah 59:19, "When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him." Or as it has been translated, "The Spirit of the Lord shall restrain him." The Holy Spirit is in the world working in and through the Church of God; He indwells every believer individually, and the Church collectively; therefore, as long as the Church of God is in the world the Antichrist will not be revealed. Of course, as the Apostle John tells us, "Even now are there many antichrists." Every denier of the

Father and the Son is an antichrist. But we are speaking here of the man of sin, the son of perdition, the one who comes in his own name, the arch-deceiver who will appear at the end of the age. This one will not be manifest so long as the Spirit of God is in the world. He came to abide with the Church forever. So as long as the Church is here He will be here, but when the Church is caught up to be with the Lord then the Spirit of God will no longer be in the world in the sense in which He has been here during the Christian era. We sing sometimes:

"The Holy Ghost is leading
Home to the Lamb His Bride."

Like Abraham's servant, the Spirit of God has come down into this far country to find a Bride for the Son. It is He who works in the hearts of men and women, leading them to Christ. When His work is completed He will go up with the Church "and then shall that wicked (*one*) be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming: even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved." This lawless one who sets himself up to be God incarnate will be the special object of Divine judgment; he

will be destroyed by the Lord Himself when He returns in power and glory. We learn from the Book of Revelation that he will be cast alive into the lake of fire.

During his brief time of power on earth he will deceive the nations by all manner of false miracles and lying wonders. Jesus says that if it were possible the very elect would be deceived; but, thank God, that is not possible: they know not the voice of strangers, but will hear the voice of the Good Shepherd. It is those who receive not the love of the truth that they might be saved who will be carried away by the propaganda of the Antichrist: in fact, it is God Himself who, in righteous judgment, will give them up to this. We read in vers. 11, 12: "And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." We might read, "That they should believe *the* lie"—the lie that the man of sin is the Christ of God. This is a solemn word indeed for those who hear the gospel in our day and definitely reject it. It tells us that if they should be found in that condition when the rapture of the Church takes place and they pass into the last solemn period of tribulation, there will be no hope of their turning to Christ in that day, but they will believe this lie and thus be judged with all those who have apostatized from the truth.

No doubt many of you who are unsaved are children of Christian parents. You have heard the name of Christ all your lives; yet you have never definitely decided for Christ. If Jesus should come today you would be among the number who will receive the Antichrist. You say, "Impossible! I have been too well-taught for that; I have heard the gospel too many times. I have learned the great outlines of prophecy, and I know something of the Divine program. I would not be deceived in that way. I would turn immediately to the Lord after He had taken His own out of the world, and so I should be prepared to welcome Him at His glorious appearing." No; according to the Word of God that will never be true. If you reject Christ now you will have no desire to accept Him in that coming day. You are in the most dangerous position in which anyone could be. The Word of the Lord says, "He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy" (Proverbs 29:1). Some of the saddest funerals I have ever had to conduct in my life have been funerals of young men or young women who were members of Christian families, who had often been pleaded with to come to Christ; but they had gone on in carelessness, hoping that everything would come out all right in the end. Then suddenly they were struck down, perhaps by accident, and they went out into eternity leaving no testimony. Young

men and young women, I plead with you, do not allow another day to pass without coming to Christ, lest the near future find you forever beyond all hope of mercy. God has given you the opportunity to believe the truth. He has presented His Word, but if you turn away from that truth and refuse to believe the gospel, then God Himself may give you up to judicial judgment that you should believe the lie of the man of sin and so be forever lost.

ADDRESS THREE

EVERLASTING CONSOLATION

1 1 1

"But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: whereunto He called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle. Now our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work"—2 Thess. 2: 13-17.

1 1 1

THE apostle has spoken of the apostasy of the last days, and the coming of the man of sin when the Hinderer, the Holy Spirit, will no longer be working on the earth. It is noticeable that he then turns to comfort the saints with the assurance that they are the special objects of the divine care. To all who have put their trust in Christ, he writes, "But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." These words apply to Christians everywhere for all such are "brethren beloved of the Lord," and everyone of them has been chosen by God from the beginning to salvation. This was brought about "through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." We read in Romans

8:29, "For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son." Looking down through the ages God foreknew all who would ever put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, and He chose them to be conformed to Christ. If you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ you need never worry about your election. The very fact that you are a believer, redeemed by Christ, assures you that you are among the elect of God.

Notice three things: He has chosen you to *salvation* through *sanctification*. That means we were aroused to realize our lost condition and our need of a Saviour by the direct work of the Holy Spirit; and so we were led to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Sanctification of the Spirit is the initial work of God in the soul. When we believe the gospel we have the assurance of salvation.

Paul told the Romans that he was a minister of God to the nations in order "that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost" (Romans 15:16). One may preach the Word with ever so great liberty and power, but unless the Holy Spirit applies the Word to the hearts, illumines the minds, and exercises the consciences of the hearers, it will never convert a single person. Those who are saved can look back and recall how the work of the Holy Spirit began in their own souls. We remember the time when we

were just part and parcel of the world around us, and then there came an awakening. Perhaps at first we could not understand it. We became unhappy and dissatisfied; there was a desire for something we had never known before; we became conscious of our sinfulness and guilt, and we cried out in our hearts for cleansing and purity—that was the sanctification of the Holy Spirit. There is a beautiful illustration of this in Genesis 1: 1, 2. We read, “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” That creation, we learn from Isaiah 45, was absolutely perfect, like everything else that comes from God’s hand. But in the second verse we read, “The earth was without form, and void.” Or as most Hebrew scholars feel that it might be better rendered, “The earth became without form, and void.” Whether or not this had to do with the fall of angels we cannot be sure, but a tremendous catastrophe took place, and the earth was plunged into chaos. “And darkness was upon the face of the deep.” It was a scene of gloom and desolation. Then we read that “The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.” The word translated “move” is a word that is used for brooding, as a hen brooding over her nest. “The Spirit of God *brooded* upon the face of the waters.” This suggests the Holy Spirit brooding over fallen man in order that he might be reached for God and saved. A brooding hen, although she seems quiet and inert,

is actually in constant motion, every muscle quivering. This generates the warmth needed to hatch the eggs. So we see the Holy Spirit brooding, moving over the waste of waters, preparatory to the reorganization of the earth, in order to fit it for man's dwelling-place. That same blessed Holy Spirit does His brooding, sanctifying work in the sinner's heart, then, when the light shines in, the soul is saved. "And God said, Let there be light: and there was light." This was the beginning of the new order. "The entrance of Thy Words giveth light" (Ps. 119:130). But no man sees the light till he has been awakened from his sleep by the Holy Spirit.

We are chosen "to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." Notice a passage in the first Epistle of Peter (1:1,2), "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied." What does he tell us? That the Spirit's sanctification leads us into the obedience of faith which brings us to the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. When we take our place in faith beneath that sprinkled blood, like Israel on the Passover night, we become absolutely secure.

Jehovah said, "When I see the blood, I will pass over you" (Exodus 12: 13).

There is another passage of deep interest. It is found in 1 Corinthians 6: 9, 10. There we have a list of evil characters, many of them so vile and unclean that we feel almost like refraining from reading them in a mixed audience. "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God." But the apostle adds, "And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." Some of the Corinthians had lived such lives as are depicted here, but they had been washed by the application of the Word of God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus. This is the order in Scripture. The Word of God is proclaimed, heard or read, the Spirit of God sanctifies—convicts the sinner, bringing him to the place where he desires to be saved, and is ready to receive Christ. Believing the gospel he is justified by faith.

Let me give a word to those who seek to win souls: Do not try to rush people into confessing Christ; do not try to make them say they are saved.

Endeavor to find out if there is any real exercise about their sins, if the Spirit of God has awakened them. The reason a great many people make a profession of Christianity and appear to come out for Christ in revival meetings, and then soon afterward drift back into their former ways, is that there is no real work of God in the soul. They have never been sanctified by the Holy Spirit; they have never known divine conviction. The first consideration is that men might be awakened to see their need of Christ. Then give the gospel to them. That is the divine order: Sanctification by the Spirit which leads to belief of the truth. "Whereunto He called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." The purpose for which God is sending His gospel out into the world is that the Holy Spirit might awaken men and lead them to believe it. When they believe the gospel message they may be assured of eventually sharing the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. When people have been really born again they will go on in the Christian life. We hear a great deal about backsliders. But some one has well said that many who are designated as backsliders have never been frontsliders; they have never been born again. In Philippians 1:6 we read, "He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."

"Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by

word, or our epistle." They were not to let anything turn them aside from the truth which had been proclaimed. Do not misunderstand what the apostle says as to traditions. Paul did not add human traditions to the Word of the Lord; but he had told these Thessalonians certain things by word of mouth, and he urged them to "hold fast these teachings," as well as those he committed to them in writing. Today we no longer have inspired apostles proclaiming the Word. Nothing is left for us but the written Word. We have no need of traditions: we have the Scriptures complete. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Timothy 3: 16, 17). When on earth our Lord told the scribes and Pharisees that they made the Word of God of none effect through their traditions. There are those today who have added a great many human traditions to the Word and have utterly confused their followers. But those who honor the Scriptures need no human traditions. These Thessalonians had listened to the apostle and had also received his written word, and they were exhorted to stand fast in all that they had received. "Now our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through

grace:”—Everlasting consolation is comfort which will go on throughout eternity. Our hope will never be disappointed.—“Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work.” We are not saved by good works, nor by any effort or behavior of our own; but because we have been saved through the sanctification of the Spirit of God and belief of the truth, we are responsible to maintain good works. Thus we adorn the gospel of Christ.

ADDRESS FOUR

CHRISTIANITY IN PRACTICE

‘ ‘ ‘

This third chapter is divided into three distinct sections, which we will take up one at a time.

“Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the Word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you: and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith. But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil. And we have confidence in the Lord touching you, that ye both do and will do the things which we command you. And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ”—2 Thess. 3: 1-5.

‘ ‘ ‘

IN these five verses the apostle seeks to impress upon the hearts of these young Christians, and of everyone of us, things which I want to bring before you under five terms.

The first one is *Prayerfulness*. “Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the Word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you.” That is, the Thessalonians were asked to remember the one who wrote this letter. He was the mightiest evangelist, missionary, and teacher of the Word that the Church of God has ever known, and yet he felt the need of the prayers of these converts in order that he might the better fulfil his ministry. How often do you pray for those who are called to preach the Word to others? When alone with God

do you remember to pray for Christ's under-shepherds who seek to care for His flock? Do you pray for missionaries who have gone forth into the regions beyond for the Lord Jesus? Do you remember those who labor in the home fields, many of them working in hard places where they find very little to cheer and encourage? Many of God's people cannot preach; many cannot teach, nor travel abroad to take the Word to distant lands; but all can pray. People say sometimes to me, "I do not know for what I should pray. I get down on my knees, thinking I shall spend some time in prayer, but in a few moments I have said everything that is on my heart, and there seems to be nothing else about which to pray." At such time why not wait quietly before God, and ask Him to bring before your mind those who are laboring in word and doctrine, and as they come before you mention them individually before God? Pray that they may be sustained and kept from discouragement. There is no one who needs prayer more than those who are bearing the burden and heat of the day in the terrific battle for righteousness. Paul and his companions had preached the Word to these Thessalonians, and he called upon them to pray for blessing as the witnesses went on elsewhere to preach. In this way believers may cooperate with those who are engaged in public ministry. Then in that coming day of manifestation, when we all appear before the judgment-seat of

Christ, and the Lord gives out rewards for faithful service, He will see to it that recognition will be given not only to those who preach the Word, but also to those who back up His servants in prayer. You may not be qualified to go to the mission-field, but as you remain at home and give of your means to help support a missionary in Africa, China, South America, or in the isles of the sea, you will have a large part in these things. You may never stand in a pulpit to preach the Word, but by your prayers and intercessions you can bear up before Him those who minister it. This is a very real thing. I am sure of this: if we prayed more for God's messengers we would criticize them less. Some are constantly finding fault with servants of Christ. They never do just the right thing from the standpoint of these critics. If one says much about sin he is too stern; if he says more about the comfort and consolation that is in Christ he is too soft; if he speaks specially to the unsaved he is neglecting the saints; if he addresses himself particularly to Christians he is not sticking to the gospel. It is easy to get into a criticizing mood. But when we are bearing up God's servants in prayer the spirit of criticism gives way to one of loving helpfulness.

The second word I desire to stress is *Preservation*. The apostle and his companions were exposed to great dangers. He says, "Pray that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for

all men have not faith." It is a sad fact that some men will never believe, no matter how clearly and tenderly the gospel is preached. There are many unreasonable and wicked men who have not faith, because they have closed their hearts and minds to the Word of God. There are those who say, "I have heard the gospel message over and over, and I cannot believe the Bible; I cannot believe in the virgin birth of Christ; I cannot believe that He was the Son of God; I cannot believe in His physical resurrection from the dead; I cannot believe in His ascension to heaven, and that He is coming again. I cannot believe all this." I can tell you why you cannot believe. It is because you have no desire to be free from your sins. You are rolling sin as a sweet morsel under your tongue, and as long as your sin means more to you than a place in heaven you will never be able to believe. Such are the people to whom the apostle refers here, and whom he describes as wicked. God's gospel is reasonable. He says, "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isaiah 1:18). He wants to reason with men; He wants them to sit down and face thoughtfully these great eternal truths that are presented in His Word. In writing to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 10:15) the Apostle Paul said, "I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say." That

is, *exercise reason* as to what I say; think it through. Some people will never do that; they are determined not to believe. They do not wish to be delivered from their evil habits; therefore, they are unreasonable; they reject the gospel. Unreasonableness itself is wickedness. God says, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon" (Isaiah 55:7). But if men have no desire to turn from their sins and be delivered from their unrighteousness they will never be forced to do so. God commands all men to repent; if they refuse they must be dealt with in judgment.

These unreasonable and wicked men have not faith. These words have troubled some people. They have been misinterpreted and made to mean that there are people to whom it does not please God to give faith, and therefore they cannot believe. Scripture says, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8). Those words declare plainly that the very faith by which we are saved is the gift of God. But some will say that if the gift is not given by God then they cannot believe, and so they should not be held responsible for the loss of their soul. That interpretation is very unsound. The Word says, "So then faith cometh by hearing,

and hearing by the Word of God" (Romans 10:17). Faith is founded upon hearing, and if men give attention and hear the voice of God and desire to be delivered from their sins, then faith springs up in their souls, and they are enabled to lay hold of Christ and be saved. But where men deliberately spurn the Word of God and persist in their sinfulness, they are numbered among those of whom the apostle writes here: "All men have not faith." They have not faith because they will not give heed to the message.

The third word I want to stress is *Protection*. "But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil." This is a wonderful promise for young Christians—and old ones too—but here Paul is thinking particularly of these young believers in Thessalonica. They were very much on his heart. He knew they were exposed to all kinds of danger; he knew Satan would do all he could to turn them away from the simplicity of the gospel of Christ. Paul had asked them to pray for him, even as he had prayed for them. He had confidence in the faithfulness of God: "The Lord is faithful!" He gives eternal life to all who believe in Him and He has promised that none shall pluck them from His hand (John 10:27-29). Nothing shall separate us from the love of Christ. The life that the believer receives is not conditional but eternal, and therefore can never be lost. Those who reason otherwise

show that they never have understood the meaning of salvation by pure grace. They still think of human merit as a condition for final salvation. This is the very essence of Roman Catholic theology; but many Protestants never have been delivered from it.

The instructed Christian rests, not upon any fancied faithfulness of his own, but upon the faithfulness of God whose gifts and callings are without repentance. He can be depended upon to establish us and to keep us from all evil, as we seek to walk in obedience to His revealed will. If at times our feet slip through self-confidence or lack of watching unto prayer, like Peter in the high priest's porch, He knows just how to restore our souls and bring us back to the path of obedience.

The fourth word is *Perseverance*, as in verse 4: "And we have confidence in the Lord touching you, that ye both do and will do the things which we command you." The apostle believed always in the saints. They had believed in Christ, and he believed in them. If they trusted Christ, Paul knew they were saved, and he counted on seeing them come out on top. It is a bad thing to get into the habit of underrating and misunderstanding God's people. I know that many of God's dear children become enthused about certain things for a time, and then they drift away from their first love, and their keen interest seems to be dissipated. But the very fact

that the Spirit of God dwells in them is good reason for confidence that they will be recovered and will come at last to the path of subjection to the will of the Lord.

The last word is *Patience*. Oh, how much we need patience. The apostle says, "And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ." A better rendering is, "The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the *patience* of Christ." You remember that James (5:7) says, "Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain." The Husbandman sits at God's right hand in heaven, and He is waiting for the precious fruit of the earth. What does this mean? He is waiting until the last soul is saved in order to complete the Body of Christ. Then the Man of Patience, who has been sitting at the right hand of God during all these centuries, as we count time on earth, will rise from the throne and "shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." We need patience as we wait for Him. This patience

rests upon our realization of the unchanging love of our Heavenly Father. "The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God." What does he mean? In Jude 21 we read, "Keep yourselves in the love of God." How can I keep in the love of God? Am I responsible to keep God loving me? He says, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." Does it mean that I am to keep loving God? No; "We love Him because He first loved us." But I am to keep in the realization of His love; the constant enjoyment of it. I have often illustrated it in this way. Suppose my child has been ill, and during dark and murky weather he has to be kept in the house. Then one day the sun shines brightly, and the doctor says, "He can go out today for a few hours, but be sure to warn him to keep in the sunshine." I say to my boy, "Son, you may go out and enjoy yourself, but the doctor says you are to keep in the sunshine." The boy asks, "How can I keep the sun shining?" I explain, "I did not tell you to keep the sun shining; I am telling you to keep in the sunshine." This, I think, makes clear what is meant here—keep in the love of God. "The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God." As we enjoy His love and learn to rely upon it, we can wait in patience for the day when all our trials will be ended, and the Lord Jesus will come to take us to be forever with Himself.

In the next section of our Epistle, verses 6-15, we have a warning against idleness and presumption.

"Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us. For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you; neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labor and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you: not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us. For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread. But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing. And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother" (vers. 6-15).

Evidently the precious truth of the second coming of our Lord had gripped the hearts of these Thessalonians so that they were fully expecting Him to return in their lifetime. I gather from this passage and the corresponding verses in the first Epistle that some of the members of the Church at Thessalonica who did not particularly enjoy hard work, were saying, "Well, if the Lord is coming soon what is the use of our working? Why not take it easy? Others of our brethren have enough laid up for the future; let them divide with us. There is no necessity for our working." The apostle rebukes such a thing. He says, "God has ordained that if a man will not work, neither shall he eat." Work may be of one kind or another; it may be mental or physical. But everyone in this world is expected to do work of some kind. God said to Adam, "In the

sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread." God could provide for us without our working, but it might not be good for us. We derive physical and intellectual help as we use the muscles and mind which God has given us. Professor Henry Van Dyke's lines are thoroughly *apropos* here:

"The blessing of heaven is perfect rest,
But the blessing of earth is work."

These men to whom Paul refers were simply ignoring the divine plan, for honest labor has a very prominent place in Christianity. Every Christian mechanic or professional man knows that he is expected to give his very best service in return for the remuneration he receives. It is God who has ordained that men should support themselves by their labor. When men are not employed properly there is always the danger that they will busy themselves in matters in which they ought not to interfere. So they become a nuisance and are used of Satan to disturb the peace of the Church, or of those to whom they look for their support. The tongue does not offend so seriously when the hands are kept busy.

The apostle adds, "And if any man obey not our word by this Epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother." That is, such an one is not to be treated

unkindly, but it is only right to let him see that his behavior does not meet with the approval of his brethren.

The last section of three verses gives us the benediction and concluding salutation.

"Now the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always by all means. The Lord be with you all. The salutation of Paul with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle: so I write. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen"—(vers. 16-18).

Every authentic epistle by Paul closes with a similar message about grace. Saved by grace and sustained by grace himself, he ever commended that grace to others.