

A Study of Paul's Letters to the Thessalonians Week Three

1 Thessalonians 4:9-5:14

Day One

9 Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. 10 And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more.

v. 9 –The Thessalonians had been taught by God to love one another. God was so interested and motivated for them to be known by love that He taught them Himself. What was Jesus main emphasis on earth? It was teaching. So teaching must be His means to express His love to His people. I have a series of four essays written on my website entitled *Teaching as a Path to Servant-Leadership* at <http://www.purposequest.com/articles.htm>. If you are, want to be or feel called to be a teacher, I would suggest that you read those essays and study what they say. Since servant-leaders influence and don't control others, then teaching is the perfect expression for servant-leadership. And Jesus was the perfect Teacher, thus making Him the perfect Servant-Leader.

Now love is so important that God Himself will teach His servants how to love. How do you think God will teach you to love? He will probably bring some unlovely people in your life so that you can learn how to love God's way. You will have to do what I did from time to time: Ask God to help you love the un-loveable. As we have stated in other studies, the standard for your love is not another person in the church or some religious leader. Our standard is Jesus, so anything less than the love that Jesus showed is less than acceptable. But to have that kind of love working in me, I must allow the Holy Spirit to work on me and change me into the person that God wants me to be. But He needs my permission to do so.

How is your love life coming along? I'm not talking about romance, but the life of love that you are to have for the brothers and sisters in the body of Christ. How are you showing that love? Is it from the heart or external actions only?

v. 10 – If you can say that your love life is doing well at this time, you can't be satisfied. Paul wrote that you and I must excel still more in this area. We must continue to grow in love! Love isn't knowing more of God's word, but doing more of God's word as it pertains other people. Read what the John wrote:

We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him. This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his

brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything (1 John 3:14-20).

I think each of us needs to have a plan for how we can show our increasing love for the members of the Church. **Jot down five ideas you have right now of how you can excel still more in the love of God for others.**

Day Two

11 Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, 12 so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.

v. 11 – Work wasn't a valued use of time for many Greeks in Paul's day. And now it appears that some were just going from house to house, relying on the hospitality of their fellow believers for their food. While going from house to house, they were meddling in business that didn't belong to them and stirring up controversy.

The word of God is specific and gets involved in our day-to-day activities. The Word isn't something just to teach us about God, but how God expects us to behave. I think that perhaps the opposite is true today. No one is going from home to home. In fact, no one is home at all. With working or single-parent homes, no one has much time for fellowship or visiting another's home. It is enough for many people just to get to church and then many of them arrive late. (It has always intrigued me how someone who reports to work at 7 am without ever being late—for fear of being fired—cannot make it on time to a 10 am service!).

So perhaps we need to apply this verse in a little different way. Forgive my feeble attempts to take the word of God and apply it to our modern setting: "Make it your ambition to lead a balanced life, not giving work so many hours that you cannot still pay attention to fellowship with others or give your gifts to help build God's church. Don't make money your ambition, for the Lord will provide, but work hard to extend God's love and kingdom through your daily jobs." **What do you think? Is that what Paul would write to today's western Church? If so, how would you measure up to that standard?**

v. 12 – Perhaps we would need to add another modern admonition to my re-write of these verses. The add-on would be "And don't rely on outside credit to maintain a lifestyle that is beyond your means. But win the respect of outsiders not by what you own, but by who you are." **What do you think? Would this be what Paul would write if he were alive today? If so, how would you do in regards to this modern admonition? Do you think it keeps the spirit of what the apostle was trying to accomplish in his letter?**

13 Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. 14 We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. 15 According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. 18 Therefore encourage each other with these words.

Day Three

5:1 Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, 2 for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 3 While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

vs. 1-3 – Most people read this and think of the Second Coming of Christ. And I don't doubt that Paul was referring to this. But don't we miss a more practical, day-to-day application of this truth by pushing it in the future?

As a pastor, I have seen more than my share of death, and as I get older, I know I will see much more as my friends, associates and I get older. Who knows if today will be our last day on earth? I was just in Singapore and a young man got up and showed us the pictures of his car, which was demolished on a recent trip to the States. While visiting the Grand Canyon, he was driving too fast as he rounded a turn and flipped the car several times. What was an innocent tourist trip could have been his last on earth. The day of the Lord does indeed come as a "thief in the night."

The brother said he came home and told his wife he loved her, because he hadn't done that enough. When he was faced with his mortality, he decided to do those things that were most important. He realized that he wasn't guaranteed tomorrow, so he has started doing things that were important today.

So if that is true, what are you doing with your life? Why do you postpone things until your retirement, or to that great procrastination destination—"some day"? Why do you talk about the next 20 years like you have them guaranteed? We must act like today is the last day.

When we buried my father, we could barely carry his casket to his grave. No, he wasn't a heavy man. It's just that we put all his regrets into the coffin with him and we could barely pick it up. He had so many things he wanted to do, but he allowed fear of risk and failure to stop him almost every time.

When I considered his life, I determined I would not fall into the same trap. So I said that “one day” I would visit Israel, and I have been there five times. I said “one day” I would write a book, and I have written seven. I said “one day” I would visit the Rose Bowl Parade, and I have been there twice. (Lord willing, I will go once more and take my as yet unborn grandchildren.).

Please don't misunderstand. I am not trying to take Paul's words and ignore the obvious reference to the return of Jesus. But the same application holds true: **If the Lord could return tomorrow, what you are doing today?**

So with that in mind, I urge and implore you to stop procrastinating! **Stop putting off until tomorrow or a decade of tomorrows what is in your power to pursue today.** You will not do the things that God wants you to do by talking about them. There must be some urgency that will enable you to do them, or at least prepare to do them.

What first steps can you take today that will enable you to reach some destination of your choosing? What have you put off until tomorrow that you can do today? Be honest, write those things down and then act like this is the last day you have to pursue them.

Day Four

4 But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. 5 You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. 6 So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled.

vs. 4&5 – How close are you to the “day of the Lord?” You could be a moment away. I don't know when the Lord will return for His church and I don't know when He will return for me. This may be my last day on earth for all I know. I want to live it as if it is. **What would you do today if this were your last day? Or what would you do today if you knew you only had six months to live?** We should always act like we have six months, making the most of every day.

Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is (Eph 5:15-18 NASU).

Paul undoubtedly borrowed the “thief” analogy from Jesus Himself, who said:

"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him (Matthew 24:42-44).

What does it mean to keep watch? I'm not sure, but I have spent two hours this morning studying the Word and writing. I can no longer put that off until tomorrow; I must do it today. **What is there that you must do today?**

So, as the Holy Spirit says: "**Today**, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts (Hebrews 3:7-8).

See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called **Today**, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness (Heb 3:12-13).

v. 6 – I met with some people the other day. They are good people, whom God has used in missions. But they were asleep spiritually. They had been lulled into a sense of complacency and I sensed God wanted to do so much more with and through them. But in some ways I felt they were asleep spiritually. Jesus had to confront His own disciples concerning this tendency:

Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Simon," he said to Peter, "are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak" (Mark 14:37-38).

Have you fallen asleep in any area in your life spiritually? Have your senses been dulled by disappointment, fatigue or discouragement? If so, wake up! God is speaking to you today and He wants you to act today. Don't wait until tomorrow. Act now!

Day Five

7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night.
8 But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.

v. 7 – We are children of the day. The topic of light and darkness makes an interesting study. God declared that there should be light in the beginning of the Bible and the kingdom of darkness has been trying to eradicate the light ever since. But it is absolutely impossible for darkness to overcome light. The only way darkness can prevail is if light withdraws or if some barrier is erected to keep light out.

Consider what John wrote in his gospel:

Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he

came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world (John 1:3-9).

Jesus is the light of the world, but this light isn't an overpowering force. It is simply light. Wherever we take Jesus, He lights up the lives of those with whom He comes in contact. Those lives may chose to flee or hide, but they cannot put out the light.

There is a children's song that states, "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine!" **Are you letting your light shine? Where does Jesus want to take you? To places that already have light or places that need light? Are you withholding the light you have from a dark place because you are afraid that the dark will overcome your light?** That is impossible! So take your light and let it shine as a child of the day and see where God will brighten up the world by using you.

v. 8 – Paul referred to a theme and analogy that he more fully developed in his letter to the Ephesians:

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints (Ephesians 6:10-18).

Notice that there is never any protection for your back; only for your front as you go forward in the Lord. Paul urged the Thessalonians to protect their head with salvation and their heart with faith and love. **Is it time you did an armor check? Are you prepared for your fight with the enemy?** If you have the time, go on and do a check through the armor components in Ephesians and repair or replace any portion of your armor that is leaving you exposed. You cannot take a break from the battle when your enemy is pressing in, but you can take time to make sure you can withstand his attacks.

Day Six

9 For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. 10 He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. 11 Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

v. 9 – We do not suffer wrath because we have taken refuge in the name and blood of Jesus. But that means that there are some who do incur wrath and it is those especially who have rejected the grace of God, as indicated by those whom Paul mentioned earlier in his letter—the Jews who opposed Jesus and Paul’s work.

God’s wrath and anger are real and will be poured out upon all those who hate and resist Him. Wrath is a theme that Paul mentioned often in his letters. To the Romans he wrote:

But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For God does not show favoritism (Romans 2:8-11).

There are some who think that God is so gracious and loving that His wrath is just a concoction of legalistic minds who want to portray God as mean and narrow-minded. That isn’t the case. God’s wrath will rest on Jews and Gentiles who do evil, especially those who resist Jesus and His Lordship. **How does this make you feel? Do you agree?**

The key here, I believe, is that the Church cannot see itself as the herald or bearer of God’s wrath. We must maintain a loving posture to the world, so that as many as can be saved will be saved. God can express His wrath all by Himself and doesn’t need the Church’s help. **Are you angry with anyone or any group? Do you feel it is your duty to express God’s wrath to sinners?** If you do, then I urge you to reposition yourself to bear God’s love and leave the anger to Him.

v. 10 – Jesus died for us! Thank you, Jesus. And Jesus’ death gave us life, whether we are physically alive or dead. We live forever because He lives forever. God is so good! A seminary professor once told me that eternal life is a life whose quality is so pure and good that nothing can stop or end it. I like that definition. The life Jesus gives me is so pure that it can never end.

v. 11 – We should build each other up, reminding one another of what we have in Jesus. You have an assignment today. You must find someone to encourage and build up. Are you up to the task? For to encourage someone else, I think you must be encouraged yourself or at least be mindful of what God has done and is doing for you. **How should you encourage someone? I’ll leave that up to you. Maybe you can send them an email or letter? Perhaps you can call them? Maybe take them to breakfast or lunch? Buy them a small gift? Or just tell them you are praying for them?** There are many creative ways to encourage, but you must want and choose to do it or it won’t get done. So what are you still sitting here reading for? Get going!

Day Seven

12 Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. 13 Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other.

vs. 12-13 – As I read this verse, I stopped and sent an email to my pastor, thanking him for the work he does and blessing his future endeavors. **What can you do today to show your respect for those who work hard and are “over you” in the Lord? Is there any financial blessing that you can give to them? Do you have something good that you don’t use that they could?**

Paul also urged that we live in peace with one another. While your pastor isn’t Jesus, you should respect him or her and not cause discord or dis-unity. My family left a church a few years ago where we no longer felt at home. We had been with this church for many years, but it was time to go. So we went. We did not try to take anyone with us, and our departure was not greeted warmly. We tried our best to just leave and join another church. We should not be the source of “un-peace” in a church. Better to leave than allow that to happen.

Here are other verses that instruct you how to relate to leadership in the Church. Why not pray over these verses and ask the Lord if there is anything He wants you to do in obedience to these words:

1. The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, "Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain," and "The worker deserves his wages." Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses (1 Timothy 5:17-20).
2. Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you (Hebrews 13:17).
3. Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor men like him, because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me (Philippians 2:28-30).

But this assumes that you have a pastor. **Are you in a church? If not, why not?** Don’t tell me there aren’t any churches that meet your needs. Church isn’t only about meeting your needs; it is also giving to God what He requires. We are directed to be part of a local fellowship and attend there regularly, without exception:

Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another-and all the more as you see the Day approaching (Hebrews 10:25).