

Dear Friends,

Much of contemporary Christian teaching regarding end times began around 1830, making that teaching some 1800 years too young to be Biblical truth. It builds on the idea of a "Secret Rapture" of really good faithful believers, while lesser believers and unbelievers are "Left Behind." Consistent New Testament teaching emphasizes one--and only one--return of the Lord and one--and only one--resurrection which shall include all who ever lived. (Matthew 25:31-46; John 5:28-29; 1 Corinthians 15:51-58 KJV) This teaching has imposed a contentious spirit onto what Scripture teaches is to be a premier comfort to the Lord's people. (1 Thessalonians 4:18 KJV) Many pastors have allowed this divisive attitude toward the Second Coming to stifle their study--and their preaching--of the New Testament teaching on the Second Coming. Sadly, the people who live under their teaching must live without that comfort.

Obviously by both Thessalonian letters, we learn that confusion regarding the Second Coming is not a new thing. Did Paul give up and choose to ignore it? No, he confronted the errant teaching and taught the Thessalonians the truth regarding it. It would appear that the error Paul confronted in 1 Thessalonians (What happens to believers who die before the Lord's return?) was replaced in 2 Thessalonians by the Thessalonians' belief of yet another Second Coming error (That it would occur soon, likely in their lifetime). Such is the unstable disposition of those new in the faith and of those who fail to study Scripture and learn with and from their pastors of sound Biblical faith. They

are liable to drift from one errant idea to another by their failure to follow Biblical teaching and learn from Scripture and their pastors, not from anyone who catches their interest.

In Paul's teaching the Thessalonians, we learn yet again the secure foundation of Biblical truth regarding the Second Coming. It is true! It shall be a real event that we shall experience. And, above all for the here and now, it compels us to faithful, loving, godly living.

Lord help us to learn these lessons from Paul well.

Lord bless,
Joe Holder

1 Thessalonians

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 shew 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 Thessalonians 1:8-10 KJV 1900)

We learn much of this church's beginning in Acts 17:1-13. When Paul arrived in Thessalonica, as was his normal habit, he found a synagogue and preached Jesus as God's fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, of the complete "Law and the prophets." Some of the synagogue members and a significant number of Gentiles believed. Based on this record, (Acts 17:2 KJV) Paul preached in the synagogue for three consecutive Sabbaths. Acts 17:3 outlines the pure and beautiful gospel of Jesus that he preached.

Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ. (Acts 17:3 KJV)

Acts 17:5 contains an insightful point. The leaders of the synagogue were "*moved with envy*" against Paul. Paul's preaching, by the empowering of the Holy Spirit, touched many, but that result of his preaching moved the leaders to resentment and jealousy. Why couldn't they reach that many people with their teaching? Biblical preaching with power and conviction is not about the rhetoric or skill of the preacher, but about the power of God in the message. Attempting to stifle Paul and his teaching, they hired thugs to stir up opposition against him and his teaching. They falsely charged Paul with being an insurrectionist, advocating for another king than the Caesars. (Acts 17:7 KJV)

Based on Philippians 4:16, Paul continued in Thessalonica longer than the three weeks he preached in the synagogue. However, his time there was cut short by

persecution. The result which we see throughout 1 Thessalonians was that he left the believers in Thessalonica prematurely. They believed and were zealous and joyful in their faith, typical of a new believer, but, also like a new believer, they were naive and still ungrounded in much of the gospel's teachings. Without a pastor or minister's sound teaching, they were vulnerable to bad teaching or to bad ideas that might grow out of their own imagination. Much of 1 Thessalonians encouraged them to continue in the godly way Paul had taught them, followed by Paul's continued teaching them in areas where they were deficient or had embraced bad teaching. In addition, Paul sent sound preachers to them to further teach and establish them in sound faith.

Our study verses above reveal this two-fold focus. Paul encourages them sincerely and heartily. They received the gospel with joy and godly zeal, but they also picked up some bad ideas regarding the Second Coming. They needed to anchor their minds in Paul's preaching. Avoid speculations regarding when the Lord shall return in glory. You need not imagine or fear regarding those who die before His coming. They won't miss anything by their death before that day. In fact, they all may die before that day, but the Lord shall recover them no less than He shall recover and glorify His children who are alive when He returns. Believe the true gospel and "*...wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead (Which He shall do for His children at His return), even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.*"

Various outlines of the major themes of 1 Thessalonians range in number and complexity from as

many as eight different focused reasons for the letter to three. Preferring simplicity, I share with you J. Vernon McGee's three objectives of 1 Thessalonians.

1. To confirm the young in the faith.
2. To condition them for holy living.
3. To comfort them regard the Second Coming.

We should learn to be vigilant in our faith to avoid the onslaughts of our adversary, as well as false teachers and our own imagination, and to realize that Satan continuously schemes to "hinder us," as he hindered Paul. (1 Thessalonians 2:18 KJV) If Satan could hinder Paul's desire to return to Thessalonica and to personally grow the believers stronger and more mature in their faith, do not doubt that he can hinder you and me. Expect it. Prepare for it by growing others around you strong in their faith so that they can pick up your labors when you are hindered by Satan. Paul may stand out as a unique figure in our thoughts of first century believers and leaders, but clearly, he was not a "Rambo" loner in any sense whatever. He surrounded himself with strong faithful believers, men and women, for support and, as in this case, to take over and work for the benefit of others when he was hindered.

Most commentaries date 1 Thessalonians several years prior to Galatians, but, regardless the date, Acts 17 makes the point. Because of his preaching, Paul faced deliberate resistance from the same people who opposed him in the Galatian churches. He did not allow it to derail him and his faith. He continued in the path of Jesus and

encouraged those around him to do what he couldn't do at the moment.

Let's briefly study two of Paul's major emphases in this letter.

1. ***Second Coming and those who die before it occurs.*** Paul addresses this question in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. In Verse 13, Paul voices his concern that the Thessalonians not be ignorant regarding the future of their loved ones who have died. Ignorance, regardless the reason, is dangerous. It leaves us vulnerable, as we see in this lesson, to our own imagination or to false teaching from others. Spiritual ignorance can only be countered by sound knowledge of, and respect for, the Scriptures. Example. Several years ago, a man who had read some of my writings sent me an email message voicing his disagreement and stating in an extended writing his beliefs. I answered his points, each time including specific Bible passages to support my points. After two more such notes from the man, all equally long and detailed, he never cited a single Bible passage. All his reasoning was from his personal opinion. At that point, I simply called his attention to his avoidance of Scripture in his reasoning. He replied briefly, telling me he would get back to me shortly with supporting passages for his beliefs. He never replied. All this man's extensive belief was based on his personal opinions, not on Scripture. Like the Thessalonians, we may reach endless bizarre and untrue beliefs based on our opinion and imagination. And none of it matters at

all. ***We need to train our minds to look for Bible examples and teachings to guide us in the right path of faith.*** Apparently, the Thessalonians wrongly feared that their dead loved ones would be left out of the blessings of the Second Coming. Had they known the teachings of Scripture from Job to Revelation, they would have no such concern. Paul walks the Thessalonians, and us, simply through the comforting truth of the Lord's return. What is the difference between the effect of His return on His children who have died and those who are alive at that day? A minuscule moment of time and about six feet of distance. Nothing else, praise the Lord. He shall raise and change them instantaneously, and, as they arise from their tombs, He shall as instantly change us. At that moment, all the family of God shall join together to meet the Lord in the air. "***And so shall we ever be with the Lord.***" Paul knew nothing of a divided rapture, some being raised at one time and some later. He, following Jesus' teaching, taught that all God's children shall be raised and changed together. (John 5:28 KJV) "...***the hour,***" not two different "Hours," separated by an extended time, and "...***all that are in the graves,***" not some in the graves at one time and the remainder later. Paul is consistent in his Second Coming teaching.

"Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible,

and we shall be changed.” (1 Corinthians 15:51-52 KJV; emphasis added)

2. ***The abiding danger of returning to our old ways.*** In 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8, Paul urges his readers to live a “Resurrection to glory” ethic in their present conduct. By the details he lists, it seems highly likely that he feared they might, either by discouragement or ignorance, regress to their old amoral pagan lifestyle. What was your moral outlook prior to your actively engaging your Christian life? Does it ever surface in your mind and tug you to go back? That is the danger Paul feared and that he taught the Thessalonians in these verses, as throughout the letter, to avoid, to be always faithful to their new spiritual and moral compass in Jesus and the gospel. How often we hear naïve believers say that they are praying or looking for the will of God for their lives. Yes, the will of God goes far beyond teaching us to avoid the failures, the sins, that Paul listed in these verses. However, if we hope to truly discover the will of God beyond these ethical sins, we must start here, by faithfully avoiding them. The Lord’s will for your and my life is not a mystical hidden thing. Paul started this teaching quite specifically, “***For this is the will of God....***” (1 Thessalonians 4:3 KJV) It is altogether a Biblical premise, that knowing the will of God for godliness and our Christian calling must begin with these values imbedded in our minds and in our daily habits.

”The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him;

and he will shew them his covenant.” (Psalm 25:14 KJV)

To “fear” God is to order our lives according to His teaching in Scripture. This lesson leaves no doubt. The Lord’s further revelation of His will, of His “covenant,” ***is contingent on our fearing Him***, manifesting that fear by our godly conduct in the faith way, walking with Him faithfully. We may claim to be His followers, but we shall remain ignorant to the extent we refuse to walk in His fear, “fear” in this sense being profound respect and love for Him, so much so that we “Fear” not following His ways.

In 1 Thessalonians 5, Paul closes the letter with more details regarding the Second Coming, specifically that the date of the Lord’s return is like a burglar’s invasion of your home, “*a thief in the night.*” You don’t know when a burglar might break into your home. When someone tells you they’ve studied out the precise date when the Lord’s return shall occur, walk away. Paul quite clearly teaches that we cannot and will not know that time in advance.

As Scripture typically teaches, Paul’s teaching on the Lord’s certain return is followed by a strong exhortation to faithful, consistent, and godly living. What should believers do while we live in this world and look for, and long for His return? Be faithful! Be faithful! We need this letter’s wise teaching so strongly in our troubled times. Lord help us to study it carefully and to practice it faithfully.

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