

ONE OF THE *Pocket Commentary* SERIES

POCKET

Commentary

ON

FIRST

Thessalonians

OUTLINED CHAPTER BY CHAPTER

by WALTER L. WILSON, M. D.

Pocket
Commentary
on
First Thessalonians

By
WALTER L. WILSON, M.D.



Price: 25¢

ZONDERVAN PUBLISHING HOUSE
GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN

POCKET COMMENTARY ON FIRST THESSALONIANS
Copyright 1956 by
Zondervan Publishing House
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Printed in the United States of America

INTRODUCTION

The Church in Thessalonica was a monument to the faithfulness of Paul as he sought to carry the Gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth. Thessalonica, located in the northern part of the Grecian peninsula, was one of the farthest points reached by Paul during his missionary journeys. Silas and Timothy were associated with him in the founding of this work of God; therefore Paul included them in his letter to the saints there.

Paul's labor was not in vain in this heathen city. He preached the Word of God in the power of the Holy Spirit and saw hearts turn to Christ.

It is evident from the line of ministry presented in both letters to the Church at Thessalonica that word had reached Paul concerning a misunderstanding among them in regard to the return of our Lord. They had received letters purporting to be from Paul, which contained doctrine contrary to what he had taught when he was with them. Paul, therefore, found it necessary to write corrective letters so that their faith might be strengthened and that they might have a proper understanding of the truth, especially as it pertains to the return of the Lord.

Chapter 1. Paul had a shepherd heart. He loved all the people of God at Thessalonica (v. 2). Some were not as attractive as others. Not all were gifted alike, but he loved each one and sent the salutation which their hearts so much desired. He prayed for *all* the saints of God, and he gave thanks for them even though their faith was not as true as he wished it might be. Paul praised these saints even though he felt it necessary to correct their faith.

It is characteristic of this letter that Paul speaks in triads. His salutation mentions Paul, Silvanus (Silas) and Timotheus. He remembered their work

of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope (v. 3). The effect of the Gospel on their hearts was in power, in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance (v. 5). Their reputation went forth into Macedonia, Achaia, and into every place where their faith was known.

Paul assured the Thessalonians that Christ had not returned as a spirit or as an influence or as an invisible person. In each chapter Paul corrects some false idea about the Lord's return and reveals what attitude a Christian should adhere to concerning His return.

In the first chapter the readers are exhorted to be in the attitude of waiting. Paul reiterates the importance of being in an attitude of waiting again in the second letter (3:5). He repeats the thought to assure them that Christ has not yet returned but is still on His throne in heaven waiting word from His Father to come back for His own.

Paul did not hesitate to remind the Thessalonians of his own godly behavior when he was with them. He mentions the power of his preaching (v. 5) and the attractive life he and his two companions lived (v. 6). It was always Paul's desire that his life should prove the truth of his preaching. In other epistles he presents his own godly manner of living as an inducement to others to become followers of Christ Jesus according to the pattern revealed by him. So it should always be. The Lord never intended that the tongue should be larger than the hand. It is His plan that believers should always do more than they say. Their lives should magnify the words that they speak.

Paul commended these saints for their godly lives (v. 7), and also commended them for their excellent words. Their reputation for living godly lives made it possible for many to believe what they preached. They were their own best advertisements

(v. 8). Their faith was evident and so their words were believed.

Although he was writing to those who were already saved, Paul did not fail to speak a good word about the Savior and His saving grace. He affirms the deity of Christ (v. 10). He states that there is a living, personal God (v. 9). He asserts that Jesus did not remain in the tomb, but actually arose from the grave (v. 10).

Because of his genuine love for the saints he was deeply interested in the condition of their souls. He asked for no money. He requested no favors for himself. He sought only to promote their knowledge of God, their love for Christ, and their obedience to the Spirit. He revealed no favoritism in his writing. Each and every one of the saints had a part in his prayer; they were included in his petition; and they shared in his love. These are the marks of a true shepherd.

Note that Paul placed this church not *in Thessalonica* but *in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ*. This church was composed of Thessalonian believers. They were no longer a part of this world but they were a part of the Church of God. They were in the family of God and belonged to Him. God was their dwelling place as the psalmist wrote (Ps. 90:1). They had left the worship of idols and were now in the care of a wonderful Father, a precious Savior, and a blessed Teacher. Paul used the full name of Christ frequently, calling Him the Lord Jesus Christ, so that they would know the Savior in the fullness of His revelation. As Lord he was their Sovereign and Master. As Jesus He was their Savior and Redcemer. As Christ He was their anointed High Priest, the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies.

Paul went to some pains to give these Christians a full measure of theology so that they might have

an intelligent faith and that they might be rooted and grounded in this faith. Other lords demanded obedience from the Thessalonians. Other gods were presented for their faith and obedience. Other powers were seeking to influence them. Paul brought before these new believers the provision through the Gospel by which they could know the true God, love the true Savior, and follow the leading of the true Spirit of God. Christian leaders need to proclaim this truth today. Each servant of God needs zeal and knowledge in presenting all the truth of God to all the saints of God, so that all may grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord.

When Paul addressed his spiritual children by the term "beloved of God" (v.4), he used the Greek verb which describes the highest kind of love. It is the kind of love that is found in John 3:16. It is a love that is fragrant with the heart of the Lord and is untainted by human lust. It is God's love transplanted into human hearts. Because Paul loved the Christians dearly, and with a holy love, he was most solicitous for their spiritual welfare and wrote in detail in order that they might understand perfectly.

When Paul said (v.5) "our gospel," he indicated clearly that this message had been embraced by him and was flavored by and savored of his personality. His speech was a product of his life. What he learned of God in his soul he expressed with his lips. Paul and the Gospel were inseparable. He threw his whole life into his preaching. His messages were filled with life, power and vigor. Because they came from his own heart they affected the hearts of others. Because they had been carefully thought out, therefore they appealed to the minds of others.

Because the foregoing was true, Paul could ask others to imitate him. He asserted without hesitation

that he was following Christ and imitating his Lord. That being the case, he could request others to imitate him (v. 6). Paul would not have anyone imitate him except as he imitated his Lord.

Paul clearly stated that "they had received the word." It is never safe to rest on feelings or experiences. Faith must rest on the unchangeable Word of God and the plain statements of the blessed Lord. Other foundations are treacherous, but this one is safe and sure. Paul said to the Romans, "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). Those whose faith rests on the Scriptures are sound in doctrine and are not easily turned aside. Those who know what God has said will not be easily affected by what men say. Those who use the Word of God with understanding bring forth fruit—thirtyfold, sixtyfold, and a hundredfold (Matt. 13:23). Only the Word of God can bring the peace of God to the heart. Only the Word of the Lord can reveal the mind of the Lord.

Although Paul wrote much about the love of God, he also emphasized the wrath of God. It was expedient to remind these Thessalonian believers that wrath was coming. God is a God of wrath as well as a God of love. He loves His Son, He loves His saints and He loves lost men. He exercises wrath against the enemies of His Son, against the enemies of His saints, and against rebellious men who reject and refuse His love.

Paul ever exalted the person of Christ as the only Savior of men. None of his experiences dimmed this vision. No theology took precedence over this truth. It is Jesus the son of God who delivers from the wrath of God (vv. 9, 10).

The work of faith (v. 3) and the labor of love which characterized these Thessalonian Christians is not described. It is not known just what they did

that called for such sweet words of commendation from this great man of God. He said, "From you sounded out the word of the Lord" (v. 8). He did not tell how it was sounded out, what methods were used, what program was followed nor what plans were promulgated.

There is a reason for this. In every country manners and methods differ. In every place the customs of the people vary. Each person serves in his own particular way. There cannot be a universal method which is blessed of God and is fruitful among men.

Romanism has tried this plan by adopting one universal dead language. It has prescribed certain rituals and ceremonies. It has planned a definite program which is the same in every language and every country. All of this has for the most part, produced only dead works, dead souls and deeds of darkness.

Our Lord gave no rigid formula for preaching or for practice. Jesus commanded that believers go and preach the Gospel, but He did not tell them how to preach it. Some do it with tracts, some in street meetings, some confine their preaching to the pulpit, others write letters, and some write books.

So Paul very carefully refrains from prescribing or even from describing the manner and the method of the work done by these earnest, zealous Christians. The work of the Lord must be done in the most suitable way for the conditions surrounding it. The Holy Spirit leaves room for individual personalities, national characteristics, and local conditions of every kind. No two Christians serve the Lord alike. For that reason there are no instructions whatever concerning the manner in which to do God's work. Every attempt to regulate these matters has resulted in failure or formalism.

Attention also should be given to the fact that the preaching of the Word is not necessarily sufficient

(v. 5). Many sit under good, clear preaching and are unaffected by it. The Word must have power; the Holy Spirit must take the Word and make it effective in the heart. Peter said that some “preached the gospel unto us with the Holy Spirit” (I Pet. 1:12). The Word of God does not affect the heart unless the Spirit of God gives it power. The Word of God must be vocal, forceful and powerful by the anointing of the Spirit, if it is to affect the hearts of the hearers. Jesus said, “The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:3). The hearer must realize that God is speaking, and that God is speaking to him personally. Then the message is effective. The speaker must thoroughly and fully believe his message. His voice, his attitude, his actions, his words must reveal to the audience that he is in earnest and is fully persuaded of the truth of his message. Only then will the hearers receive and accept the message. It was in this manner that Paul preached at Thessalonica. Many believed.

Chapter 2. Paul had some very unhappy experiences, but none of them dimmed his vision or lulled his ardor. Though a host of enemies was arrayed against him, he continued to serve his Lord and to preach the Gospel in every place.

In this chapter the Apostle reminds the brethren at Thessalonica of his faithfulness in coming to them after he had been so terribly mistreated at Philippi. He reminds them that there was much contention in regard to his ministry (v. 2). The contention, however, only sharpened Paul’s wits. It made him lean hard on the Lord. It made him look more fully to the Spirit for liberty, power and ability.

Paul is not bitter in this passage. He is only expressing his attitude of heart which was to win

more fully the confidence of the brethren. He came to them with the Gospel, not with cunningly devised fables nor a program of living from a set of rules. He did not organize a church with peculiar doctrines and practices. He did not suggest a program of dead formalism nor of wild fanaticism. He brought them God's good Gospel which revealed to them the value and the loveliness of Christ Jesus the Lord.

In view of the fact that false teachers had visited Thessalonica in an attempt to turn away the Christians from the true faith, Paul reminded the believers (v. 3) that he came among them neither as a magician nor as a sorcerer nor as a hypocrite. Paul was not a bluffer. He did not misrepresent any truth of God nor did he seek to win men by false promises or false representations.

Paul greatly prized the Gospel. He desired to guard this trust from God zealously and to speak the message truthfully. Since it was God's Gospel concerning God's son, therefore Paul wished to please the God who entrusted it to him without respect to the fear or favor of man. He knew that it would not be profitable either in this life or in the next to misuse this trust. He knew that one day there would be a judgment when God would inquire into his preaching and his ministry (v. 4). Being a steward of God, he knew that God was watching his expenditure of this Gospel (v. 5). Therefore, he presented it honestly, forcefully and clearly, without regard to remuneration and without fear of the results.

There was no covetousness in Paul's life. He preached whether there was money or no money. He delivered the message even though he often suffered for it and was misunderstood and terribly mistreated. He did not flatter the people in order to obtain their favor or their financial assistance.

His only purpose was to make known the true God to those who sat in darkness.

In religious matters many seek the glory of their fellowmen. Some who are engaged in religious service desire to obtain imposing titles which indicate their power and position among their fellow men. Paul sought none of these. He desired simply to be a bond slave of Jesus Christ. He desired to be as a nurse to the Thessalonians, caring for them kindly, graciously and carefully (v. 7).

Paul evidenced an unusual amount of loving care for the Thessalonian saints. His word indicated that his love for these believers was so great that he was willing to lay down his life on their behalf, in order that they might receive the full blessing and benefit of God's good Gospel. It was not church programs that filled his thoughts. It was not ecclesiastical honors that attracted his attentions. It was not religious plans that called for his earnest care. It was the precious Gospel story with its blessed truths that prompted his heart's affection toward them. The servant of God who would best serve the church of God must love the people of God dearly and must feel a shepherd's care for each and every member of the flock.

Paul greatly despised those who opposed Christ Jesus and the Gospel. He greatly loved those who trusted Jesus Christ and believed His Gospel. He attempted the unusual and unorthodox to spread the Gospel to the ends of the earth. He was not a mediocre man. He was not filled with greed. He was God's man. He learned God's will and executed it well. In utter self-abandonment He laid his whole life at Jesus' feet.

Paul took his preaching very seriously (v. 9). In order to maintain his financial independence he opened his own workshop to earn his own income. He did not insist on a forty-hour week. He did not

watch the clock. He must live, of course, and rather than go around begging for his living and expecting others to pay his bills, this great lawyer worked at a menial job to obtain the funds for the service of his Lord. He wanted those in Thessalonica to hear the Gospel, so he preached the Gospel between jobs. He did not consider that it was beneath his dignity as a great man of God to work. He boasted of it. He was glad for the privilege. Working and preaching, he established a church among the heathen in Thessalonica.

In verse 10 Paul presents some more triads—the triad of his preaching: no deceit, no uncleanness and no guile. He also presents the triad of his godliness: Paul lived among the Thessalonians holily, justly and unblamedly. His life was so transparent that he called on the Thessalonian saints as witnesses to it and also asked God to agree to it. His life was an advertisement for his message. His conduct revealed his character and his attitude toward God. He practiced the precepts of his messages.

Another triad reveals the character of his ministry. He exhorted, comforted and charged the saints. He spoke to them as father to children, since Paul and the Christians were so related in God the Father. In verse 7 he treated them as a nurse treats children. The nurse, however, has no authority. The father has. But a father will comfort and protect his offspring. So Paul, assuming his position as an apostle of Christ, took charge of these saints and dealt with them for their good. He urged them to live a separated, useful, godly life. He comforted them because they were persecuted by the ungodly. They needed the loving words of their gracious leader to help them bear their burdens.

In verse 13 this gracious shepherd again expressed his thanks to God for these sheep. Paul desired that the Thessalonians know how pleased he was because

his children were walking in the truth. In the previous chapter he is pleased with their work and with their patience. Here he is rejoicing because of their attitude toward the Word of God. They believed in the Scriptures, accepting, honoring and permitting them to work mightily and successfully in their souls. The church at Thessalonica learned the will of God from the Word of God and sought to put it into practice. That they had experienced a genuine conversion was evident from their intention to live up to the confession of their lips. They wanted God to speak to them and to work in their lives to prove to the world that they were true believers. They were willing to suffer for their beliefs (v. 14) and for the truth which they received. Paul did not fail to recognize the proofs of genuine faith as he wrote them this letter.

Note that Paul very carefully refrained from any denominational separation or segregation in his discussion of the local churches (v. 14). Although they were located in different cities, they belonged to the same Savior. Faith and trust in Christ knit them together. The new life in Christ Jesus' made them members one of another. The presence of the Holy Spirit in their hearts united them as brothers individually and collectively. No differences were mentioned, no separations were expected. Christ unites. Religion separates. Means and methods of procedure divide God's people into numerous sects; only the love of Christ can unite.

The Thessalonians were persecuted by the heathen (v. 14). The churches in Judea were persecuted by religious enemies. In either case the results were the same. God's people were persecuted and suffered for their faith.

Paul in verse 15 describes the Jews with another of his graphic triads. He pictured them as a people who killed the Savior, killed the prophets, and

persecuted Paul and his companions. The enemies of God and His Gospel are always enemies of God's people. They have no desire or intention to please God. They do not plan to help their fellowmen. They play their own fiddle while Rome burns and have no concern for the salvation of their own soul or the souls of others.

Note that nothing is said about the sins which are prevalent among worldly men, such as drunkenness, thievery, immorality and other such evils. The sins described pertain to the spiritual realm, because they are the sins which mark the apostate. They are sins against the servants of God, against the Gospel of God, against the Church of God and against the people of God. These are the worst sins if sins may be cataloged.

Not only did these Jews reject Christ themselves but they sought by every means to prevent Christ from being offered to the Gentiles. Taking the "dog in the manger" attitude, they refused the Bread of Life and sought to keep others from eating it. They refused the Savior of sinners and sought to keep Him from saving others.

Paul deeply desired to see the saints at Thessalonica and to be with them again (v. 17), although he was with them in spirit. He had seen miracles of God's grace wrought among them.

Certainly it is not surprising that Satan did not want Paul in Thessalonica (v. 18). How would Satan hinder? What would he do to prevent this desired visit? By what plan and program would he hinder this great man of God not once but often? Was not Paul Spirit-filled? Was he not Spirit-led? Did he not know the Savior intimately? How then could this archenemy of the soul bring up any obstacles which Paul could not overcome? It is not known. This phase of Paul's life remains secret. Paul had experiences with the powers of darkness

that were not for publication. Paul had battles that were not for public information. Paul had a private life as well as a public life. What went on in that sacred realm is not revealed. Perhaps some day he will tell about it in the glory.

Paul assures the Thessalonians that there is a Devil. He frequently refers to Satan. He never treats lightly this great fallen angel. He neither treats him as a myth or phantom, nor as a figment of the imagination. Paul always expresses his realization of the power of this mighty being.

Satan's ways are devious and multitudinous. He is clever in his machinations. He is skillful in exacting his schemes. He is persistent in backing his policies. He is clever in executing his plans. How careful the Christian should be to stay close to the Almighty God so that he may be preserved from the wiles of the devil.

The place that these Thessalonian believers occupied in Paul's mind and heart is clearly revealed in the triad in verse 19. They filled his heart with radiant hope, with exquisite joy, and they rewarded him richly as his crown. A Christian can readily understand Paul's ecstasy when thinking of them. He had come to them with the Gospel of God's grace and had seen them turn from darkness to light, from the power of Satan unto God, from idol worship to worship of the true God. This was satisfactory proof to Paul that he was God's servant. It was adequate evidence of God's remedy. It furnished a satisfactory example of the blessedness of the service of the King.

Paul concluded verse 19 by reminding them that they were on the way to meet the Lord Jesus Christ. In this way he again combatted the error which had crept in among them that Christ had already come.

Chapter 3. The solicitous care of this shepherd of the sheep is revealed most plainly throughout chapter 3. There was a burden on the heart of Paul for the Christians at Thessalonica. It distressed him and depressed his spirit. He stood it as long as he could and then sent his beloved son in the faith, Timothy, to see personally how his "children" were getting on with God.

Paul refers to Timothy as an equal and not as subordinate. The apostle was wise in dealing with others. He refrained from making any individual feel inferior to him. He would always take the lesser place, or else he would exalt the other person to his own position. He called Timothy his brother in this passage, although when writing to Timothy, Paul called him his "son in the faith" (I Tim. 1:2).

There was no mistake about the purpose of Timothy's visit to Thessalonica. He was to strengthen the faith of the Thessalonians; he was to establish them in the truth of God which they had learned; he was to comfort them in regard to the persecution which they were enduring.

Paul knew the frailty of the human heart and so he felt deeply solicitous in regard to their situation. Many men who are brave in times of peace become timid and fearful in times of stress. Many who will walk with God while in the home church and among friends will deny their Lord among strangers. Paul wanted to know what was happening in Thessalonica. Were the saints standing up well under the pressure of their enemies? Were they enduring the storm of opposition? Were they withstanding the seduction and temptations of the worldlings around them? He knew that if they were living godly lives they would invite the animosity of the ungodly. He knew that if they were practicing his teachings, then Satan would be busy in arousing opposition.

The presence of godliness has always aroused

and will continue to arouse the hatred of the human heart. The presence of purity stirs up the wickedness in evil lives. Men are not neutral about the things of God. Many of those who saw Jesus sought to strike Him, spit upon Him and injure Him. Some wanted to stone Him; others wanted to throw Him over the hill in Nazareth. All the evil of the human heart rises up against Christ when He is brought forth in the presence of sinners. Paul knew this. He had experienced it himself. He had gone through terrible persecutions for being true to God and His Word. He knew that the believers would fare no better, for they who "will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (II Tim. 3:12). It is a mark of genuine work of grace when one remains unmoved in the midst of persecution, trial and affliction.

What a transformation took place in Paul's heart when Timothy returned from that visit with the good news about the people of God at Thessalonica. What an honor it is to be chosen as a messenger of God to ascertain the condition of His people. Not everyone is fitted for this service. Some do not have the ability to discern spiritual values. Some are more interested in the structure or the finances than in the welfare of the souls of the people. Some are more occupied with the physical conditions that exist rather than the spiritual attainments of the Christians.

Paul knew whom to send. Timothy had spiritual discernment. He knew how to differentiate between fleshly enthusiasm and godly zeal. He knew the difference between formality and faith. He knew the comparative value of forms and ceremonies as compared with faith, the love of God and holy zeal. Timothy was God's man thinking God's thoughts and running God's errands. Paul was fortunate in having such a helper.

Timothy made the journey, visited in the homes of the saints, talked with them individually, observed the service which they rendered, and came back with a glowing report. He had found the people of God in Thessalonica walking with God and living for God. He had found them true to the faith. They had continued in the doctrines learned from Paul's lips and had not been turned aside by the fables of false teachers. They were still loving the things of God and one another.

The Thessalonians continued to love Paul. They remained his true friends. They continued in his sweet fellowship. Their hearts were longing to see Paul and to tell him personally of their continued devotion. They had not failed him. They remained true, in their friendship.

At this time Paul was suffering considerable trouble in Athens. The Greeks were mocking his preaching, scoffing at his teaching and rejecting his ministry. He speaks of his affliction as well as of his distress. Evidently the Greeks were inflicting physical punishment and mistreating him as an enemy. In the midst of all this Timothy came with the story of the Thessalonians' faithfulness and constant love for him. This cheered Paul's heart, refreshed his spirit, and gave him new courage. Timothy's news put new fire in Paul's bones and filled him with new zeal. Now he could sing again. Life was filled with sunshine. Now he knew that God had sent them to Thessalonica and that God had faithfully worked through him there.

The message from Timothy's lips caused Paul to offer praise and thanksgiving to God (v. 9). His heart went out in adoring gratitude to the God of heaven who had not let His Word fall to the ground, or allowed His servant to fail. He felt unable properly to express to God the gratitude of his heart for the blessing in that faraway city.

Paul was neither a lazy nor negligent preacher. He was not satisfied just to have a good time, go to church, preach for an hour, go out for a party afterwards, and then retire with a feeling of satisfaction. Such was not his calling.

In verse 10, the apostle reveals his tender love and the purpose of his soul in desiring the very best for those whom he had led to Christ. He was not content to know that they had accepted Christ Jesus as their Lord and Savior. He wanted them to pass on to a full growth in the things of God. He wanted them to have a full faith: know all the doctrines, not just the gospel story. He wanted to visit them to increase their knowledge of the precious truths of God. Paul's nights were spent in prayer and his days in supplication. He did not pray carelessly, but "exceedingly." His complete soul was in this business.

A true shepherd desires the food, training and conditions which will make his sheep fat, healthy and covered with plenty of wool. Ministers should imitate Paul in this matter. They should not be satisfied merely to tell the gospel story, count the raised hands and then go to another town, bragging, "I had thirty-one converts in the last town." Such evangelism is superficial. It lacks depth. Paul would have denounced this frivolous method of soul winning. He wanted the Thessalonians to believe the total truth that God desired for them, an intelligent belief based on the knowledge of the Scriptures. He felt that he should serve the church in this manner. Therefore he prayed God for permission to return and add to the growing work.

Paul evidently perceived the insufficiency of self, for in verse 11 the apostle prays in a spirit of expectation that God the Father and the Lord Jesus would fulfill his heart's desire that he might visit the Thessalonian Christians. Paul made it clear,

however, that he would not return to the field unless it was God's will. Paul was not self-willed in this regard. He wanted to be fully controlled by the desires of God. He wrote to the Thessalonians that he expected the blessed Lord of glory to let him come to them. Since he was God's servant, he must have knowledge of God's mind. Since he was God's ambassador, he must have knowledge of God's will. Since he was entrusted with the Gospel, he could only go where the Lord wanted that Gospel taken.

Perhaps in this passage the divine Trinity is revealed. "God himself" may refer to the Holy Spirit, for there follow the expressions, "and our Father", "and our Lord Jesus Christ." The word "and" would indicate that reference is to two persons. It seems likely that the Trinity is revealed here because the Holy Spirit is the Lord of the harvest: He is the Guide: He is the One who directs the servants of God in this age. Perhaps the Holy Spirit is mentioned first because He is concerned with the harvest and is called "God" because He *is* God. It always is wise to look for the presence of the Holy Spirit whenever the matter of service is under discussion or guidance is being considered.

The Holy Spirit must plant this heavenly grace in the human heart and cause it to flourish there. Where God's love abounds in the soul, petty difficulties are overlooked and joy and peace reign. Love is the fulfilling of the law because a person never injures those whom he loves. Those who love God, please God. Paul would have these believers look to the Spirit of God to make their lives holy, clean and pure in His sight. They might hide deeds and thoughts from the eyes of men, but he wanted them to be transparent in God's sight. Paul desired that these saints remain rooted and grounded firmly in the holy path of separation and consecration until they would meet the Lord Jesus.

Here again a triad is mentioned. The Spirit is first, the Father is second, and the Savior is third. It is the same order that exists in verse 11.

Always avoid the thought that the Holy Spirit is the "third" person. It is quite unfair to this precious person of the Trinity to indicate that He is down in third place in the scale of deity. In verses 11 and 13 the Holy Spirit has the first place. Sometimes the Father has the first place, as in the baptismal formula. Sometimes the Son has the first place, as in the benediction formula. Each one is God. Each one is to be honored on an equality with the others.

In chapter 3 Paul reveals to the Thessalonians that the coming of the Lord is still future and refutes the false teachings of those who insisted that Christ had already come. Paul cared for the faith of the saints. He wanted them to be saved from false teachers. He desired to keep them from being led astray by false doctrines. To this end he invoked the work of all three Persons of the Trinity to bless and protect His people.

Chapter 4. In Chapter 4, Paul is just as much interested in the personal godliness and holy walk of the Thessalonians as he is in setting them straight in their theology. All through the book he switches from the one train of thought to the other. Part of the time he presents theology and part of the time a godly life. These parts must be properly mingled if Christians are to develop well.

In Thessalonica, a town filled with idolatry, there was great need for Paul to urge the believers to live separated, consecrated lives. He exhorts them in the name of the Lord Jesus. It is not only "Jesus" whom he brings before them, but he gives this lovely Savior His official title of "Lord." As Lord, Jesus

expects them to own His lordship, to listen to His message, and to desire to do His will.

Paul had taught the church at Thessalonica the commandments of the Lord Jesus. He withheld no truth from them. He did not deceive them into thinking that they could be Christians and then live as they pleased. He did not suggest for one moment that they could profess a faith which was not proved by their works. He assured them that they could hardly expect to call themselves Christians and then live like the heathen around them.

The same temptations which enticed the Thessalonians have prevailed throughout various generations of mankind. The human body has never changed. In every land and in every race passion rules unless it is restrained by the power of God. In Thessalonica the people of God were surrounded with the evil influences of idolatry. Lewdness and lustfulness constantly are manifested where the grace of God does not prevail.

It is God's will that the whole spirit, soul and body be preserved for our Lord, as indicated in Chapter 5. It was also Paul's desire that all parts of the body should be preserved for the glory of God.

The passage does not indicate that the Thessalonians were living evil lives. It only brings to their attention the need of being protected and preserved from the evil activities and desires of the flesh.

In verse 6, Paul reminds the saints that God sees every intrusion into the sacred precincts of another's life and will avenge every invasion of another's rights. It seems that Paul told this to the Thessalonians when he visited them, but knowing the great danger of temptation, he wrote a reminder. God wants His children to be a blessing, not a curse, to one another. He wants them to practice the doctrines of His Word and not to dishonor His name.

There are many doctrines which concern the control of sinful bodily impulses. Some Christians preach that fleshly desires should be eradicated, and that they are obliterated by what is called "the second blessing." Others preach the doctrine of repression wherein the Christian by much exercise, purpose of heart, and firm decision endeavors to "keep under" all these evil propensities so that they are not permitted any freedom in the life. Still other believers teach the doctrine of victory which embraces the thought that if the heart and life are given over to the Holy Spirit in utter abandonment to Christ, then the Lord Himself will rule in the life, and the desires of the flesh will have no room nor place in the life and practice of the Christian.

Paul indicates that he expects the believer to find *the* remedy and use it.

Paul indicates in verse 8 that some may reject the call of God and neither care for His will nor His plan. He argues that if the Holy Spirit has been received, then a holy life will result. The Holy Spirit gives holy thoughts, holy desires, and produces holy actions. Quite often, and in fact most of the time, when the Spirit is mentioned, the qualifying word "holy" accompanies it in order that the believer may know that He desires holiness and that His presence insures holiness.

Throughout the Scriptures three kinds of warfare are manifested: world against the Father, Satan against the Savior, and the flesh against the Spirit. Christians everywhere need the same admonition and warning. The particular sin of uncleanness reveals an attitude of rebellion against God and a despising of the will and purpose of God. Paul desired God's best for His saints.

In verse 9 Paul states that the attitude of Christians toward one another should be one of loving

devotion. He knew that the Holy Spirit, the God mentioned in this verse, would fill their hearts with love toward God, love toward one another and love for the lost.

Paul, however, was not satisfied with the quantity of their love, although the quality does receive his approbation. He wanted them to increase more and more in this blessed ministry. He would have them find new ways of expressing and revealing their love. He would have them manifest this gracious attribute of the Spirit in fresh volume and in new avenues. He would not have them content with mediocrity. His desire was for them to be unusual believers.

The apostle gives some very practical suggestions to the saints at Thessalonica, in verses 11 and 12. "Study to be quiet"—how needful is that admonition. Most Christians are too busy: It is not natural for them to be silent. They like to be moving, going, working, playing, visiting and rushing around. It was a matter of deep concern to Paul that these saints were not quiet enough to hear God's voice. The Christian needs to be quiet in God's presence so that he may properly appraise himself and hear God's voice without distraction.

The saint should do his own business and do it well. The master's product cannot be produced at the bungler's price. God takes no pleasure in haphazard and careless service. He never promotes laziness. He would have the Christian "maintain good works for necessary uses." And He would have them honest in all their dealings. By quiet attention to spiritual values and by learning to maintain themselves by profitable industry, every need is met and no saint will become a public charge or a burden to the church. The Lord would have each Christian support himself and at the same time grow in grace

and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The scene again changes. Having instructed the saints of God in regard to living useful, profitable and happy lives, Paul suddenly turns his attention to the return of the Lord. To instruct the Thessalonians about the Second Coming was the primary reason Paul wrote the letter. The church had been misinformed by false teachers. Paul attempted to enlighten them on the subject by a clear and definite statement of the facts.

Paul definitely declares that those who die without salvation in Christ have "no hope" of ever enjoying the blessings of peace or of entering the presence of God. No future joys await them, only eternal punishment.

Paul also asserts that the saints who die are "asleep in Jesus." They shall rise to live with God and to walk with their Lord.

The unsaved will rise to be cast out from God's presence into the lake of fire. There is no hope of a second chance or of a resurrection unto blessing.

The return of the Lord is promised upon His death and resurrection (v. 14). Christ will return, bringing back with Him the spirits of saints who have died.

Paul calls attention to the fact that Christ is coming as Lord. Notice how often the word "Lord" occurs in this revelation concerning His coming. It is "the word of the Lord." It is also "the coming of the Lord." And Paul says that it is the "Lord himself" who shall descend. Then the believers shall "meet the Lord" and finally shall be "with the Lord." Jesus died as the meek and lowly Savior. He will return as the glorified, exalted, omnipotent Lord of all. Never again will men wound and strike Him.

The saints living when Christ returns will have no

advantage over those who have died. The dead in Christ will see the Lord before the others. They have the joy of being with Him in their spirits and then afterwards in their bodies. They will rise first. They obtain a double blessing. They occupy an enviable position. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" (Ps. 116:5).

The expression "asleep" does not mean that the spirits of the saints are in the grave with their bodies. Do not be deceived by the false teachings of "soul sleepers." The soul never sleeps. Many Scriptures reveal plainly that the soul of a Christian who dies goes to be with Christ at once, although the body is laid to rest in the grave.

The Lord will descend with the shout of the conqueror. The voices of multitudes will acclaim His glory. The archangel will lead the procession that will announce the coming forth of the glorious King of heaven. A trumpeter will herald the approach of this mighty Lord, the Son of God, clothed with power from His Father.

All those in heaven, in earth and even those in hell must some day acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. They must honor His name and acknowledge His deity. His voice will quicken the dead, will open the graves of Christians, and will bring about the first resurrection. They along with the living saints, will be caught up by the mighty power of God to meet the lovely Lord whom Christians have learned to know and trust.

This message brought the saints at Thessalonica comfort, peace and hope. "Jesus is coming, sing the glad word." Some day He will descend from the sky, a Conqueror.

Chapter 5. In the previous chapters the Apostle Paul revealed his interest in the Thessalonians' per-

sonal welfare, in their testimony, in their godly life, and in their knowledge concerning the return of the Lord. Now he directs their attention again to the false teachings which were creeping into the church. Evidently Paul had been very thorough in teaching them while he was with them, else he would not have said, "Ye have no need that I write." In fact, he had been so thorough in teaching the Second Coming that he says they know "perfectly." That can rarely be said of any today. Paul had given the believers the words of the Savior and also the revelations he had received from heaven. He did not give them cunningly devised fables. He did not teach them clever but misleading reasonings. His was a ministry of fact.

Paul uses the expression, "the day of the Lord," as referring to that day in which the exalted Jesus will rule and reign. It is the day of His power. It is the day of His sovereignty. God has not revealed when that day will come. One thing is certain: it will be at such a time as the great minds of earth "think not." Earth's leaders will be crying peace and safety while the storm is ready to break and the power of God is ready to be revealed.

Remember and never forget that the Word of God is addressed to Christians. False religions make the mistake of taking God's messages to His children and applying them universally, even to the Devil's children. Verses 4 and 5 apply to Christians. The ungodly are not "brethren." The unsaved are not "children of light." God's people are brethren with one another and with the Lord Jesus. They belong to the same family. They are indwelt by the same Spirit. They possess the same life.

The saints at Thessalonica were not now in darkness, as were the ungodly, the idolaters and the unsaved. They had been brought "out of darkness into his marvelous light."

Sleeping folks look like dead folks. Paul did not want the Thessalonians to live and act in such a way that folks would not know whether they were living or dead. His call is "awake . . . arise from the dead" (Eph. 5:14). The saints are not to be like sinners at all in their daily walk and life.

In verse 7 Paul continues his figure of speech, showing that the darkness of the night permits careless living of every kind. The unsaved live in the dark. They are not awake to either danger or opportunity. They do not care about God's call and do not tremble because of His warnings. The unsaved drink themselves drunk with business, pleasure and the sins of this life. They are in the dark because they love it and they do the deeds of the prince of darkness.

The Christians, however, are out of the dark and are now "of the day." They are to be fitted for daytime duties. They are to show by their actions that they are ready for all the privileges and opportunities offered in the daytime hours. They face the facts soberly, quietly and thoughtfully. They deliberately fill their hearts with faith in God, faith in the Word of God, faith in the Son of God, faith in the Spirit of God and faith in the work of God. They prove it by their actions. They cultivate in their souls great love for the Father, devoted love for Christ, a true love for other Christians, and a godly love for a lost world to whom they would bring the Savior.

The unsaved are appointed to wrath. God makes the appointment and it must be met. He appoints to wrath all those who deliberately choose to live without Christ and to die without hope. The day of death is appointed and what is to happen after death is appointed.

Again Paul turns from theology to practical application. He would have the saints get acquainted

with their leaders. God raises up shepherds for His flock. They watch after the sheep for the benefit of the flock. They do not do it for financial reward. They do it for the love of the Shepherd and His flock. Paul desired that the Thessalonian Christians recognize and honor their leaders, and accept the guidance and instruction of those who labored among them as God-appointed men to strengthen their faith.

The saints were exhorted that there was to be no quarreling among them, no contention in regard to the instructions, no faultfinding or criticism of the leaders and leadership. They were to be at peace with one another, loving one another, caring for one another and seeking the blessing of one another.

The apostle tenderly urged the leaders to be active in service (v. 14). The under-shepherds were to show godly patience, which surely would be tried by the unruly, the feeble-minded and the weak.

The instruction in the last of verse 15 is most timely. The tendency of the human heart is toward evil treatment of others. No matter how the other person acts, the Thessalonian Christians always were to do good. Only a Spirit-filled person could carry out such instructions. Only one whose single desire to please God would endeavor to do as this verse says. There must be an abandoning of self-seeking and self-interest in order that the Lord may be glorified and outsiders blessed.

“Rejoice evermore”! How can this be done in a world of sorrow and disappointment? Broken hearts, broken homes and broken bodies abound everywhere. Death reigns, sin flourishes on every hand. Only the Spirit-filled man can “rejoice evermore.” Only the Spirit-taught man will be glad to obey this injunction. Only the man who has relinquished the claim to his own life will be able to carry out this commandment.

An exhortation to pray quite naturally follows a command to rejoice. It is easy to pray when the heart is happy. Prayer becomes a joyful ministry when every burden is laid at Jesus' feet and every hope depends upon the power and love of God. In verse 18 the apostle urges the saints to retain a thankful spirit. He told the Ephesian saints to be thankful for everything (Eph. 5:20). In every circumstance the Christian should be grateful. Conditions might be worse than they are. The Lord selects the path and the program that He sees is best for the Christian. It is God's will that the saints should be thankful people, praying people and rejoicing people. Of course, it can only be done in Christ.

Paul was a Spirit-filled man. He recognized the place and person of the Spirit. He recognized the power of the Spirit. He knew quite well that the beloved saints in Thessalonica could not and would not live spiritual lives unless the Spirit had free reign. Therefore Paul warned the Thessalonians, "Quench not the Spirit."

The prophesyings mentioned in verse 20 refer to the teachings of the Word and the ministry of God's servants. None of the messages of God are to be overlooked or ignored. All of God's ministrations are for blessing and admonition. Every word of God is helpful and profitable.

Speakers preach on many subjects. Christians should check the statements of the public minister according to the Word of God. If a friend states that something is a fact in Scripture, let him prove it. Examine the Bible to see whether "these things are so." Some conclusions will be true; others false. Be careful in discerning between truth and error. Then seek to incorporate that which is truth into the heart. Christians never will be led astray if they seek to know God's will from God's Word.

They never will go astray if they go by God's Word alone and not by the teachings of false prophets.

The admonition to "abstain from all appearance of evil" is greatly needed. Those who are known as God's children should not live in such a way that outsiders question their stand. God expects His people to live lives that will advertise Christ. The Lord never compromised with the world.

And now comes the benediction. Paul desired that his children, the Thessalonians, be wholly and fully under the blessing of God. He uses a beautiful title for God, "the God of peace." There cannot be peace in the heart and life unless the spirit, soul and body are devoted to Christ. This is Paul's prayer.

Here again is a trinity, a trinity of human life. Paul longed that these friends be wholly blameless in their spirit as it relates to God, in the soul as it relates to sin, and in the body as it relates to earthly attractions. Christ is coming and Paul would have no tears shed at that meeting.

We would hardly expect this giant of the faith, Paul, to ask for prayer, but he does, not only for himself but for Silvanus and Timotheus. He believed that these brethren at Thessalonica knew how to pray and could get answers to their prayers. He coveted a part of their happy ministry of prayer.

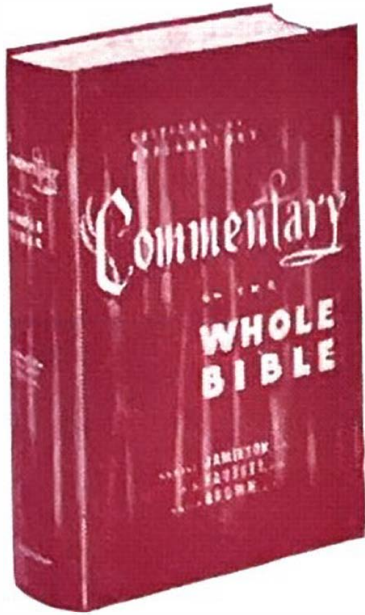
Because Paul was a giant in God's battles, the Devil was strongly opposed to him. Prayer would protect him from Satan's schemes and the Devil's plans. Prayer would envelop him and hide him from the snares of the enemy. Prayer would encourage his heart. Prayer would bring God closer to him and bring him nearer to God.

His closing charge is that this letter should be read to the entire church, so that all would hear and none would be ignorant of his teachings, his love and his prayers. He closes the letter with a precious benediction, bringing the grace of the Lord Jesus

Christ to their hearts. The grace of Christ is the grace of giving up riches for the blessing of others (II Cor. 8:9). The great servant of God had poured out his heart to them. He leaves them in the loving care of the Lord.

Books for Christian Workers

COMMENTARY ON THE WHOLE BIBLE



By JAMIESON, FAUSSET and BROWN

Critical and Explanatory Comments on Every Verse in the Bible. Complete. 4 Volumes in 1.

THE SUNDAY SCHOOL TIMES says: "*The greatest one-volume commentary.*"

DR. ROBERT G. LEE says: "*It is the best commentary on the whole Bible I have ever known.*"

1347 pages—6 $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 10" Only \$7.95

FAUSSET'S BIBLE ENCYCLOPAEDIA AND DICTIONARY

By A. R. FAUSSET. co-author J. F. B. COMMENTARY

THE MOODY MONTHLY says: ". . . probably the best one-volume Bible encyclopaedia ever prepared . . . contains around a million words."

600 illustrations—753 pages—6 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ " Only \$5.95

CRUDEN'S COMPLETE CONCORDANCE

New. Clear-Type Edition

An index to all the key Words of the Bible.

783 pages—5 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ " Only \$3.50

SMITH'S BIBLE DICTIONARY

By WILLIAM SMITH.

400 illustrations—818 pages. \$3.00

ZONDERVAN PUBLISHING HOUSE