

1. In all of Jesus' teaching there is only one time I can think of where he gave us a "new" command in the same equality of say, the 10 commandments. That was to "love one another".
  - a) Jesus said, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." (John 13:34, NIV)
  - b) The question becomes, how do we actually "perform" that command?
  - c) To love one another is to put other's needs in front of our own. Jesus commands us to show love to other Christians. Further, we draw upon God's love for us to have the strength to love others and keep His commandments:
  - d) "This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world." (1st John 5:2-4)
  - e) I'm not saying this is the only command Jesus gave. Jesus taught us to obey lots of things. I'm just saying that this command is "something special". It is the only time in the Gospels that Jesus actually used the word "command".
2. Speaking of other things Jesus taught, ☺ Let's discuss the "Great Commission" passage:
  - a) Jesus said to "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:19-20a, NIV)
  - b) The "great commission" passage is our marching orders from Jesus.
  - c) Our primary mission as Jesus is to go make disciples of people.
    - i) "Making disciples" is not just bringing in new believers, but helping existing believers to grow in their faith.
    - ii) When Jesus says to teach people "Everything I have commanded you", that is going to take some time. ☺ That tells me that to "make disciples" is not just day-one-evangelism, but to work together to help people grow in their faith.
3. What most Christians never think about is the command to "love one another" and the "Great Commission" go together.
  - a) In order to bring new people into Christ, and in order to mature people in their faith in Jesus (i.e., fulfill the Great mission), that command has to be combined with the command to "love one another".
  - b) In other words, it is not by our wonderful personalities that people become Christians. ☺
  - c) It is not due to our persuasive speaking abilities that people receive the Gospel message.
  - d) It is because the Gospel Message is God's truth and the Holy Spirit convicts people's hearts to not only accept the message but to help them grow in their faith.
  - e) That means, in a sense, it is not our problem if people believe the Gospel message or not. It is God's problem. Our job is just to trust God and obey His commandments. Among those commandments are the "Great Commission" and "Love One Another". We go out and be witnesses to others, love one another and then "Let the Holy Spirit do its job".
    - i) We don't get a "notch in our bible" every time somebody gets saved because we witnessed to them or for some deed to help them grow in their faith. Like good servants, our job is to be faithful to what God called us to do and let God worry about the results.
    - ii) The "fun part" is that when you are being faithful, you can watch God work.
      - a) That is the joy any Christian can watch in action. Pray, "OK God, I'm going to step out in faith and be a witness to this group of people. The results are your problem!" That is the kind of prayer God is looking for.

- b) When the results do happen, we can then look back and see how God has worked through us. I believe there is no greater thrill in this life than to be used by God for some purpose. God is willing to pick anyone willing to be of service. If God “choose” you, then He has plans for you!
- 4. OK John, that is neat. What does any of this have to do with 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians Chapter 2?
  - a) I’m so glad you asked that question. I was just thinking the same thing. ☺
  - b) In this chapter, Paul lays out a model of how we are to show love to other Christians.
  - c) This chapter has Paul writing about his time with the Thessalonians.
    - i) First of all, remember this letter is from Paul, Silas and Timothy. The term “we” is used throughout the letter. If I say, “Paul” in this lesson, please note that I usually mean all three of these guys as Paul is the leader.
    - ii) Paul describes in different terms how much he loved and cared for them.
    - iii) Paul describes his previous suffering before getting there.
    - iv) Paul defends himself in that he did not use false pretenses to teach the Gospel.
    - v) Paul describes how the Thessalonians are now like the other older churches. They go through the same persecutions as well as Christian benefits.
    - vi) Paul reminds them of all of these things for encouragement.
      - a) This church was being persecuted. Imagine living in world where being a Christian is a crime and death sentence. Now trying carrying your bible around in public. ☺ This was a difficult thing and a major purpose of this letter was to encourage the Thessalonians through their trouble.
  - d) This book, particularly this chapter, is a model for us on combining Jesus commandments for us to fulfill the Great Commission and to love one another.
    - i) Yes you can study this chapter from a historical basis. It is accurate.
    - ii) What is more important is to study Paul’s behavior as a model of how God wants us to fulfill the great commission and to love one another.
    - iii) The more I read this chapter, the more I kept thinking of those two commands by Jesus. Remember that if we “claim”, to be followers of Jesus, then we are to obey what Jesus’ commands us to do. One cannot be a follower of Jesus without making a daily commitment to keep his commandments.
    - iv) Does this mean we are to quit our jobs and go on the road?
      - a) For some people, they do receive this calling. For others, it is simply to integrate these commandments into our daily life. If God “put” you in a certain location, or job, or in charge of someone, God expects you to fulfill those commandments where you are. A classical Christian expression is to “Plant where you bloom, and bloom where you are planted”. It means to be a witness for God right where you are.
      - b) How do I know I’m at the “right place” where I am? That is something that can best be answered by prayer. I usually find when God wants me elsewhere, the answer gets obvious. Many things I do for God is because “I can’t stand not doing them”. If you are grounded in God’s word and spend time in prayer, and you feel a sense of “uncomfortableness” about some aspect of your life, that maybe a clue that God wants you elsewhere.
- 5. Chapter 2, Verse 1: You know, brothers, that our visit to you was not a failure.
  - a) First of all, notice Paul calls them “brothers”. Paul shows his equality to them as opposed to trying to profess some sort of superiority. One’s maturity level as a Christian does not give one superiority over a new believers.
  - b) Notice the end of this sentence is “not a failure”. Some English translations end this sentence with “not in vain”.
    - i) The idea is similar. What Paul is saying is that his time in Thessalonica was successful in that a new church was formed and a new church was thriving.

- ii) The alternative translation of “not in vain” can be Paul saying, “I didn’t start this church to fulfill my ego. I did it because the love for God compels me to be a missionary and I love to see new Christians grow in their faith”.
  - iii) By either rendering, the idea is that Paul is teaching that there is a purpose for the Thessalonians to form a new Christian church. It wasn’t for Paul’s sake and better yet, it wasn’t a failure.
- c) One has to remember that Paul was only there a short time.
- i) Acts Chapter 17, describes 3 Sabbath’s where Paul preached in the local Jewish synagogue about Jesus. After that he was ran out of town by nonbelievers. That means Paul could have been there as short as a three-week time span. I happen to believe the actual time was a little longer (but not much) and Acts is focusing on the time span where Paul presented the Gospel message and was ran out of town. Between the Saturdays Paul was working on the church itself.
  - ii) Acts does not say that immediately after Saturday #3, Paul was ran out of town. You do get the impression it was a short time afterwards. My point is that this is a very young church. I doubt Paul was there more than a month or so.
  - iii) Here was this young church in a city of 200,000 people.
    - a) I’m sure the city of that size was full of “preachers” of every cult and religion one can think of, all trying to get new members. Having a group of people who profess there is only one true God and claiming all other gods were false had to be a source of problems for these young Christians.
    - b) You also people from Jewish backgrounds and converts to Judaism who did not believe in Jesus trying to stop this new “Jesus movement”.
    - c) Once Paul and his companions left town, I’m sure doubts began to creep in. Let’s face it, these guys didn’t have a bunch of bibles and study helps to help them grow in their faith. Therefore, a letter of encouragement was essential to their growth.
6. Verse 2: We had previously suffered and been insulted in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in spite of strong opposition.
- a) To understand this verse, one needs to read Chapter 16 of the Book of Acts. (Go ahead, I’ll wait. ☺) Let me summarize it for you: Beginning in Acts 16:13 Paul and Silas went to Philippi. There was no synagogue, but Paul found a small group of Jewish people by a riverside. Some converted and a new “church” was born. In a short time, Paul and Silas were arrested for preaching Jesus. They went to jail where they were whipped and put in stocks. During that time, they converted the Phillipian jailer and his family. By the end of Chapter 16, Paul and Silas were on their way to Thessalonica.
  - b) Imagine those first few days in Thessalonica for Paul and Silas.
    - i) On one hand they were happy to be alive and happy for the Phillipian jailer who was converted. As they started walking to Thessalonica, the pain of the whip marks on their back was probably settling in.
    - ii) Imagine being in that audience in Thessalonica that heard Paul and Silas speak.
      - a) You see Paul and Silas with their backs all scarred. Despite the pain, they take the trouble to tell you about Jesus.
      - b) I have to admit, if I saw someone in terrible pain or with those type of whip marks, and they were willing to risk their lives to tell me some message, I would listen. It goes to show how God can “use anything and everything” as a witness for him.
      - c) I’m not telling you to go get beat up and then preach the Gospel. ☺ This is not the recommended method for Evangelism ☺. The point is that in a weaken state, God can use you for His glory. Never underestimate how God can use you, even if you are tired or in some sort of physical pain.

- iii) With all of this in mind, reread Verse 2. Paul stated his history in Philippi to the Thessalonians. Paul used that experience to proclaim the gospel message.
- 7. Verse 3: For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you.
  - a) Paul begins here a defense of his ministry. This theme will continue for a few verses.
  - b) Now that Paul and his friends were out of town, the Thessalonians only had to rely upon their memories of what Paul taught. These people had to face the daily visual reminder of all the false gods all around them. In their persecution, I'm sure negative stories were being circulated about Paul and his companions.
  - c) Let's discuss this verse from Paul's perspective.
    - i) Paul is reminding them that his motive was to preach Christ and not to gain popularity or financial wealth.
    - ii) This is something we have to remember when we preach Jesus to others.
    - iii) By nature, people are doubtful. Anyone who has lived in the world a good while knows that trust must be earned and not granted.
    - iv) We need to remember is that we are imperfect people. We need to point to Jesus as the model for our behavior and not us. At the same time, we need to watch our behavior as people are looking to us as to how to be a good witness for Jesus.
- 8. Verse 4: On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts.
  - a) The main application of this chapter is to study Paul as a model of how God wants us to behave. Here is Paul telling the Thessalonians that:
    - i) 1) We are entrusted with the Gospel message.
    - ii) 2) We are not trying to please men but God.
    - iii) 3) God tests our hearts.
  - b) How much different is Paul's life than what God has called us to do?
    - i) God has entrusted us with the Gospel message. Remember the Great Commission applies to all believers, not just those who are in the "professional" ministry.
    - ii) A common Christian buzzword is the term "ambassadors". We use that term to imply that we are ambassadors for God.
      - a) If you are an ambassador representing say, the United States in a foreign land, you are still a United States citizen even though you live elsewhere. Further, when you meet with the leaders of those countries, you are representing the United States. Therefore, you do so as not to please those foreign leaders, but the United States. That is who you work for.
      - b) The same applies with Christians. We are "ambassadors for God." We work in a "foreign land" which speaks of this world, but are home is in heaven and we work "for" God. Therefore, we are His ambassadors.
  - c) Verse 4 says, "We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts."
    - i) Paul is working for God, and hopefully, so are we.
    - ii) Remember that God holds us accountable for what we are given. That includes the knowledge and resources He has placed upon us.
    - iii) We go forth as God's ambassadors trying to please Him, and not people.
    - iv) This is actually a freeing thought. If we try to please people, all that would happen is that we would be dead tired. Stop and think, are you ever "100% satisfied" with any single person? Of course not. We can't please people. The good news is we can please God by focusing on what God has called us to do (and here's the key!) letting God worry about the results!

9. Verse 5: You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed--God is our witness. <sup>6</sup> We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else.
- a) Unfortunately, the world is full of "religious people" who are primarily interested in their own power base, their own credibility or their own financial gain.
    - i) I have seen people make "little gods" out of how big their ministry has grown, or how many people they have in their congregation. We forget that God is not impressed by the size of a ministry. God calls all us to be faithful to Him, faithful to preach His Word and faithful to the people He called us to minister to.
  - b) When you read this verse, Paul is making a defense for his ministry.
    - i) He is stating that he didn't preach the Gospel for greed or for praise.
    - ii) The commentaries are full of speculation as to why Paul stated this.
      - a) Maybe his adversaries were saying this about Paul.
      - b) Maybe now that Paul was no longer there, others crept into the church and were placing doubts about Paul and his companions.
    - iii) I think the main point is not to figure why Paul was making this defense, but to model the behavior Paul and his companions were trying to set forth.
      - a) They are trying to teach us to preach the Gospel out of a love for God and a love for other people. Christianity is never designed to be an exclusive club for those who already "got it". God's love is designed to work through us so that we have that same type of love for the unsaved. God's love is to work through us so that we have a desire to see those who are saved grow in their maturity in Christ.
10. Verse 6 (cont.). As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, <sup>7</sup> but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children.
- a) Paul could have said to the young church, "OK, now that you're saved, here is a list of my salary demands and expense reimbursements that I require of you. Just make the check out to Paul, thank you much." ☺
  - b) I believe what distinguished Paul from religious salesmen going around were:
    - i) 1) Paul had the power of the Holy Spirit to support what he was saying was truth.
    - ii) 2) Paul never demanded money or hospitality of any kind from the converts. Paul had a "day job", which I discuss more in verse 9.
    - iii) 3) Paul cared for the Thessalonians like a mother caring for a newborn child. This is stated in Verse 7.
  - c) Picking up on the last analogy, think about what a mother doesn't say to a child: "OK, now that you're born, here is how you're going to take care of me!" ☺
    - i) Think about how much love a mother has for a newborn child. Here is someone "you've never met" until the baby came out, and immediately you have this tremendous love for a new person.
    - ii) Compare that to Paul, who just started a new relationship with the believers of Thessalonica. He is stating that his love for them is as great as a mother for their child. (The original Greek implies a nursing mother weaning a child)
    - iii) That is the attitude God wants for us.
      - a) A sign of Christian maturity is "How much do you hate sin? At the same time, how much do you love the sinner?" God wants us to have that same type of love for others as a mother for her newborn baby!
      - b) You may read this and say, "If I have that much love for every stranger, my kids will never get fed and the dishes will never be washed." ☺
      - c) Yes there is a balance in life. God calls some to be missionaries to foreign countries and God calls some to be missionaries to our children and to our neighbors. God does not expect each one of us to do it all. Christianity is a team effort. Our primary focus is upon whatever God has called us to do.

11. Verse 8: We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us.
- a) What pops out of these verses is the love Paul had for these believers.
    - i) Verse 8 states that Paul not only shared the Gospel, but his life as well.
  - b) This gets back to the combining “The Great Commission” with “Love One Another”:
    - i) Christianity is not: “Let me preach the Gospel to you and then excuse me while I get back to my life”. ☺
    - ii) Paul became involved with the lives of the new believers. He “integrated” with them as they became one family.
    - iii) That is the role for being a Christian witness. It is not only to preach the Word, but also to get involved with the lives of other Christians and let them see your life as well!
    - iv) There is an old cliché that goes, “People don’t care what you know until they know that you care!” I not only apply that to my witness for Jesus, but every aspect of my business and personal life. That’s the idea of Verse 8.
  - c) So why is Paul reminding them of this?
    - i) It is not for the sake of his ego. Remember now that Paul and his companions were gone, this young church is on their own. They have to go from memory in compared to the reality of the idolatry that is all around them.
    - ii) There are times in our Christian walk, when we have to go from “memory” as well. I have found that during the rough moments in life when you “don’t sense God is around”, that one has to recall past times where we have seen God work in our lives in order to get through those difficult moments.
    - iii) God allows us to go through those difficult times in order to test our faith. In order to teach a child how to mature, we have to “let go and let them learn”. In a sense, God does the same with us sometime. During those times, besides our regular prayer and bible reading times, I find it is helpful to recall past times where it was obvious God was working in our lives. (This is where journaling pays off!) Recalling how God was working helps during those times.
    - iv) The other reason Paul is reminding them of this is again, as a model for us.
      - a) Sometimes I have to remember, “The main things are the plain things and the plain things are the main things.” Paul is teaching about getting involved in their lives as a model for Christian behavior.
12. Verse 9: Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you.
- a) Translation: Paul worked nights so he could preach during the day.
    - i) When Paul says, “worked night and day”, this means that Paul had a professional occupation in order to pay his bills while he was ministering to this new church.
  - b) In Acts 18:3 we learn that Paul worked as a tentmaker.
    - i) I suspect he spent whatever time he needed as a tentmaker to support himself financially so he wouldn’t be a financial burden to the local church.
  - c) Let’s face it. We often hear a sales pitch and keep thinking in the background, “OK, how much is this going to cost me? You keep describing the product and I keep waiting to find out how much this is going to cost!
    - i) Suppose you found out the answer was nothing. You keep thinking, “OK, nothing is free, there has to be a catch somewhere. What does this guy really want?”
    - ii) The reason I’m stating all of this is Paul preached the Gospel, free of charge, with no financial motives nor any motives for prestige.
    - iii) Paul wanted the Thessalonians to comprehend, “Wait a minute, you’re telling us about Jesus without any expectations of financial gain or prominence? “

- iv) Just to make sure the Thessalonians understood all of this, Paul kept working the whole time he was there just so they couldn't condemn Paul's motives.
- v) I know of a local church that never "passes the plate" at their Sunday service. The pastor doesn't want new believers to think that the church is doing this for the money. He trusts that people will give, and they do. I'm not saying it is sinful to pass the plate at church. I simply admire his faith as a witness to newcomers.
- d) Which leads to the topic of the "Professional Ministry".
  - i) First of all, I like to ask the question, "How many of you are in the full-time ministry?" Before you answer that, ask the question, "Have I fully committed my life to serve Jesus? If the answer is yes, now answer the question, "Am I in the full-time ministry". Anyone who has dedicated his life to serving Jesus is in the full-time ministry, period!
  - ii) The church that I attend has a wonderful sign at the parking lot exit that reads, "You are now entering your mission field". That is the attitude all Christians need to have. The mission field is your own home, your neighborhood, your city or some special place God has called you to go to or pray for!
  - iii) Does this mean that pastors need to get a day job and give up their salary? ☺
    - a) No. If you read through the New Testament, there are times when a collection was taken so that "elders" could run a church on a full time basis. If God has provided the means to form a church and have full-time pastors, that is a biblical ministry.
    - b) There are also situations, especially in the mission fields where a church is not established for a mission to have a "day job" while he is being a missionary for God.
    - c) God may also call you to volunteer in some ministry aspect. We still need to pay the bills and financially support our family. The key is if God is leading you to get involved in some ministry work, God will make the time and we should make the time for that to happen.
    - d) The trick is "balance". For me personally, it is a balance between my personal relationship with God, my commitment to my family, my day job and this writing ministry. All of these commitments have demands on my life and pull me in certain directions. This is why I can relate to this verse of how Paul works "night and day as to not be a burden to anyone (i.e., those he is ministering to).

13. Verse 10: You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed.

- a) When Paul lived among the Thessalonians, Paul acted in a way as to be a model to them.
  - i) Paul did not say, "OK, my sermon is done for the day, now excuse me while I go visit a few pagan temples on the way home." ☺
- b) People watch what we do far more than what we say.
  - i) If you want to raise God-fearing children, how you behave says far more than attending church or a bible study.
  - ii) If you want to be a good witness to others, how you behave says far more than the fact you profess to be a Christian.
- c) When Paul says he was "holy, righteous" and blameless", he is not claiming to be perfect!
- d) To be "holy" means to be dedicated to God.
  - i) Let's say I'm in my kitchen. Let's say I take a certain plate and say, "This plate is for the exclusive use of my wife and no else." I am "dedicating" that plate for the exclusive use of my wife. This is the idea behind "holy". It is the idea of saying what we are and how we live are "dedicated" to God the Father. Our lives are his and we are His possessions. That is what Paul meant by Holy.

- ii) This does not mean praying, preaching and bible thumping round the clock. Remember Paul still had tent-making job. It just means that we make God part of every aspect of our lives. We live for Him.
  - e) The term “righteous” in its basic form means to do what is right.
    - i) It means to live in conformity to what God requires.
    - ii) In the Old Testament, the word-picture of righteousness is that of a scale that had accurate weights and measures.
    - iii) I always preach that Christianity is about “putting your money where your mouth is”. It is not about saying you believe in Jesus, but it is about being obedient to the commands of the bible. (I need a whole separate lecture on keeping every command of the Old Testament. In summary, let the New Testament be your guide as to every law of the Old Testament. There are some laws in the Old Testament that are only binding to Jews, and there are some that are universal.)
  - f) The final term Paul uses is “blameless”.
    - i) Paul is not saying he is perfect. We like Paul are “blameless” only because we believe Jesus died our sins, past, present and future. When we sin, we confess that and we continue to become blameless before God.
    - ii) At the same time, this does not give us a license to sin as much as we want knowing God will forgive us. Christianity requires us to change our life for the better. That is what “repentance” means.
    - iii) The idea of “blameless” is to confess those moments when we fail to live as God demands of us.
  - g) Tying this all together, not only did Paul live this way, he did it publicly.
    - i) It is easy to be a great Christian on Sundays in church or by yourself. The trick is to be a good witness to others on a regular basis. Paul “walked the walk”. The secret is about praying to God to be “holy, righteous” and blameless” and trusting in His power to accomplish this way of living.
    - ii) We as Christians make “little gods” out of self-discipline. The only way to be “holy, righteous” and blameless” is to let God work through. We all need to pray to be the type of person that God wants us to be.
14. Verse 11: For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children,<sup>12</sup> encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.
- a) A few verses back we had the comparison of Paul and Christians to a nursing mother. Now we get dad into the picture. ☺
  - b) Paul compares himself to a loving father who is “encouraging, comforting and urging” Christians to live a life worthy of God.
  - c) It’s time to let you in on my favorite prayers. When I read my bible, I often like to start with this section as my opening prayer:
    - i) “For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.” (Col. 1:9-12, NKJV)
      - a) This prayer in Colossians and Verse 12 both mention “worthy of the Lord”.
    - ii) What Paul is preaching is for us to live our lives in a way that pleases God.
      - a) We “please” God by being obedient to what he calls us to do.

- b) The specifics are a bit complex. In summary, we pray to God for guidance, we study our bible for guidance of what God expects of us and we spend time with other believers for accountability and to perform as a team.
    - d) Let's get back to the "father" image.
      - i) Show me a family where the father is a good spiritual leader and most often you will find children who follow God as well.
      - ii) A fatherly spiritual leader is one who encourages the family to pray, who leads by example as well as speech and who "encourages, comforts and urges" their children as a good parent should.
      - iii) I remember hearing Pastor Allistar Begg on the radio on time say, "One of the greatest days of my childhood was when I told my father, "I'm not going to church today and you can't make me." His father replied, "Watch me!" His father then placed Allistar in the car and carried him to church. Then Allistar said again, "That was the greatest day of my young life and I appreciate it to this day!"
      - iv) For those who didn't come from a home with a God-fearing father, we look to the bible as a model of how to encourage Christians.
        - a) Remember this verse is not just for dads, but for anyone. This verse is to be shown that we are to help other Christians like a good father encouraging and helping their children to grow in their faith.
15. Verse 13: And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.
- a) When Paul spoke on a daily basis, he was not reciting the bible verbatim.
    - i) My point is that the "Word of God" also refers to preaching the Gospel message.
    - ii) Remember that a nickname for Jesus himself is the "Word of God" (John 1:1-2)
    - iii) To receive the "Word of God" is about receiving Jesus in your life.
  - b) Notice the first phrase: "We thank God continually..."
    - i) Paul does not take credit for saving the new Christians of Thessalonica.
    - ii) Paul does not take credit that the church is surviving and thriving.
    - iii) Paul gives God the credit for their salvation and their continuing faith.
  - c) Last, notice the continuation of the work of the Gospel in their lives:
    - i) Paul says in it is "at work (continuous) in you who believe".
    - ii) One of the great things about committing your life to Jesus is that He never leaves you alone. I once heard maturity as a Christian described as follows:
      - a) God is like an army about to conquer a foreign land. First they conquer a spot and establish a beachhead. Then they continue to move throughout that land. (Illustration taken from Rick Warren).
      - b) That "land" is you. Accepting Jesus into your life is like God picking a spot. He then spends the rest of your life "working on you" to conquer different areas of your life to be in conformity to His will.
    - iii) Which leads back to Verse 13. The Gospel message was not just the Word of God that they accepted as truth, but it continues to work in their life even in Paul's absence. (Technically, Paul is not "absent" as he continues to pray for them.)
16. Verse 14: For you, brothers, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the Jews,<sup>15</sup> who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to all men<sup>16</sup> in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last.
- a) This is a big chunk, but these verses all go together. I want you to read them in context.

- b) First of all, Paul tells the Thessalonians they are just like the Christian churches in Judea.
  - i) Judea is southern-Israel. It is where Jerusalem is. Paul is not saying, "Let me tell about the churches in Judea so you can model your life after them."
- c) Paul is saying is that the price you pay to be a Christian is that you will suffer persecution.
  - i) When we are suffering, the tendency is to think, "Woe is me...nobody understands the suffering I am going through right now." Paul is saying, "Hey guys, you know the persecution you are going through? Welcome to the club! The older churches in Judea are going through the same thing. Welcome to Christianity!" ☺
  - ii) I believe there is a comfort in knowing there are others going through the same thing. I have found the pain is a little less knowing that there are others who are going through the same situation. It gives you something you can relate to.
- d) So why is the persecution necessary? That is like asking why did God create Satan?
  - i) The basic answer is gives you a great incentive to keep you close to God and dependant upon God. You cannot combat Satan on your own.
  - ii) Second, God wants to come to Him out of free will. Therefore, there has to be "enticing" alternatives in order for us to freely choose to follow God.
  - iii) What you discover is that the persecution is worth it. When one considers the alternatives of eternal damnation, whatever we go through in this lifetime is nothing compared to eternity.
    - a) "I (Paul) consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us." (Romans 8:18 NIV)
  - iv) Finally, you have to understand that when Jesus comes back, Satan understands he will be bound up and then destroyed. Therefore Satan is trying to delay Jesus return as long as possible. In summary, Jesus returns when the "last person" gets saved. Satan can delay that "final number" by preventing more from getting saved. Therefore, Satan persecutes believers as to prevent them from witnessing to others. That may not help your pain, but it may help you to understand why you are being persecuted.
  - v) With that in mind, stop and reread these verses. It gives you a fresh perspective.
- e) Let's talk a little about what Paul said about the churches in Judea. Paul is specifically focusing on the crimes of Jewish nonbelievers:
  - i) They (Jewish nonbelievers) killed the Lord Jesus. I'll discuss this in a moment.
  - ii) Second, they killed the prophets. Paul is specifically talking about the Jewish people of His day that persecuted the church. Therefore, when Paul says the prophets, he is not talking about the historical prophets, but those who preached Jesus at that time. This group would include John the Baptist and the apostles.
  - iii) Third, they prevented preaching the Gospel as to save Gentiles.
    - a) First of all, Revelation 20 speaks of a day when all people will be judged. If God is perfect, God will judge people perfectly. Therefore, they will be judged based on what knowledge they had of God in their lives and how they acted upon that knowledge.
    - b) The bible never says, "All Gentiles go to hell unless they hear of Jesus".
    - c) When Paul describes the Gentiles as being "saved", it is about people changing their lifestyle based on the knowledge of Jesus. It is a salvation issue. To know Jesus is a far greater way to spend eternity than to never learn about him in the first place.
  - iv) I stated on the previous page that there are demonic influences that want to stop the Gospel from being spread. That does not mean people are not accountable. We have the free will to choose God and the free will not to choose God and the free will to persecute the church.

- v) I want to get back to the idea of the Jewish people “killing Jesus”:
  - a) First of all, Jesus freely gave his life for our sins. (See Matthew 20:28, 1 Timothy 2:6). Paul is describing murder in the 2<sup>nd</sup> degree, which is to kill someone unknowingly.
  - b) When the Jewish leaders had Jesus killed, remember Jesus words:
    - (1) “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” (Luke 23:34 NIV)
  - c) When you kill someone in “The 2<sup>nd</sup> Degree”, that is a legal term that describes unintentional murder. That is the crime that the Jewish leaders did along with anyone else who rejects Jesus as their Savior. To reject Jesus is to reject the free-gift of salvation. In a “sense” that is the 2<sup>nd</sup> Degree murder that Paul is talking about.
- f) The last verse states, “They (Jewish nonbelievers) always heap up their sins to the limit”.
  - i) It sounds like Paul is comparing them to an empty well that is always being filled with a bunch of sins.
  - ii) A better way of describing this is “because they are a sinner, they sin”.
    - a) People don’t steal because they are a thief, they are thieves and therefore they steal. If you have a “tendency” that is part of you, you then act upon that tendency.
    - b) Another example is “I write because I am a writer, and not I write, and therefore I am a writer.”
    - c) The reason I’m making such a big deal about this technical point is that we are born with this sin-nature. Because we have this sin nature, we sin. When we seek God, we then produce “good things from the heart” because God has placed a “new heart” inside of us. At the same time, those who refuse to turn to God continue to produce “bad things” from the heart.
    - d) “The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.” (Luke 6:45 NIV)
- g) The last sentence in this paragraph says, “The wrath of God has come upon them at last.”
  - i) What fascinated me is the fact this sentence is past tense.
  - ii) When were these guys punished while Paul was living? Does it mean God struck them dead while they were persecuting Paul and his companions? I don’t think so.
  - iii) I believe what Paul meant is “Their fate is sealed”. The evidence of their life has eternally condemned them and it is a “done deal”.
  - iv) The only unforgivable sin is “Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 12:31, et.al.)
    - a) I believe this sin is a continual, lifetime denial of Jesus as God. If one goes a long time denying Jesus as God and “lives that believe” by persecuting those who believe in Jesus, I do believe their fate is sealed.
    - b) It is as if God is saying to them, “OK, you don’t want to believe in my son. Fine, I hardened your heart so you cannot believe.” That is the idea behind “Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit”.
    - c) I do believe there is a point for a person where it is too late. What we don’t know (big emphasis on this point!) is when that “point” comes. I have seen people who have denied Jesus for a good portion of their life turn and become born-again Christians. This is why I pray for a lot of nonbelievers I know. My point is that this concept does exist. We are to watch people’s actions, but when Jesus says “don’t judge” in Matthew 7:1, he means that we are not to judge whether or not someone is eternally saved or condemned. Only God makes that judgment.

17. Verse 17: But, brothers, when we were torn away from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you. <sup>18</sup> For we wanted to come to you--certainly I, Paul, did, again and again--but Satan stopped us.
- a) In these two verses, Paul is describing a time when he was torn away from the Thessalonians. These sentences then say that Paul made an effort to come back to them, but that "Satan stopped us".
  - b) First, let's talk about the historical aspect of these verses.
    - i) Acts 17:5 describes what was happening in Thessalonica to Paul:
      - a) "But the Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city." (NIV)
      - b) In Verse 10, it states, "As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea."
      - c) What Acts Chapter 17 is stating is that once the church in Thessalonica was established, some of the Jewish nonbelievers hired some thugs to persecute Paul. That effort required the local Christians to send Paul out of town.
    - ii) Those verses are the only "clues" we have to whatever Paul meant by "Satan stopped us" from seeing you again. From that point, Paul moved on to other locations in Greece, never to return to Thessalonica, according to Book of Acts.
  - c) Again, I don't believe it is as important to study history as it is to model Paul's behavior.
    - i) Notice Paul does not have the attitude of "Well, my work is done in this town. Time to carve another notch in my bible and ride off into the sunset." ☺
    - ii) Paul was only there a short time. Yet, he had such a love to see others not only get saved, but mature in their belief, that he longed to be back.
    - iii) Notice the phrase "in person, not in thought". That is part of the original text.
      - a) What it means is "If I can't be there personally, at least I can be there prayfully." We are only a prayer away from being close to anyone on earth. Prayer has no geographical or time-restricted boundaries.
      - b) If you are taking the time to pray for someone, you are not only helping them, but you are developing a relationship with them and are caring for them. One of the reasons Paul's desire was so strong to see them again, is because he had a regular prayer time for them.
      - c) Prayer support is a necessary part of any ministerial effort. I once heard a pastor say, "If you are not on the front lines fighting the war, you should at least be in the back line providing the ammunition." The "back line" refers to prayer support.
    - iv) Another of my favorite expressions is "If you don't believe Satan is real, try opposing him for awhile." The reason Paul was "stopped by Satan" from returning is Satan not only doesn't want new believers, he doesn't want mature believers. His goal is to slow down and prevent the growth of the church. Therefore, Satan somehow made an effort to thwart Paul's effort to return.
18. Verse 19: For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? <sup>20</sup> Indeed, you are our glory and joy.
- a) Every chapter in 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians has some reference to Jesus' Second Coming. Verse 19 is the representative for Chapter 2.
  - b) When we think of the Second Coming, we generally want Jesus to come back, say before we have to pay our next credit card bill or something to that nature. ☺
    - i) We may be one step better than that and want Jesus to come back so we can be with him. We see the world for what it is and know heaven is a better place.
  - c) What we tend to forget is that Jesus' Second Coming is not just for us alone.
    - i) Paul states that his hope, joy and "crown" is the Thessalonians being with him when that event occurs!

- ii) This verse is not saying, “Hey God, it’s about time you brought me home. Hey, look at all of these people I brought with me. So where’s my reward money?” ☺
  - iii) It is about sharing the joy of salvation with others. It is not “me and Jesus”, its “we and Jesus”! God wants us to have joy with him, but it is designed to be a group effort and not an individual thing.
  - iv) A purpose of the Second Coming is for all believers to be gathered in Jesus. Part of that joy is to share it with other believers.
  - v) This gets back to “Love One Another” and “Great Commission” working together. Take a good look around you at other believers. You are going to be spending eternity with them. Better get used to them. ☺ Further, God wants you to have a love for them as much as He has a love for us. That is a command.
  - vi) Yes, people are not perfect and there are some believers who are just plain obnoxious. (Not you or me of course. ☺) The point is God is working on changing them just as He is working on changing us. Further, heaven is a sinless place. Therefore, these people will have a major improvement overhaul in the next life. What’s my point? The point is not just to love them as one of God’s chosen, but to see them for who they will be and not just who they are.
19. Let’s pray: Heavenly Father, we thank you for choosing us to spend eternity with you. Help us to remember the command to love one another. Fill us with Your love so we can show that same type of love upon others. Help us to focus on the specific ministry that you have called us to and at the same time not to ignore other opportunities to love one another. Give us the spiritual strength to combat the enemy as we go out and be witnesses for you. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.