

1. I want to open with the question, "What motivates you as a Christian?"
  - a) What motivates you to go to church or to pray? Is it guilt or fear of punishment?
    - i) Is it the nice heating and air conditioning in your church? ☺
  - b) Here is the correct answer:
    - i) Jesus said, ""If you love me, you will obey what I command." (John 14:25 NIV)
  - c) Before I discuss this, let me give you an illustration: Remember the first time you feel in love with somebody? You wanted to know everything about them. If they asked you to do them a favor, you not only agree to do it, but the words coming out of their mouth is the greatest thing you've ever heard because you want to please that person.
  - d) Jesus wants the same type of motivation. It is about God's love working through us. If God asks us to do something, He wants to hear us say in effect, "Is that all? That's great! Nothing makes me happier than to do what you tell me to do!"
  - e) Let me tie this point to something else Jesus said: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:36-40, NIV)
    - i) If you go through the first five books of the Old Testament, there are a total of 613 commandments given by Moses to the Israelites. In Matthew somebody asked Jesus in a sense, "Of the 613 commandments, what is the most important?"
    - ii) Jesus responded with two commandments that are not part of the "Big 10". ☺ He said the most important commandments are to love God with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength. The second is to love your neighbor as yourself.
    - iii) A quick side note is, "If these are the two most important, why don't we pray more often for God to help us with these two commandments?"
    - iv) It has been said that if we can learn to obey these two commandments, "the rest are just commentary". If we focus on loving God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength, as love and care for others as much as we love and care for our self, then all the rest of the commandments are just "commentary" on those two.
2. This leads back to the idea of "motivation". If we ask for God's love to work through us, God is more than happy to give us that love. He wants us to have that love as a response to Him and as a witness to others. Again, the rest is just "commentary".
  - a) In Chapter 5 of 1st Thessalonians, we get a lot of "commentary".
    - i) The last half the chapter is a bunch of "do this" and "do that" commands.
    - ii) I kept reading that list and thinking about the idea of love as motivation. Most of those commands are "natural outputs" of loving each other.
  - b) The first half of the chapter gets back to the idea of Jesus' Second Coming.
    - i) What is interesting about that commentary is that it is "sandwiched" between two fairly identical sentences:
    - ii) The last verse of Chapter 4 says, "Therefore encourage each other with these words." (NIV) Remember there are no chapter breaks in the original text.
      - a) Verse 11 of Chapter 5 says, "Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing." (NIV).
    - iii) This half-chapter long discussion of the Second Coming is sandwiched between two commands by Paul to encourage (or comfort) one another.
  - c) The remainder of the chapter is additional commands by Paul of how Christians are to act. So therefore, the main point of this Chapter has to do with Christian behavior.

3. Since this is the last chapter of 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians, let's tie this part with the whole letter.
  - a) If I had to play "word-association" with 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians, and you asked me to describe this letter in one word, I would say "encouragement".
  - b) The chapter is about Paul and his two companions writing to a very young church. This church encouraged Paul by the fact they were still growing and surviving despite persecution. Paul turned around in the last few chapters and gave them further instructions on how to grow and mature as believers. The key terms in the last chapter center around the idea of encouraging and comforting one another.
4. Which leads back to our motivation to serve God:
  - a) If we are motivated by guilt, the stress will wear eventually wear us down.
  - b) If we are motivated by say, money (you would be surprised how many people go to church because it is "good for business") one will never be satisfied.
  - c) If we go to church because our spouse "makes us go", we are going out of guilt. In those cases, we are going through the motions, but not really interested.
  - d) The best motivation is love. With that said, let look at the most important verse in this chapter (in my humble opinion ☺). It is verse 9. It goes as follows:
    - i) "For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 5:9 NIV)
    - ii) I would encourage you to memorize this one. It's pretty short. ☺
    - iii) Let me paraphrase this verse in terms of motivation: "Father, I am grateful Jesus paid the price for me and I will not spend eternity in hell. I am grateful that You gave me purpose for living. Out of that gratitude I love You and want to please You. You reached out to me and I want to respond back to You".
    - iv) Now that's motivation. We have to remember that no matter how much we mess up, God loves us with a perfect love. He wants to bless us, just because he wants to bless us, not based on what we do.
  - e) Here's another illustration: If you love to canvas-paint, you just "want to paint" whether or not you get paid for it. The same with a talented musician or some other artist. God is perfect in love and just wants to "shower us" with that love. God desires that we have that love in us and then "just want" to respond to Him and to others. That is the motivation for obeying the commands of the bible. That is the motivation to pray. It is not because we "have to", but because we "want to".
  - f) On that happy note, let's go to Verse 1. ☺
5. Verse 1: Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, <sup>2</sup> for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.
  - a) Notice Paul says in Verse 1, "We don't need to write to you".
    - i) Along a similar idea, notice in Verse 2 Paul says, "You know very well".
    - ii) During the short time Paul was in Thessalonica he spent time teaching about Jesus Second Coming. He is saying in effect, "It is not necessary that I tell you again about this because I already taught you that doctrine when I was there.
  - b) What we are to glean from these two verses is the importance of teaching on the Second Coming in church.
    - i) There are too many churches that ignore the doctrine of Jesus Second Coming.
    - ii) How do I know this? Because of the naivety of many Christians on this concept.
    - iii) The bible as a whole has more text dedicated to the events of Jesus Second Coming than there is to the text of Jesus first time on earth!
    - iv) The New Testament alone has an average of 1 out of 24 verses that deal with the events of Jesus Second Coming. Yet ask many Christians anything about the "how's" and "why's" of Jesus Second Coming, and they will be ignorant.
    - v) Here is Paul reminding the reader that the Thessalonians already know this stuff and he doesn't have to say anything more. This reminds us of its importance.

- c) Onto the topic itself. The important cliché taught in this sentence is “Day of the Lord”.
    - i) This is a term used throughout the entire bible. It refers to judgment.
      - a) Sometimes it refers to a specific group-judgment, like a nation being judged for its sin. It usually refers to the events of Jesus Second Coming.
  - d) Both Paul and Peter mention that when Jesus comes the second time, a purpose of His coming is to judge people. (2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 4:1, 1 Peter 4:5).
    - i) When Jesus came the first time, He did not come to judge people (See John 12:47). People who read that forget to read the fine print. ☺
    - ii) Believers will be saved, but we will still be judged and rewarded based on our service to Jesus on our time on earth.
      - a) “For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.”  
Matthew 16:27 (NIV)
    - iii) Revelation 20 teaches that a thousand years after believers are judged, there will be a second judgment for nonbelievers (Rev. 20:12). Believe me, it is much better to be part of the first judgment than the second judgment!
6. Verse 3: While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.
- a) One of the main points about Jesus Second Coming is the fact that no one knows when it is going to happen. The only thing we know for sure is that it is going to happen.
    - i) Jesus said, "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." "(Matthew 24:36 NIV)
    - ii) The reason only God the Father knows the day and hour of Jesus return is so no one can study their bible and say, “I saw a secret message in the text stating when Jesus is coming back.” (or “Jesus told me when he’s coming back”).
      - a) This is why Jesus stated no angel knows the day or hour. That way no one can claim, “An angel told when Jesus is coming back.”
    - iii) If there is a first believer in Jesus, there has to be a last. Heaven does not contain an infinite number of people, but a finite. If the number is finite, then there has to be a last one. Only God the Father knows what that specific number is. When that number is reached, God the Father then sends Jesus down and says, “Go round up the last group of believers on earth.
  - b) This leads us back to Verse 3: The first part of this verse says, “While people are saying "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly”.
    - i) Let me paraphrase what a nonbeliever might say, “You Christians have been claiming Jesus has been coming back for 2,000 years now. Well that line is getting pretty old. I don’t think he is coming back. Life just goes on as it is.”
    - ii) If you want to get an idea of God’s time clock, it was roughly 2,000 years from Adam to Abraham. It was roughly 2,000 years from Abraham to Jesus. Why then should we be shocked if Jesus waits at least 2,000 years to wrap it all up?
    - iii) Peter himself addressed this charge: “With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief.” (2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 3:8b-10a NIV)
    - iv) A related idea is the concept of God and evil. People ask, “Why does God put up with all the evil in the world?” First, God doesn’t “put up with it” as all evil will be judged. Further, what Peter is saying is that one of the reasons Jesus appears to be “slow” in His Second Coming is that Jesus is patient with mankind as He doesn’t want anybody to go to hell.

- v) God wants to wait as long as possible so as many people as possible get saved. On the other hand there has to be a final person. Paul thought Jesus was going to come back in his lifetime. I happen to believe Jesus will come back in my lifetime. All Christians are to live with the expectation that Jesus could come back at any moment. We live that way, partially because it could happen, but mainly as a motivational tool to keep our focus upon God and His commandments for our life.
  - c) Let's get back to the term "peace and safety". What did Paul mean by that?
    - i) Does your average nonbeliever go around saying "peace and safety?" I don't think so and because of that I don't think it was meant to be taken that literally. The idea is about nonbelievers don't fear God's judgment.
    - ii) I believe the point is that most people don't think about their own mortality other than at funerals or late in life.
    - iii) Let me paraphrase what your typical nonbeliever thinks: "Hey, I know there is a God. I know I'm going to heaven because my good deeds outweigh my bad deeds (Satan's greatest lie, in my opinion!). Therefore, I'll just worry about making a buck, taking care of myself and my loved ones and not worry too much about the next life. So stop bothering me about that, ok?" ☺
    - iv) We don't know when our life will end. In a sense, that is what "Day of the Lord" is all about. God wants us "ready" as we don't know when we are going to die.
    - v) God is saying to believers, "I'm only going to give you a fixed amount of time on earth. I know what that time length is, but you don't. Therefore, since you have committed your life to me and serve me, I expect you to use the gifts and talents I gave you to glorify me. Now get going." ☺
    - vi) Jesus himself commented on this: "I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them- do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish." (Luke 13:3-5 NIV)
      - a) In-between two identical verses (Luke 13:3 and Luke 13:5), Jesus tells about some news story of that day where a tower collapsed and killed 18 people.
      - b) Jesus says in that story, "Look folks, they didn't die because of some special sin they committed. They were just as guilty as you for not believing in me. It just happens their "Day of the Lord" happened sooner than your "Day of the Lord". It's too late for them, but not too late for you. You don't know when another tower might fall on you, so repent!"
  - d) Believe it or not, we still haven't finished Verse 3. ☺ The last part of the verse says, "As labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.
    - i) The point is labor pains (assuming you don't get a Cesarean) are inevitable.
    - ii) Just like pregnant woman knows she is going to have a baby, we all know that we are going to die someday. It is inevitable and unavoidable. Pregnant women can "not think about the fact you're having a baby", but it is going to happen. You can not-think about the fact you are going to die, but it is going to happen.
    - iii) For pregnant women, once that labor pain starts, there is no avoiding it. The same applies to our eternal life. Once we die, there is no avoiding judgment.
7. Verse 4: But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief.
- a) This is the second time in four verses that Paul uses the term "thief".
  - b) Jesus himself said, "Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you." (Revelation 3:3 NIV)
    - i) In Revelation, Jesus is speaking to believers at this point. He is emphasizing that we should watch for his Second Coming. If we are not watching, the event will be a like a thief coming into our lives.

- c) Let's get to the practical aspect. How do we "watch"? Does that mean we are to ignore our family and our jobs and stand in our driveway all day and stare at the sky? ☺
- i) First of all, there are entire chapters in the four gospels that describe the events surrounding the Second Coming. (Matthew 24-25, Luke 17, Mark 13, John 16).
  - ii) A Christian should know these chapters so that when these signs start to appear, we can say, "OK, I remember this. Jesus is coming back."
    - a) It is like seeing a movie where you have already read the book. You may not know all the details in the movie, but you have a general idea of how the plot goes, and therefore you know what is coming.
    - b) The same with the events of Jesus Second Coming. Some of the predictions in those chapters seem a bit vague to us. That is done on purpose so that every generation can think, "This must be it now, as this-and-that event in recent history matches what Jesus said." At the same, time we are to watch certain aspect of history and know Jesus is coming back.
  - iii) For me personally, I watch the Nation of Israel.
    - a) One of the events prior to Jesus Second Coming is the Antichrist would allow the Jews to rebuild their temple. To summarize a lot of Daniel and Revelation, there will be a 3½ -year period of world-peace. I believe the Antichrist will strike a peace deal between the Arab nations and the Jewish people. The Antichrist will allow the Jews to rebuild a Great Temple. After 3½-years, this Antichrist will do a "double-cross" and go into the temple and demand to be worshipped as God. Then all the horrible stuff of Revelation begins.
    - b) My point is none of this can happen unless the Jewish people are back in Israel. That is one reason why I believe we are close to the Second Coming.
- d) Which leads us back to the question of how do we "watch" for Jesus?
- i) Part of the answer is to watch news events so we can discern the signs of the bible.
  - ii) Again, it does not mean we stand around staring in the sky. The point is we live our lives for Jesus. We go about the ministry that God called for us.
  - iii) If you have committed your life to serving Jesus, you are in the full time ministry. Your ministry may include financially supporting yourself and others around you. Your "day job" may be part of your ministry. Your job may give you an opportunity to minister to people that a professional pastor can never reach.
  - iv) As Christians we are to live a sense of urgency because we know Jesus can come back at any moment. It should motivate our daily lives.
8. Verse 5: You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness.
- a) For the next five verses, Paul talks in illustrations and word-pictures.
    - i) One of my bible rules is "If the plain text makes perfect senses, seek no other sense". A corollary to that rule is that if the plain text does not make perfect sense, seek some other sense.
    - ii) Paul says we are the "sons of light". I state that because human beings are not literally balls-of-light. It is a word-picture.
  - b) So why did Paul call the Thessalonians "Sons of the light and sons of the day?"
    - i) It ties back to a nickname Jesus gave for himself: "Light of the World".
      - a) Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." John 8:12b, NIV
    - ii) If we follow Jesus, then an appropriate nickname for us is: "Sons of the light".
      - a) Jesus said, "While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light." John 12:36 NIV

- c) So what does the “son of the day” refer to? I believe the idea is similar to “sons of the light”. When I think of “day”, I think of daylight. To work in the daylight means we are dependant upon another source of light in order to do that work.
- i) This brings up something else Jesus said, “You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:14-16 NIV)
  - ii) Jesus said He is the light of the world (John 8:12).
  - iii) Jesus said we are the light of the world (Matthew 5:14). This is not a contradiction.
  - iv) The difference is like sunlight and moonlight. The moon does not have any source of light, but reflects the light of the sun. We as believers are like moonlight, reflecting the light of Jesus unto others.
  - v) For us to reflect God’s “light” on others means that we have to interact with people. God never calls Christians to live in a cave. That is why Paul uses the word-pictures of “light shining in the dark”. The “dark” refers to people who don’t comprehend the Gospel message and we have that “light” in us.
9. Verse 6: So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled.  
<sup>7</sup> For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night.
- a) First of all, this verse is not about being awake at all times and not about being sober at all times. The “literal” interpretation is impossible because people can’t be awake 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Therefore, we know Paul is working in word-pictures.
  - b) As an example of “spiritual darkness” I want to talk about people who have heard the Gospel message, but for all intents and purposes, ignore it. The best way to understand these verses is by the term “get it”.
    - i) Have you ever tried to explain a concept to someone and they just didn’t “get it”?
    - ii) Have you ever told a joke to someone and they didn’t “get it”?
    - iii) That same person, five minutes or an hour later might say, “Oh, now I “get it” .
      - a) It is at that moment, the truth of the concept or the joke sunk in.
    - iv) That same idea applies to Christianity. The gospel message is simple and logical. It is truth. People are going to receive eternal punishment for not turning their lives over to Jesus. Yet we explain this to people and they don’t “get it” .
    - v) This is why Paul used the word-picture of “sleeping” . It would be like explaining a story or a joke to a person who is in a deep sleep. They don’t “get it” .
    - vi) Obviously there are other reasons why people don’t accept the Gospel.
      - a) Many don’t want to change their lifestyle. They too live in “darkness” .
  - c) Why don’t people get the Gospel message? Why do people spiritually “sleep”?
    - i) Jesus used an illustration that is key here. “When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart.” (Matthew 13:4 NIV)
    - ii) Satan is trying to prevent as many people as possible from accepting Jesus. His time on earth is limited based on that last person accepting Jesus. Therefore, the longer he can delay “the last person”, the more time he has. Therefore, there is an evil, spiritual force that tries to prevent people from “getting it” .
    - iii) This is why we pray for individual hearts to be opened. This is why we pray for God to bring witnesses into the lives of those we are concerned about. It is not about “the perfect presentation” of the Gospel. It is about people’s hearts being opened to the truth.

- iv) Before I move one, let me say a few words about those who never heard the Gospel message. They too are in the “dark”, as they don’t comprehend God’s plan for their lives. Because God is fair, and God will judge people based on what knowledge they do have about God’s truth.
  - d) Paul then said, “Those who get drunk, get drunk at night”.
    - i) First of all, Paul is speaking in word-pictures. He is not talking about the perils of getting drunk. There are lots of other passages in the bible on that topic.
    - ii) While we’re in the neighborhood, ☺ let’s discuss Christians and drinking.
      - a) Paul states very clearly that drunkards, that is those who get drunk on a continual basis shall not get into heaven, period. (See 1st Corinthians 6:10).
      - b) Whether or not Christians “can” drink, lets look at what Paul said elsewhere: “All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.” (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 6:12).
      - c) What Paul meant is that all “things” (be it drinking, entertainment, sports, etc.) are “lawful” for Christians, but at the same time Paul didn’t want to be controlled by them.
      - d) Therefore, if any “thing” is a weakness to you, it should be avoided.
      - e) I believe Christians can drink alcohol as much as they want. If you have the Spirit of God living in you, your desire for alcohol (or whatever) should be limited. Why would you want to “dull” the joy that God gives you?
      - f) If I’m with Christians who believe we should never drink, or if I’m with nonbelievers who are confused on this issue, I will not drink alcohol. I don’t want to be a bad witness. In summary, I would rather err on the side of caution over any pleasure.
    - iii) Now that I’ve gotten that out of my system, ☺ let’s get back to what Paul meant.
      - a) I think the term “drunk” in this context is simply another word-picture of those who want to be “blind” to the truth of the Gospel message.
      - b) Paul says, “Those who get drunk, get drunk at night”. Paul is not making a literal statement that sinners only drink after dark. He is talking in word-pictures that those who “sin”, “sin blindly”.
      - c) This is not to say only nonbelievers sin. Paul’s point is that those who don’t care what God thinks of their actions are more willing to commit acts that God considers sinful.
10. Verse 8: But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.
- a) We are still using word-pictures in Verse 8.
  - b) Paul’s first statement is “Since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled”.
    - i) The “day” refers to the light of Jesus Christ, shining within us.
    - ii) We belong to Him. The more we keep that mind, the better our light shines.
    - iii) “Self-controlled” is a balance of self-discipline and at the same time, giving glory to God for our good works and not ourselves.
  - iv) This ties for example, to the idea of not getting drunk. There is a need for self-discipline for that act, albeit tougher for some than for others. We each have our strong suits and our weak-suits and we all have things that are more tempting to us than for others. What we have to remember is to pray to God for help not only in the area that we consider a weakness, but in our strengths as well.
    - a) When you read the Gospels, Peter is known for boldness. Yet his greatest failure was to stand up for Jesus (denying Jesus three times) in front of a young girl. Peter failed in his “strong-suit” of being bold.

- b) A point of that story is that we not only pray to God for help in the areas of our life that are weak, but also those we consider our strengths.
    - v) In summary, Paul is calling upon us to draw upon God's strength to live a life of obedience as to please God and be a good witness to others.
  - c) Which leads to the "how" question. How do we do this? The answer in part, is the second part of this verse that says, "putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet."
    - i) Paul likes to use the analogy of a soldier. Paul traveled around the Roman Empire and saw Roman soldiers everywhere. Therefore, he often used word-pictures tying to parts of the soldier's uniform.
  - d) The first word-picture is comparing a soldier's breastplate to "faith and love".
    - i) One "puts on faith and love" by praying for God to provide us with His faith and His love. Remember that every aspect of our goodness comes from God. Faith and love are God based gifts that He gave to us and He expects us to use!
    - ii) "Praying" for faith and love is like "stirring up the dirt" inside of us. Dirt lies dormant unless it is stirred up. God wants us to pray for faith and love as to "stir up" those gifts inside of us. Praying keeps us close to God, as God desires that personal relationship with us. A free gift God provides for all believers is faith and love. To make it effective, it has to be prayerfully "stirred up".
    - iii) A soldier gets dressed before going into battle. So we should "get dressed spiritually" (prayer) before going out into the world and face our own battles!
    - iv) Remember that faith is not just believing in God's existence, but to live moment-by-moment knowing God is in charge. Putting our faith into action requires prayer to encourage us to act upon that faith.
    - v) The same applies to Christian love. "Love" is about putting other's needs above our own. Our ego wants to put us first. Therefore, we pray to God to "stir up" His love that exists in us so that it can be manifested on those around us.
  - e) The last part of this verse has "hope of salvation as a helmet".
    - i) The helmet protects the head. The head is where we think. We pray for the hope of salvation as a reminder to keep our thoughts on God and not on the cares of this world. It is a prayer for "head (thought) protection.
    - ii) I'm not saying one has to think about God 24-hours a day. A soldier may wear his helmet at all times, but no one is firing at his head at all times. This is about protection. There are moments when we are contemplating doing things that God would not approve of. This is about praying for protection against the temptation at any given moment to turn away from God.
  - f) Believe it or not, we made it to Verse 9. ☺
11. Verse 9: For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.
- a) "Wrath" in this sentence refers to the opposite of eternal salvation.
  - b) As I stated in my introduction, this verse is a motivation to respond to God's love. If God cared enough for us to die for us, we need to respond in love back to God and others.
  - c) Since the word "salvation" appears in this sentence, it is logical that the word "wrath" is used as a contradiction.
  - d) I emphasize this as some people try to use Verse 9 as a "pre-tribulation rapture" proof.
    - i) OK, here we go. ☺ The Book of Revelation speaks of this horrible period of time where God judges the earth. The term "wrath" is used at least five times to describe this period of time (e.g., Revelation 15:1). God takes believers into heaven as part of the events of Jesus' Second Coming. Those with a "pre-tribulation view" or "pre-trib." for short believe the rapture happens prior to all of this bad stuff.

- ii) Those with a post-tribulation or “post-trib.” view believe the rapture does not happen until after it is over. If the bible were clear on this, it wouldn’t be a debate.
  - iii) I happen hold a strong a “pre-trib.” view. I don’t use this verse as a proof-text because in context, this verse is about salvation. (There are other views on the tribulation, but most Evangelical Christians hold a “pre” or “post” trib. view.)
  - e) The important application of this verse is not the pre-trib./post-trib. debate, but the fact that we can have peace no matter what happens to our life.
    - i) Sometimes during the worse moments we need to remember that no matter what, we are saved. As long as we are trusting in Jesus for payment of our sins, no matter how bad we mess up, we’re still saved. No matter how grim a situation, we are still saved. Eternity is a lot longer than anything we are going through.
    - ii) Paul said, “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1 NIV). That “no” covers any and all sins you will ever commit! It is not a free license to sin, just a reminder that as long as we are trusting in Jesus, we can have the peace knowing we are eternally saved.
12. Verse 10: He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him.  
<sup>11</sup> Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.
- a) If you read the last lesson, I made a big deal about “sleep” versus dead”.
    - i) The bible uses the word-picture of “sleep” for Christian believers who are no longer with us, but are in heaven.
    - ii) Paul uses “sleep” because he wants us to understand that Christians never experience death in the same way nonbelievers do. For a nonbeliever, when they die, they experience eternal separation from God the Father. They have truly died.
  - b) With all of that in mind, notice it says Jesus died for us.
    - i) That is an important word-picture. It is not saying Jesus is in hell. It is a word-picture describing how our sins are permanently dead. We are “alive” because Jesus paid the price and our sins are dead. For that reason, Jesus had to die.
  - c) The next part of this verse says, “awake or asleep”.
    - i) This simply means that those Christians who have died before us will live with Jesus forever as much as those who are currently living.
    - ii) Remember heaven is about being with God and other Christians forever. If that doesn’t excite you, you have the wrong religion. ☺ Heaven is not about how big of a house you get, it is about being with Jesus forever. It gets back to the love-motivation. If we have that love, we want to please Him and be with Him.
  - d) As I stated in the introduction, Verse 11 is end of the “sandwich”.
    - i) The last verse of Chapter 4 and Verse 11 are fairly similar. The idea is that Jesus’ Second Coming is motivation to encourage us. (There’s that word again. ☺) To paraphrase, “I have such a love for God, that I want to be with Him. Therefore, the Father is sending Jesus to come back for me. I can’t wait. Not to get out of whatever trouble or pain I’m in, but because I love Him and want to be with Him.
    - ii) On a similar note, Paul said, “I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.” (Philippians 1:23-24 NIV).
      - a) Paul is saying, “Hey, nothing would make me happier than to be in heaven with Jesus right now. I’m torn between heaven and earth. My motivation for staying here is to encourage and help (i.e. love) other believers.”
13. Verse 12: Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. <sup>13</sup> Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other.
- a) The subject of the letter now changes from Verse 12 to the end of the chapter.

- b) We are no longer talking about the events of Jesus' Second Coming or comparing believers to nonbelievers. The remainder of the chapter is a set of "do's" for Christians.
    - i) It gets back to the "love motivation". If we have this love for Christ and we are anticipating His Second Coming, then these "do's" are simply "natural commentary" that would flow out of a love relationship.
  - c) The first one of these commands is to have respect for the elders of the church.
    - i) Most Christian churches have a pastoral staff and a group of elders to whom the pastoral staff are accountable. Different churches have different style of structures, but the basic idea is that there are those who "run" a church.
    - ii) These two verses encourage us to respect and love those who run our church.
  - d) Notice in Verse 12 it says, "because of their work".
    - i) That means our motivation for respecting them is not based on their wonderful personalities ☺, but based on what God called them to do.
    - ii) I believe it is essential for Christians to pray for the leaders of our church. In particular we are to pray for God to give them guidance and wisdom to lead our church and to protect them.
  - e) I should also caution that I've heard of a few churches where the leaders use these verses as a basis for their power. It would be saying, "You the congregation have to obey us because 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians, Chapter 5, Verses 12-13 say you have to".
    - i) Remember this is about a love motivation, and not a power motivation!
  - f) The last phrase of Verse 13 says, "Live in peace with each other."
    - i) The commandment is to live in peace with one another, and not to be in 100% agreement with one another. The command is to respect the leaders of our church and be "good soldiers" in God's army.
14. Verse 14: And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone.
- a) If we have God's love in us, then we want to help others grow in that love.
  - b) Christianity was never designed to be an exclusive club. God's love is about giving of yourself back to God and to others. It is about helping others grow in that love.
  - c) Paul gives four practical illustrations of how to love one another in Verse 14.
    - i) The first one is to warn those who are idle.
      - a) We tend to think of being "loving" as always being passive or "mushy". Sometimes the best type of love is to be strong with someone.
      - b) Here's an illustration for "warn those who are idle": "Hey, you're really messing up right now. It's obvious to me and obvious to everyone. I'm not saying this because I'm a better person than you. I'm saying this because I care about you and I want to see you go down the right path."
    - ii) The second one is to encourage the timid.
      - a) Being scared or fearful is a common trait. We all experience it at times. The point here is instead of ignoring those are timid or who are scared at any giving moment, encourage them. This requires spending time.
      - b) Nobody likes it when you say, "Hey, just cheer up, it will be better". Take the time to hear their problems. This comes back to the idea of "People don't care what you know until they know that you care."
    - iii) The third one is to help the weak.
      - a) If we have God's love, then we want to help others in whatever they are going through. "Weak" can mean any form of suffering.

- iv) The final one is to be patient with everyone.
    - a) Some people are easier to love than others. Remember the secret to dealing with irritating people is not to rely on your own self-discipline to overcome their habits, but to pray for God's strength to deal with that person and to pray for God to change that person.
    - b) Ask yourself, "Is God bigger than what is dividing me and that person in our church that drives me crazy every day?" Pray for them. Let God deal with them and pray for God to give you the strength to deal with them.
15. Verse 15: Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else.
- a) Our ego always wants to say, "They hurt me, and I want to hurt them back."
  - b) Here is a better solution, "Lord, I am really hurt by what that person did to me. That hurt is blocking my relationship with you. I turn that pain over to you and let you deal with it so your love can flow through me and I can be a good witness to others."
    - i) On a practical note, I also find it helpful to pray for others who have hurt you. It's hard to be angry with someone you are praying for!
  - c) Getting back to the big picture, this is all about love as a motivation.
    - i) Too many church splits come from anger over some issue.
    - ii) When I think back of arguments I've had, I remember the fights, but I can't remember what the argument was about. I remember the "hurts" but not the motivation for the hurts. Paul is commanding us to love one another and be kind to one another so we can help mature one another in Christ.
16. Verse 16: Be joyful always; <sup>17</sup> pray continually; <sup>18</sup> give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.
- a) A point to all of these commands is that they are to be obeyed regularly and continually.
    - i) For example, it does not mean we focus on these commands nonstop, around the clock, but for us to do "God's will", we must do these commands "regularly".
    - ii) This ties back to the opening concept of loving God and loving others. If we love God we are to obey his commandments. The practical aspect of obeying that command includes being joyful, regular prayer and giving thanks for all things.
  - b) Verse 16 is about being joyful. It doesn't mean to be happy all the time. Happiness is often based on how outside circumstances are affecting your life. Joy comes from within. When we have the "God-perspective" of loving God, loving each other, we are eternally saved, Jesus is coming back, fresh in our minds, we have that joy.
    - i) That joy, then affects our behavior and our happiness. The circumstances of the world "don't seem so bad" when we are properly motivated.
  - c) Verse 17 says to pray continually. God wants a personal relationship with us and wants to hear from us regularly. A reason to pray is to "energize" us as Christians. We are like rechargeable batteries. If we are not "plugged in" every now and then, we fade.
  - d) The last command is to "give thanks in all circumstances".
    - i) Giving thanks when life is going well is the easy part. The "other" is the trick.
    - ii) Here's a practical example. "Lord, I don't know why I'm going through this right now. I know that You have a purpose for this situation. I thank You for this situation based on what you are going to teach me. Help me to learn what you want me to learn from this circumstance. May you receive the glory in all, amen!"
17. Verse 19: Do not put out the Spirit's fire;
- a) A few pages back I talked about "stirring up the dirt". Dirt lies dormant unless it is stirred up. Paul states the same concept with "Don't put out the Spirit's fire".
  - b) The Holy Spirit makes His home within us (See 1 John 4:13).

- c) The Holy Spirit desires to be “stirred up”. A purpose of the Holy Spirit is for us to give glory to God in all we do. Remember that God allows free will, and therefore he doesn’t “force” the Holy Spirit to be used within us, even though it is there.
  - d) How does one keep the “fire” of the Holy Spirit going? There are lots of ways:
    - i) First of all, it is not a formula like a cooking recipe. One does not have to do say, 10 minutes of prayer, 3 spiritual songs and then, we are “ready”. ☺
    - ii) Praying is keeping the “fire” going. Singing a song to God is keeping the “fire” going. Anything and everything that is “God-centered” in our life is the Holy Spirit working within us.
18. Verse 20: Do not treat prophecies with contempt. <sup>21</sup> Test everything.
- a) “Prophecy” simply means, “to shine forth”. If you were trying to read in a very dark place, it is difficult. Prophecy would be like adding light to that dark place so it is clear.
  - b) Prophecy includes explaining the meaning of a bible passage. One can make a bible passage “shine forth” by explaining its meaning or giving it examples.
  - c) When we think of “prophecy” we tend to think of some personal prediction about our future. That is also a part of prophecy, although less so than biblical teaching.
    - i) I’ve had people “prophecy” over me. When I hear things like that, my first thought is, “If God has this message for me, why didn’t He tell me personally? Has God lost my telephone number?” ☺
    - ii) Deuteronomy 18:22 and 1<sup>st</sup> John 4:1 teach that we are to test prophecies. When someone makes a prediction and says it is from God, we say or think, “OK, I won’t panic, I’ll just wait and see if it happens and then I know it was from God.”
  - d) This is why the next sentence in Verse 21 says, “test everything”
    - i) If “test” refers to bible teaching, then we should have an open bible in our laps and see if the teaching is true. If “test” refers to predictions, then we test them by seeing if the event comes to pass.
  - e) Which leads back to this verse 20. We are not to treat them with contempt.
    - i) If Paul was referring to bible teaching prophecy, we are to treat it seriously and not be disdainful about it.
    - ii) If Paul was referring to predictions, then again, we don’t be disdainful about them, but simply be patient and see whether or not it comes true.
19. Verse 21a: Hold on to the good. <sup>22</sup> Avoid every kind of evil.
- a) I see these two short sentences as going together. One is to be done, the other avoided.
    - i) These two sentences represent the end of Paul’s list of “do’s” as a summary.
  - b) It would be like Paul saying, “Look, if you forget all the details of the commands I am giving you, just remember to focus on what is “good” and avoid what is evil.
  - c) The last sentence of Verse 21 says, “Hold on to the good”. So what is “good”?
    - i) Jesus said, “No one is good – except God alone.” (Mark 10:18 NIV)
    - ii) Therefore “good” refers to what God commands and desires for our lives.
    - iii) I can’t really summarize “good” any better than that because the details are the rest of the chapter and the rest of the bible for that matter.
    - iv) It comes back to “love God and obey His commandments.”
20. Verse 23: May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>24</sup> The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.
- a) The last few verses of the letter are a final blessing by Paul on the church.
  - b) Paul doubted he would ever see this church again. He knew they were struggling with persecution and were young in the faith. After a whole letter discussing their mutual love, the coming back of Jesus and some commands to grow in love, Paul now comes down to his “wish list” for the Thessalonians.

- c) Notice in Verse 23 that it is “up to God and not up to them”. Paul is praying that God himself help the Thessalonians to grow in their faith.
  - d) To “sanctify” means to set apart. It means to take something and set it for God’s use.
    - i) The idea here is that Paul wants more and more aspects of the Christian life be transformed from our will to God’s will. To “mature” is to find new areas of our life that are not in conformity to God’s will and change them to His will.
    - ii) That is the idea of the 2<sup>nd</sup> sentence of Verse 23. Notice the word “whole”. Paul is praying that our “whole spirit, soul and body” be blameless (i.e., grow into maturity) when Jesus comes for us, be it at our death or His Second Coming.
    - iii) Remember that Christians are a “three-fold” being. We are body and spirit. Our soul is our consciousness. The “spirit” is the Holy Spirit living inside of us.
      - a) Ever have one of those moments where you knew what was the right thing to do but didn’t do it? That is when your “spirit” and “soul” were acting as separate entities struggling with each other.
  - e) Verse 24 is a cry of victory. It ends with “He will do it”. Bank on that last statement! ☺
    - i) It is not up to us, it is up to God. God does not leave people “half baked”. If God calls us, then he wants to bring us into full maturity. At the same time, He won’t violate our free will. All God asks of us is a desire to grow, and then He works!
21. Verse 25: Brothers, pray for us. <sup>26</sup> Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss. <sup>27</sup> I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers. <sup>28</sup> The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.
- a) Notice Paul asks the Thessalonians to pray for Him and his companions. It is Paul saying, “Hey I’m not claiming to be perfect or even better for you. Pray for me to do God’s will as I will pray for you to do God’s will.”
  - b) Verse 26 says, “holy kiss”. This may have been a cultural thing. In many parts of the world, to greet a relative is to kiss them on both cheeks as a greeting. It’s pretty hard to be mad at someone you are kissing. ☺
    - i) Some people are more emotionally extroverted than others. For some, handshakes are fine, and others need hugs and kisses. The point is that we treat other Christians in love. The method is personal. ☺
  - c) Verse 27 commands that the letter be read to all the Thessalonians and not just the leaders. That tells us this letter is for all Christians and not just for certain individuals.
  - d) Finally, (thought we’d never make it! ☺), “Paul ends with the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.”
    - i) We are created by God. It starts with God. It also ends with God.
    - ii) Paul’s final words of this letter are that God’s grace be upon them.
    - iii) “Grace” is getting something positive you don’t deserve.
    - iv) God is blessing the Thessalonians, not because they are thriving because of the persecution. They are not thriving because of their love for one another. They are thriving because the grace of God is working through them. Through God’s love they have the motivation (there’s that word again ☺) to survive the persecution, to love one another and be a good witness to others. Again, it is about “God first, us second. It begins with God reaching to us and we respond, never in reverse order.
22. One last piece of business and I’ll close in prayer: I usually put a bibliography of my sources at the end of each book of the bible. Since this study covers 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians, that bibliography will be after the last lesson on 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians.
23. Let’s pray: Heavenly Father, We thank You that Your grace has reached down to us. You love us, simply because You do. In response, help us to take that love, and respond back to you and to use that love upon others, especially for believers. Help us to love you with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength, and our neighbor as ourselves. May Your love be our motivation in all we do. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.