

1. There is a classical saying in Christianity which is a great opening line for this lesson:
 - a) “If you are not on the front line fighting the battle, you should at least be in the back line providing the ammunition”. The topic of this cliché is about spiritual warfare, and the great fight to win souls and mature people in their faith in Jesus.
 - i) I remember hearing a sermon about a pastor who wanted to borrow a great bible illustration from another pastor. When he asked for permission, the person who wrote the illustration said, “Share the ammo, brother, share the ammo!”
 - ii) Whether we like it or not, all Christians are engaged in this warfare. We are all called to tell nonbelievers about Jesus. We are all called to help mature people in their relationship with Jesus. We are all called to service in the church. We are all called to help hurting people and to reach out to others.
 - iii) You may be thinking, “Wait a minute, we have pastors at our church who do that thing. I help pay their salary and I leave that up to them. I have to work for a living or I have to raise my kids. That is their problem.”
 - iv) Those are the people who are regularly on the “front line”. Yes we are to financially support them, but more importantly is to prayerfully support them. That does not mean a quick “shot prayer” as part of a Sunday service. ☺ It does mean to pray regularly for those who are on the “front lines” of Christianity.
 - b) This gets into the issue of “Just who are we to support anyway? Is it just my local church? Do I give to everyone and anyone who asks or sends me junk mail?” ☺
 - i) First of all, I would start with your local church. If this is the place where God calls you to minister to others than support that church. If this is the place where you are getting spiritually blessed, support it. If that church supports all the fundamental principals of a good bible-based church, support it. Support includes prayer and time as well as finances.
 - ii) Next, what ministry are you being “blessed by?” There may be some regional or national ministry that has blessed your life. Ask how you can support it. Pray for its success and pray for its leaders. Give your time and money if they ask.
 - c) Finally, you may see a ministry that God is “blessing”. It has been said that we should support ministries like we picking stocks in the stock market: “We look for stocks that are good investments”. The same concept should apply to ministries. Look at the ones God is blessing and if you feel called toward it, pray for it and support.
 - d) You know the old cliché, “You can’t take it with you?” Well, that’s not biblical. You can take it with you. The secret it is to “send it up ahead of you”. By supporting those on the “front lines”, be it prayer, money, or supplies, you are being obedient to God’s will and you join in the “reward” of those on the front line of that ministry.
 - i) “Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor.” (1st Corinthians 3:8, NKJV)

2. Which, amazingly, leads us back to an ancient church in Thessalonica, Greece. ☺

In this chapter, Paul is giving commands for how this church should pray and behave.

- a) It is not like Paul is saying, “Well my Thessalonian brothers, it was nice knowing you. I’m on my way to go save more people. Good luck in keeping your church going.” ☺
- b) Chapter 3 is Paul’s final words to the church. It gives some specific advice on a few issues, but the “big-picture” idea is how the church is to survive and thrive.
 - i) Part of that issue is the concept of pastoral support. The chapter urges the Thessalonians to pray for Paul as much as Paul prays for them.

- ii) This is “supplying the ammunition” to those on the front lines of Christianity. Without that “back-line” support, those on the “front-line” are ineffective.
 - c) This last chapter is Paul teaching, “Hey, its not up to me to keep your church growing and thriving, but its up to you. God desires to work through you. God started a “work” in Thessalonica and He desires to finish it. At the same time, God allows free will. If you want the church to die off, God will let it. The good news is if you prayerfully support each other, it will thrive and grow. If you act in love and service to one another, it will thrive and grow. If a congregation seeks God with all of their heart, soul, mind and strength, than that church will grow in ways you cannot imagine.
 - d) On a related note, I personally can’t stand church marketing programs. There are countless books out there on “How to make your church grow”. There are programs that say, “Follow these 10 easy steps, and your church can grow like ours”.
 - i) First of all, God does not measure “success” by size, period. God measures success by significance and impact. God is interested in people “making a difference” for Jesus. God is interested in a group of people who have a strong faith in Him and outreach to the world around them. Church “success” does not come in numbers. It comes from obedience to what the bible commands us to do.
 - ii) The problem with marketing programs and seminars is the glory goes to the program and not to God. It violates a biblical principal:
 - a) “I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols.” (Isaiah 42:8, NIV)
3. On a different note, the more I study Paul’s letters, the more I’m convinced he had Attention Deficit Disorder. ☺
- a) You get the impression, he was about to end the letter at the end of chapter 2, with a nice closing greeting. Then he thought, “Oh, and one more thing”, and then came another set of instructions. Then came another positive thought that sounded like a closing statement, and then came another set of instructions.
 - b) Chapter 2 appears to be the main topic of this letter, which has to do with the events of Jesus’ Second Coming. Chapter 3 is an “epilogue” of miscellaneous instructions given to the church at Thessalonica.
 - c) OK, time to stop rambling. ☺ Let’s finish 2nd Thessalonians:
4. Verse 1: Finally, brothers, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you.
- a) Someday I’m going to organize a topical study of all the times where someone in the bible commands us to pray for something specific. It is less often then you think!
 - i) When you go through say, Paul’s letters, there are really not that many specifics that Paul asks us to pray for. There are lots of generic discussions of prayer in the bible, but the times when a specific request is made is not as common.
 - b) I mention that because here in Verse 1 we have a specific prayer request.
 - i) To paraphrase Paul, it is saying, “Hey, pray specifically for me and my companions. I don’t want you so much to pray for our health, or our well being, but pray that our specific task that God has called us to be accomplished. That task is to preach the Gospel message. Further, pray that people may receive the message rapidly and the message sink in (i.e., “be honored”).
 - ii) To further paraphrase Paul, “Hey, remember how fast the Gospel message spread in Thessalonica? Pray that the same thing happen elsewhere. Remember how the church was formed and grew in a matter of weeks? Pray the same thing happens elsewhere. Notice how your church is thriving despite persecution because you are grounded in your faith? Pray that the same thing happens elsewhere”.

- c) I heard a quote this week from Jon Curson that applies here: “Great pastors do not make for great congregations, great congregations make for great pastors”.
- i) The secret of a successful church is a praying, faithful congregation and not a great leader. It is the “flock” that makes a church successful and not the leadership.
 - ii) There is a classical story about Charles Spurgeon that fits here. For those who are not familiar with Spurgeon, he is considered one of the great bible expositors of all time. He had a large church in England in the 19th Century. Imagine preaching to 3,000 people at once with no microphones! In this large church, a group of visiting pastors asked to see the boiler room. They wanted to know how to heat a building of this size. Spurgeon took them, on a Sunday afternoon to a room full of people on their knees praying for the Sunday night service. Spurgeon said (in a sense), “That gentlemen, is our boiler room”. The “heat” of those prayers is what provided Spurgeon with God’s power to “warm” the congregation.
 - a) My point here is like Jon Curson’s comment, is that a great congregation makes a great pastor, not vice-versa.
 - iii) Paul understood the secret of his success was people praying for him. Paul was not afraid to ask people to pray for him, and so am I. I understand that the only way this writing ministry is successful is only if people pray for it, and I thank God they do.
 - iv) If you are unhappy with your pastor, pray for him! If you are grumbling that people aren’t getting saved at your church pray for that church! The “problem” is not with the pastors, the problem is with the congregation! God can and does use anybody willing to work in His name. The source of power of any pulpit comes from prayer closets.
5. Verse 2: And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men, for not everyone has faith.
- a) Verse 2 is another prayer. Paul is saying in effect, “Look we are not going to “bat a 1,000” when preaching the gospel. Some people are not going to get it. Some people are going to reject it. Some who reject this message are going to do so violently and come after us.”
 - b) The price one pays to be a witness for Jesus is that it comes with persecution. I’ve already beaten that point to death in previous lessons. What is new “here” is that Paul is asking for help to combat that prayer. Paul is saying, “Hey, I’m preaching the Gospel. The price I have to pay for preaching the Gospel is that I’m going to be persecuted. Whether I like it or not, this is going to happen. Pray for my protection.
 - i) This ties to my opening cliché of “be on the back lines supplying the ammunition”. The ammunition is our prayer support for the church leaders.
 - c) Notice Paul does not pray for the death of the wicked. Notice Paul does not pray for their harm. Paul prays that he be delivered from them.
 - i) It is similar to Jesus statement of “deliver us from evil” (Matthew 6:13).
 - ii) Whether we like it or not, evil men exist. Satan exists and cannot be eradicated until Jesus himself performs that task one day. God “does this” to keep us close to Him and dependant upon God for power over Satan.
 - iii) This is why we pray to be protected from the evil one.
 - iv) This gets back to my opening theme of proper attitude of a congregation. How does one specifically pray for the leadership of a church? One of the things we do is ask that they be protected from evil. Satan loves an ineffective ministry. If he can get the leaders to “trip up” somehow, that will become a bad witness for Jesus.

- d) If you read through the Book of Acts, Paul faced death a lot. He understood the price it took to be a good witness for Jesus. Yet Verse 2 of this chapter tells us that Paul did not have a death wish. If anything, he simply asked for prayer so he could live to preach another day. Paul understood the price he had to pay to preach the Gospel and “all” he was asking in return was prayer support. Personally, I don’t think that’s too much to ask of any pastor or person who is on the “front lines” of Christianity.
6. Verse 3: But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one.
- a) Verses 1 and 2 focus in Paul’s request of the Thessalonian church.
- b) Verse 3 is the Thessalonians wondering, “OK, we’ll pray for you Paul, but what about us? You’re no longer in site. How we will survive? Who will guide us and protect us from Satan?” With that in mind, re-read Verse 3.
- c) There is a balance in Christianity between trusting in God and at the same time to continually pray for God’s help.
- i) One extreme is to say, “I prayed one time for God’s protection 23 years ago. God’s answering that prayer and I don’t have to pray again.” ☺
- ii) The other extreme is to say, “I need to pray every 23 seconds for God’s protection. If I forget, I’m doomed because God’s protection expires after 23 seconds. ☺
- iii) God wants us close to Him. He wants us to pray regularly to remind us that He is there and is watching over us. Our problem is our short-term memories. Our problem is we get our focus off of God and unto our problems. Therefore, we pray regularly for God’s protection, partially to remind us that God is still there.
- d) At the same time we have to have faith during those rough moments that God is working. That is what Paul meant in Verse 3 by “But the Lord is faithful”.
- i) That’s why Paul said “The Lord will strengthen and protect us from the evil one.”
- ii) We as Christians have to have trust in those words in Verse 3.
- iii) Remember it is not our faithfulness that is on the line, but God’s. Personally, I don’t have a lot of trust in my faithfulness. I mess up constantly. On the other hand, I can sleep well trusting that God is faithful.
- iv) Let me give an example. “Lord, once again, I am in deep do-do here.” ☺ I don’t know how I’m going to get through it. I don’t know what is going to happen next. I do know that You are faithful to protect me. You promised You would never leave me nor forsake me. (Hebrews 13:5). Therefore, God, Your reputation is on the line, and not mine. Teach me the lessons you want me to learn from this situation. Strengthen my faith during this situation so I can be a good witness for You.” Rescue me from this situation so that You may be glorified by it. In the meantime, I’m going to trust that You are working through this situation, Amen.”
7. Verse 4: We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command.
- a) In Paul’s short time in Thessalonica, He gave them the basic instructions on how to live the Christian life. He taught them about Christian conduct, which we’ll discuss in depth over the next set of verses. The two letters to the Thessalonians are full of commands by Paul as to how the Thessalonians (and us) are to live.
- b) Now Paul is writing his last words to them. It is Paul saying in a sense, “It is not necessary that there be a 3rd Thessalonians or a 4th Thessalonians. I, Paul, have confidence that God will be your instructor, and not me. Paul is saying he no longer has to worry about the Thessalonian church as long as they follow Paul’s instructions.
- i) That is the idea for us. God gives us a book of instructions and says, “Read this, here are your instructions. At the same time we pray regularly both individually and collectively. We gather together with other Christians, as God never wants any of us to be a solo act. If we do that, than God is working in our lives. In that sense, Paul no longer had to worry about the Thessalonian church.

- ii) It is as if Paul is saying, "I don't have to teach you any more things. Do what I have told you when I was there. Here are a couple of more things in these letters. Now stop looking to me for further instructions and get moving." ☺
 - c) Paul's "confidence" does not mean he stopped praying for that church.
 - i) That would be contradictory to what Paul said earlier in this letter.
 - ii) Paul mentions three times in these two letters how much he regularly prays for this church. (1st Thessalonians 1:2, 2nd Thessalonians 1:3, 2:13)
 - iii) Paul is confident that God is trustworthy. Therefore Paul prays for this church.
 - a) That is the application for us. We are to pray for our church and whatever ministry God calls us to support, regularly and with confidence that God is faithful and will do what He says He will do in His Word.
 - b) The success of our church is not up to "them" (say, the pastoral staff) but up to "us" (the congregation). This gets back to Charles Spurgeon's "boiler room". Regular prayer by and for the church is the secret of its success.
8. Verse 5: May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance.
- a) Verse 5 is a great verse to be read in balance to Verse 4.
 - i) Verse 4 is Paul saying in effect, "I have confidence that you will persevere."
 - ii) Verse 5 is Paul praying that the Thessalonians persevere.
 - b) Notice that Verse 5 is "up to God" and not "up to us". The prayer of Verse 5 is directed for God to act as opposed to the Thessalonians to act.
 - i) That is a nice little model of how to pray for others. Start with God working in their lives and then focus on the individual's or the group's behavior.
 - c) The last phrase of Verse 5 says, "Christ's perseverance".
 - i) When you read through the Gospels, Jesus is focused upon his mission.
 - a) Four times in the Gospels Jesus uses the expression "my time" or "my hour" referring to Jesus purpose and mission.
 - b) You get the impression that Jesus was always in control of His actions and His destiny and no one could change his appointment calendar. ☺
 - ii) The lesson for us about perseverance is "figure out what God called you to do and stick to it, no matter what".
 - iii) If you're not sure, do "something" for God. You'll soon know whether or not it is the right thing to do. At the same time, we need to be flexible enough to know that if it isn't "bearing fruit" for God, it maybe time to go elsewhere. Our service to God involves using whatever gifts God has given us and is often combined with what we enjoy. What God calls us to do may be "something we can't stand not doing it". That is God working in our life.
 - iv) This is what Paul meant by Christ's perseverance. Remember this church was under persecution. Paul is saying, "stick to it, despite the issues. Hold tight to your faith in God despite the pain. It is worth it."
 - d) Something else caught my attention about this verse: Notice the focus is upon God the Father and Jesus and not on the Antichrist.
 - i) If you remember from the last lesson, most of chapter 2 is about "How to recognize the tribulation." Most of chapter two describes the Antichrist. Paul teaches in that chapter how to know when the tribulation has started.
 - ii) At the same time, Verse 5 of chapter 3 is saying in effect, "Keep your eye on God and not on the Antichrist. He should be our focus, and not the enemy.
 - iii) That ties very well to the concept of perseverance. Focus on God and not the circumstances around you and you will persevere.

9. Verse 6: In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us.
- a) Paul changes topics in Verse 6. We move from the discussion of “sticking to it” in Verse 5 to Paul commanding the church to keep away from “busybodies”.
 - b) The next set of verses gets into the topic of avoiding Christians who are “idle”.
 - i) This refers to people who are capable for working for a living, but instead “mooch” off of the church.
 - ii) In both 1st Thessalonians and 2nd Thessalonians a big issue is the Second Coming of Jesus. Maybe there were people in that church who were so convinced the rapture would happen any day, they refused to get a job. Whether or not that was true, Paul’s point is that everyone who could support himself should do so.
 - c) Notice how important this command is to Paul:
 - i) He doesn’t just say, “I command you”, but “I command you in Jesus’ name”.
 - d) Notice what Paul does not say in this Verse:
 - i) Paul does not say to take every Christian who refuses to work and shot him. ☺
 - ii) Paul does not say to put an ad in the local paper stating who is lazy. ☺
 - iii) Notice in Verse 6 that Paul says that every brother who doesn’t work should be avoided. One is not sent to hell for being a lazy Christian. One’s salvation depends upon their trust in Jesus, not their behavior in the church. Paul still calls these people “brothers” even though they are causing problems in the church.
 - iv) This leads to something Jesus taught Peter:
 - a) I (Jesus) will give you (Peter) the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” (Matthew 16:19 NIV)
 - b) This verse in Matthew states that whatever Peter “binds on earth” will be “bound in heaven”. Does that mean that when we get to heaven people will be tied up in ropes for eternity? ☺ I don’t think so. Therefore, Jesus is not discussing eternal salvation in Matthew 16:19.
 - c) Jesus is saying that the church (believers) get to decide who does and who does not get to go to church on Sundays with us. Individual churches have the right to “ex-communicate” somebody who refuses to repent of a sin.
 - d) This quote by Jesus in Matthew 16:19 is repeated almost verbatim in Matthew 18:18. Matthew 18:15-17 discusses how to treat a sinning Christian. In summary, one confronts him or her individually. If they don’t repent, you approach them a second time with some witnesses (so it won’t be “their word versus your word”). If they still refuse to repent, you kick them out of the church. Then Jesus gives the “bind on earth/bound in heaven” statement.
 - (1) If you read this quote by Jesus in context of Matthew 18, you understand that Jesus is giving Christians the power to decide who can and cannot join a church.
 - v) With all of that in mind, now you can understand how Paul is saying that if a “brother” is a “nosy busybody”, to avoid them. Paul is discussing for Christians to keep away from them, but it is not a salvation issue.
 - e) The last thing to discuss is the topic of “idleness” itself.
 - i) First of all, this does not apply to every man, woman and child who is saved.
 - ii) I believe it applies to the “head of every household”. If you are a single adult of either sex, you are the head of your household. If you are supporting children or parents, you are the head of the household. This applies to those who can work, but then refuse to.

- iii) In the cases of people who are financially well off and don't have to work, the point is to "serve" and at the same time, not be "nosy". God calls us to help people who ask for help, not to fix problems where people don't want help.
 - iv) In a sense, this gets back to a principal taught in the "Garden of Eden"
 - a) When God was cursing Adam for eating the forbidden fruit, He said: "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life." (Genesis 3:17 NIV)
 - b) Through a curse, God is commanding Adam to "go work the ground". The fact that Adam didn't have a day job ☺ meant he had too much time on his hands and was willing to eat the fruit. God placed this curse on Adam (among other reasons) is God wanted Adam to work. It is a model for Adam as well as mankind. If we are idle, we get lazy.
 - c) Unfortunately, many men derive their sense of self-worth from their work. This is dangerous, as it becomes an idol over God. Look how many people are more interested in what you do for a living than your relationship with God!" At the same time, work gives us a "sense of purpose" in that we are to do what God calls us to do, and to support our household.
 - v) We'll get into more of this over the next set of verses. Speaking of which:
10. Verse 7: For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you,⁸ nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you.⁹ We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow.
- a) My loose translation: "Paul put his money where his mouth was".
 - b) Paul wasn't just saying that, "You should be busy working for a living". During the time Paul was there He worked for a living so he didn't have to get a free meal off of anyone.
 - c) Paul's point is that we shouldn't be a burden to anyone if it can be avoided.
 - i) Again, this is not about helping those in need. This is about not helping those who should be working instead of "mooching" off other people.
 - ii) In 1st Timothy 5:9, Paul describes which widows should be "put on the list". What that meant was that some widows should be on the church payroll if they met a certain list of qualifications. The point is that Paul believed that people should be helped financially if they are in need.
 - d) Why is this issue so important?
 - i) When you hear somebody give you a sales pitch for anything, be it a household product, a political view or a religion, you can't help but think, "OK, what's the catch? What is this going to cost me? What does this person want from me?"
 - ii) This is why you as a Christian should never say to a stranger, "Hey, let me tell you about Jesus. When we're done, you owe me dinner because God called me to preach to you." ☺
 - iii) People are going to question your motives if you are doing something for the money. That is human nature. But if you, like Paul, are self-supportive financially and are telling others about Jesus or being a witness for Him without demanding anything in return, people are more likely to listen.
 - e) This verse is an important lesson for a missionary.
 - i) A missionary should find a way to be self-supportive or have his or her "home church" help pay their expenses. The missionary should never be a burden to the people they are witnessing to.

- ii) To those considering being a missionary, also consider learning a trade as well as learning your bible. There is no guarantee that some church will support you full time. There may be situations where you need a spare job in order to pay the bills while working on your ministry goals. If Paul had to work, so can we! 😊
 - f) This verse is not arguing against “the professional ministry”.
 - i) If you are in a large enough church that can afford full time pastors, that is wonderful. This topic is about being a witness to others. There are other chapters in the bible that deal with the topic of Christians financially supporting those in the full time ministry. (Ref. See 1st Corinthians 9, 1st Timothy 5)
11. Verse 10: For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat."
- a) One of the problems we have as Christians is dealing with guilt. We believe to “love one another” is to always give handouts and help without asking questions.
 - b) Here is what Paul is not saying, “Oh, look at “so-and-so” over there. He doesn’t have a job because he loves God so much and just wants to help us with our problems. We all need to support him, because that would be the Christian loving thing to do.”
 - i) Think about that in connection to “If a man will not work, he shall not eat.”
 - ii) Paul is saying, “Excuse me you lazy bum, go get a job and then come join us.” 😊
 - c) Remember the key word here is “will”. If a man will not work is the issue.
 - d) Does this mean we don’t give a dollar to the beggar on the street corner?
 - i) First of all, I am not arguing against compassion. God’s love is meant to be unconditional. We are called to help hurting people, despite their faith in God.
 - a) If you feel “lead” to give, give.
 - b) If a person is hungry, cold or not sober, we can’t be a witness to them if they are in so much pain or so “out of it”, they can’t comprehend your message. I thank God for the Salvation Army and the “street missions” that help people get a new life. They are doing the Lord’s work.
 - ii) On the general issue of panhandling, a big issue to me is whether or not they “can” work. The economy can be an issue. A good test is often to offer the person something to eat as opposed to money and watch their reaction.
 - iii) I remember having a wealthy friend with lots of employees. Whenever he met a beggar, he offered them a job. He has yet to find one who took up his offer. My point is some people simply choose to live that lifestyle and are scared of change.
12. Verse 11: We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies. ¹² Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat.
- a) Notice Paul does not say everyone in that church were wonderful people who are to be commended. My point is that Paul is not afraid to admonish someone or some people who are problems.
 - b) If we have compassion for a person, or a group of people, we also want to prevent them from harm. It is a rare occasion when somebody is publicly admonished from the pulpit or even from a church. Yet Jesus and Paul both clearly taught there are situations where we are to separate ourselves from people causing problems in the church.
 - i) Again we are not to kill them or physically harm them, but we are to avoid them. That often means to excommunicate them from the church until they change.
 - ii) A church is not to be financially burdened by people who shouldn’t be a burden.

13. Verse 13: And as for you, brothers, never tire of doing what is right.
- a) The verse prior to this topic of “idleness” had to do with perseverance.
 - b) Verse 5 said, “May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance.”
 - c) Here in Verse 13, a similar command is given to “never tire of doing what is right”
 - d) Therefore the whole discussion of dealing with busybodies is sandwiched between two verses on the topic of perseverance. Why is that?
 - i) The answer is that we all want to be popular. Let's face it, if we tell a Christian brother or sister to go get a job, they won't like us very well. ☺ Nobody likes the difficult job of having to say negative things to others and be hated.
 - ii) Sometimes the most loving things we can do for others requires saying things people don't want to hear. This is where the “art of diplomacy” comes into play. The goal is to get the person to change, not to yell in their face.
 - iii) Let's try a practical example: “Dear so-and-so, first of all, we want you to know that we appreciate the good things you do around here. We know that you are a believer in Jesus and believe the bible is the word of God. Now I want you to read Verse 10 of 2nd Thessalonians Chapter 3 (the one about “don't work/can't eat”). What do you think that verse means? Yes I know you do stuff around here, but maybe you don't realize it, but you are being a burden to the church despite your best efforts. Whether you like it or not, our church has to take all bible commands seriously. We're afraid, since this is your third warning ☺, that we have to ask you to leave this church until you get a job.”
 - a) “Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still; teach a righteous man and he will add to his learning.” (Proverbs 9:9 NIV)
 - b) The point of Proverbs 9:9 is if a person is a God-fearing person, who does believe the bible is the Word of God, they are more likely to be motivated to change their ways than one who doesn't take their bible seriously.
 - e) Even if you don't read Verse 13 in context of the surrounding verses, this Verse is a good principal for Christian living. The basic point is to persevere through whatever God has called you to do and whatever situation you are going through in the moment.
 - f) This is a good time to discuss the issue of “feelings”.
 - i) A good point about Verse 13 is to take God's word as priority over feelings.
 - ii) With that said, I'm not “anti-feelings”. Our emotions are often instinctive reactions that our body needs something. I recently heard a story of a mother of a newborn complaining about spiritual warfare. An older mom responded to her by saying, “Honey, it's not spiritual warfare, you just need a nap”. ☺
 - iii) On a similar note, if you are sick in bed with a fever, God does not expect you to be in church. If anything, spreading your sickness becomes a hindrance to others.
 - iv) The point here is to see Verse 13's point about perseverance as a priority over our “feelings”. Our feelings are based on the situation at any given moment. God's word stands true despite our feelings.
 - v) A standard line that Mormon missionaries use when they come to your door is, “Well, I prayed about this belief and I just feel it is true.” My response is, “That's so funny you said that because I prayed about Mormonism too and I have this overwhelming feeling it is not true.” ☺ You can state that in order to resolve this issue, we need to trust God's Word over our “feelings” and study the Word accordingly. (Illustration source: Greg Koukl – Stand to Reason Ministries).

14. Verse 14: If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed.
- a) Now we are back to the topic of excommunicating a disobedient Christian.
 - b) Verse 14 is a good reminder to take Verses 12-13 in context.
 - i) Verses 12-13 are about “never get tired of doing what is right”. To do what is right is often an ugly job. My point here is that Paul is still talking about dealing with believers who are a problem. Verses 12-13 should be read in context of that topic.
 - c) In Verse 14, the issue of excommunication is broadened from “busybodies” to anybody who does not obey the “instructions” of this letter:
 - i) Does that include those who don’t “watch” for Jesus’ Second Coming? Possibly, but one can read Verse 14 being still in context of the previous set of verses.
 - ii) The broader application is that Christians have a fundamental set of principals from which no deviation is allowed: Off the top of my head, that list is:
 - a) Jesus is God; Jesus always existed, and came to earth at a specific time for a specific purpose. Jesus is now “100% God, 100% man”.
 - b) Salvation is based on trusting in God’s free gift to us through Jesus’ payment on the cross.
 - c) The belief that Jesus is now in charge of our lives (i.e., “Lord”) and we desire to obey Him with our lives. Out of gratitude for what Jesus did for him, we now live in obedience of His commandments.
 - d) The belief in the Trinity
 - e) The belief in the fact that Jesus rose from the dead and we will be resurrected ourselves. All people are resurrected, some to heaven and some to hell.
 - f) The bible as we know it, is the Word of God.
 - g) There maybe something else that I forgot, but that’s essentially it. All the other debatable issues are just that.
 - iii) Paul said, “That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” (Romans 10:9 NIV). That is a pretty good summary of the Christian salvation doctrine.
 - a) My other point here is that every other Christian issue is “debate”. These are the nonnegotiable issues to be a Christian and to be part of a church.
 - b) To willfully disobey a bible commandment or to willfully deny one of the truths stated above is grounds for excommunication from a church. Whether or not an excommunicated person is “saved” is not the issue, but the responsibility of who is and who isn’t part of the church is the issue.
 - c) “What if the guy or girl then goes to the church down the street? The answer is “That’s now the problem of the church down the street”. I might add that if the person was a “threat” we may want to warn that church if at all possible. I do believe it is the responsibility of the new church to check out the past history of anybody “transferring” from another church.
 - d) Let’s get back to the verse: It ends with “In order that he may feel ashamed”.
 - i) The purpose of excommunicating a Christian is that the shame would drive them to change their lifestyle. Sometimes to kick someone out of the church is the best thing we can do for them.
 - ii) A similar idea is the topic of “codependency”. This is relatively modern term that means a person is “harming someone by not helping them.” An example is the spouse of an alcoholic who either denies the problem and/or helps them drink.

- iii) My point is sometimes the best solution is to “kick somebody out” than to ignore the problem. A codependent is a person who keeps “bailing out a person” hoping that they would change on their own as opposed to the more difficult, but correct choice of dealing with a problem “head on”.
- 15. Verse 15: Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.
 - a) Verse 15 is the advice not to take expulsion to an extreme.
 - b) Paul is saying, “Don’t take the guy out and shoot him. He is still a Christian. Treat that person as you would your own flesh and blood”.
 - i) Ever notice how we are “tougher” on a sibling or a spouse than a member of our church? That is because at the end of the day we know that we still love that sibling or spouse and they would still be there. We are willing to be tougher on siblings than we are on people who attend our church.
 - ii) Paul is arguing to treat fellow Christians “like brothers”. Hopefully that is a good thing. ☺ We must remember to be tactful when giving out discipline.
- 16. Verse 16: Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you.
 - a) It is easy to talk about this verse as a “catch-all” generic sense of peace.
 - i) The hard part is talking about this verse in context of the past set of verses.
 - ii) Let’s face it, if we are at the point of kicking somebody out of a church, it usually means that person has already caused all sorts of problems. More likely, that person will not go peacefully and it is painful for everyone involved.
 - iii) After Paul deals with the difficult issue of having to kick somebody out, not for not believing in Jesus, but just for being a “busybody”, Paul then talks about the importance of having God’s peace in our hearts.
 - b) When it comes to “church problems”, the easy solution is to avoid it or hope it will go away. Having “peace” with God often means doing what the bible commands us to do even it means being unpopular. Paul is saying the love of God will bring you peace over and above whatever circumstance you are going through.
 - c) Next I want to talk about this verse in context of the whole letter.
 - i) Remember that this was a church in a lot of physical pain. They were dealing with persecution on a daily basis.
 - ii) It was so bad, they thought they were going through the tribulation. A big part of this letter was about Paul telling them why their suffering was not the specific period of time known as the tribulation.
 - iii) In the final chapter, Paul deals with a specific problem in this church. For all we know, Paul may have been talking about one specific person causing problems.
 - iv) What Verse 16 remind us is that, yes, there are problems. Yes, there are issues in any church we have to deal. Yes, there is suffering going on, both individually and collectively. Despite all of that, Paul’s final words include the idea of having peace with God at all times.
 - a) To do that requires a God-centered life. We draw upon God to give us the strength and the wisdom to get through these situations.
 - b) The question is “What’s the alternative?” Do I give up my faith in God and avoid the persecution. If you are convinced the bible is truth and Jesus is truth, then this is not an option. The other alternative is to try to fix it ourselves. We are now relying upon our ability to fix things as opposed to God’s. Again, we are then trying to give us the glory and not God.
 - c) The only solution is trusting in the peace of God. Life is painful, but God is bigger than that pain. That realization is how we have God’s peace.

17. Verse 17: I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand, which is the distinguishing mark in all my letters. This is how I write.
- a) Verse 17 indicates that this letter was dictated, and then Paul signed “with his distinguishing mark” here in this verse.
 - b) There is a theory that the Thessalonians had received a counterfeit letter and this signature validated Paul’s letter as being genuine. This verse may also deal with doubts some may have had that Paul actually wrote this letter.
 - c) I personally love the second sentence “This is how I write”. As a writer, I can relate to the idea of having a distinct style.
 - i) I read commentaries by some of the great Christians preachers and I get intimidated. I say, “Lord, look at what that guy said. How am I to compete with that?” God responds with, “I didn’t ask you to compete with Him. I just called you to write with your style. Now quit complaining and start typing!” ☺
 - ii) My simple point is not to be intimidated by someone else who you think is doing something better than you are. If God called you to something, stick to it and don’t worry about “competition”. Use your “style” and gifts God has given you and don’t worry about anyone else. Paul said, “This is how I write.” This outline format is “how I write”. ☺ I’m not trying to compete with Paul or any other bible preacher. I just do what I believe God called me to do.
18. Verse 18: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.
- a) This letter opened and ended with God’s grace.
 - b) Our relationship with God begins and “ends” with God’s grace.
 - c) Despite the problems the church is having, despite the pain, despite their worries, God’s grace is bigger than all of it and then some. I can’t comment any further than that.
19. With that, I’m finished with both Thessalonian letters.
- a) On the next page is a biography of my commentary sources.
 - b) What I’ll probably recall the most from these studies is how to deal with suffering. Suffering is part of all lives, and believers in Jesus are no exception.
 - i) It doesn’t make the pain go away, but God’s word helps you to get the proper perspective so you can have joy despite the circumstance.
 - c) If you ask me to play word association with these letters, and you say, “Thessalonians”, my response would be “comforting”. The letters are about comforting a church that is currently going through a lot of pain at the moment.
 - d) My hope is that these lessons add to your comfort in difficult situations. May God’s grace be upon you to comfort you through whatever situation you are in. That is why Paul ended with that tag line even after his signature line of Verse 17.
20. Let’s pray: “Heavenly Father, we give you thanks for this study. Help us to remember that Your grace is bigger than any and all situations we face in our life. May the Holy Sprit keep our focus upon You and give us the proper perspective. We pray for the leaders of our church and for those on the “front lines”. Give them, wisdom, discernment and protection in their lives. There is no mission, no assignment, no situation that is too small to be insignificant nor too big that You can’t handle. May you be glorified in all we do. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

Supplement: Bibliography

“If I have seen further, it is because I have stood on the shoulders of giants.” (Isaac Newton)

Without prayer and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, all these commentaries are useless. My prayer as I prepare these lessons was for God to show me the things He wanted *me* to learn, and second, the lessons He wanted me to pass on in my writings. I have quoted many sources throughout these lessons. If any of these writers appeal to you, I invite you to read or listen to further commentaries as listed below. I have also quoted other sources not listed, and those names are usually listed in the lessons. These other authors were usually quoted from the materials listed below and taken from those sources.

First and foremost, the greatest commentary on the Bible is the Bible itself. Here are the bible versions I use in this study. I mostly quote The New International Version (NIV), Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society; The New King James Version (NKJV). Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.; The King James Version (KJV) and The Living Bible (TLB) Copyright © 1971, 1986 by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, IL 60189. “The Message” copyright © 1993 by Eugene H. Peterson. All rights reserved. All the bible text is taken from Parsons Software: Electronic Edition STEP Files Copyright © 1999, Parsons Technology, Inc., all rights reserved.

Here are the commentaries I have referenced over the past lessons. The specific commentaries on Thessalonians are listed first, and then the bible-wide commentaries. They are listed in alphabetical order by author. The reference to “audio” commentary means the information was gathered via the Internet in Real Audio® or MP3® Format, unless otherwise stated.

1. Commentary on 1st Thessalonians by Allistar Begg. The “Belief and Behavior Series” Truth for Life Ministries. Available in various audio formats at <http://www.truthforlife.org/>
2. Commentary on 1st Thessalonians and 2nd Thessalonians by Jon Curson. It is in book form from Harvest House Publishing. It is also available in MP3® format <http://joncourson.com>
3. Commentary on 1st Thessalonians and 2nd Thessalonians by David Guzik. It is available for free in text format. The web address is <http://enduringword.com/commentaries/01.html> It is also published in book format.
4. Audio Commentary on Thessalonians by Chuck Missler, available at K-House Ministries 1-800-KHOUSE1. The web address is <http://www.khouse.org/> It is also available at <http://firefighters.org/html/library.cfm>
5. Commentary on 1st Thessalonians and 2nd Thessalonians by Ray Steadman Preached at Peninsula Bible Church in Palo Alto by Ray C. Stedman in 1987 and 1988. Messages are in HTML, PDF, and MP3 audio format. <http://pbc.org/dp/stedman/thessalonians/index.html>
6. The Defender’s Study Bible by Dr. Henry Morris World Publishing (1995) ISBN: 052910444X
7. The MacArthur Study Bible with commentary by John MacArthur Nelson Bibles (1997) ISBN: 0849912229
8. The Life Application Bible, Zondervan Publishing <http://www.zondervanbibles.com/0310919770.htm>
9. The Expositor’s Bible Encyclopedia, Zondervan Publications, (via CD-ROM 1998 release). This is a multi-volume encyclopedia with notes on every verse of the Bible. (It is available at Christian bookstores.) Paperback books are published on individual Bible books from this source.
10. When Critics Ask: A Popular Handbook on Bible Difficulties -- Norman L. Geisler, Thomas Howe; Baker Book House 1999 (Available at Christian Bookstores.)