

Thessalonians

Two Epistles

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The unconventional punctuation styles you will see are related to the way these studies were originally intended for the e-mail audience, using plain text to keep file sizes smaller for bulk mailing; creatively 'formatting' with punctuation, for various kinds of emphases, in the absence of formatting the actual type. You may find occasional misspellings, and the more rare cases of a Scripture reference going to a wrong passage; those will be 'typos', not intentional. With this type of POD (Print On Demand) publishing, it seems simplest, and the most prudent use of time, to not completely go through and revamp everything, but to just leave things as they are. Please accept this book, warts and all; but rather, please pay attention to, and receive God's Truth presented herein.

Thessalonians

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Introduction

Thessalonica is an interesting place with respect to Paul's missionary journeys. It was also a place not at all unlike the days in which we live (as this series begins: September, 2004).

When Paul first gets to Thessalonica, he goes "to the Jew first" (Rom1:16), as Jesus had mandated His Jewish apostles to be "witnesses" to Him, beginning "in Jerusalem" (Ac1:8, Lk24:47); he goes to the Jewish synagogue and reasons with them "for three sabbaths". (Ac17:2) Those who should have been receptive to God's Word, the Jews, for the most part rejected the message, and set up persecution against Paul and his travelling companions. However, "a great multitude" of Gentiles believed and "joined Paul and Silas". (vs4) When you read of the Berean Jews who "received the Word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily" (vs11), notice that their "nobleness" is in contrast to those Jews of Thessalonica. And the unbelieving Jews of Thessalonica are not content to kick Paul out of their city, they also go to Berea to stir up trouble there. (vs13)

So, this is the kind of atmosphere in which the predominantly Gentile Church is established in Thessalonica. Translate that to today, the established 'church' (like the Jews) with all its traditions, myth and ritual (Tit1:14), see this movement that sticks to God's Word as something that infringes on their authority and mind-control of those under them. Perhaps they also taunted: With all our vast education and traditional background going back to Moses, of whom we are the experts, you mean to say that "we are wrong, and you are right?"

So, as we read in these epistles of "affliction" (1:6), note 'where' the affliction comes from? The openly unbelieving, ambivalent world? Their fellow-gentiles? No! From that which has the label and claims to belong to God. Then it was "Judaism". Today it is the organized ecumenical apostate "[c]hurch", falsely called "[c]hristian". As I think on my past life, I don't think I've ever been persecuted by the unbelieving world-at-large. Sure, some of them might have poked a little fun at the fact that I did not join them in their taverns and for their sexual deviancies...but they never persecuted; they would joke good-naturedly, but would let-me-be; and in some cases actually 'respected' me for my stand. But it was always pastors and church boards/councils, or others with "christian" backgrounds who would either kick me out of their church, or call me before their councils to attempt to elicit confessions from me of wrong-doing, for sticking to God's Word, which naturally then condemned their behavior and practices. If this hadn't been America (with certain civil laws), in a couple of cases, they might have easily been of the heart to drag me out and stone me (as the Jews did to the early believers) ...such was the vitriolic hatred from some of them.

Notice it says this persecution came from the "Jews who were not persuaded" (Ac17:5) They had the label "Jew" (today: "christian"); but they were not persuaded (to the Gospel of Jesus Christ which Paul was presenting); they were unbelievers. They were not saved. As Paul says, "...not all those of Israel are Israel" (Rom9:6) They were Jews by birth, but they were not of the "faith of Abraham", who was their father by lineage. (Rom4:16)

Thus, these epistles are written to Believers, very much like the ones who are subscribed to this mailing list; specifically, those of you who have also "come out of her" (Rev18:4) and are now 'alone', apart from the organized church system; and also, you who have experienced similar 'afflictions' at the hands of -the- [c]hurch.

Just because we are not recorded in some church's 'membership' books, and don't regularly address some man as "The Rev Mr Dr", does not mean we are free of obligation to righteous living. We are followers of Christ and of God's Word, and as such, we are distinct from the world in which we live; something the [c]hurch doesn't seem to understand. The [c]hurch thinks it has standards...but our standards are higher. These epistles to Thessalonica address a few of those things. And interestingly enough, some of those are very much -characteristic- issues that we face today; such as sexual perversion (1Th4:3), working for a living (1Th4:11, 2Th3:10) and not being freeloading busybodies, etc.

In addition, today we see world events unfolding, propelling towards the final fulfillments of prophecy just prior to Jesus' return. Christians are "looking up" in anticipation of Christ's return. We see things happening, and make mental note how similar they look to various prophetic words in the Scriptures.

Well...these Thessalonian epistles are also some of Scripture's key writings regarding Christ's return, and the meting out of God's wrath. While many other Scripture passages address God's wrath from the perspective of those expecting to 'receive' His wrath, the Thessalonian epistles are written -to- Believers; the perspective of those anticipating Jesus' return, to go meet Him and be with Him.

Notice I keep talking about -both- epistles. Most other epistles that have the designations "1" and "2", each can stand alone as distinct entities, although in the case of Corinthians and Timothy, the "2"s do have some "follow-up" material to complete the "1"s. But seeing as how the Thessalonians both cover Christ's return as they do, in order to have a full picture of that subject, we really do 'need' to address both epistles in this series. While we will plan to begin with "1", and then go to "2", we will also, nevertheless, plan to keep them both together as one study series.

While there are smatterings of different topics dealing with 'how' the Christian is to live in this world, how we are to conduct ourselves before

God, there are two topics that exist throughout both: 1) Afflictions, and 2) Rapture/Day of the Lord

The context of the Christian life and expectancy of Christ's return is affliction. Affliction is the backdrop to both these topics. As we will see, affliction was promised to the Church by Jesus: "In the world you have affliction..." (Jn16:33) That is a 'given'. It is a fact and characteristic of the Christian-life; as he says to Timothy: "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." (2Tim3:12) When a person chooses Christ, and rejects the world's "temporary pleasures", it often results in "suffering affliction". (Heb11:25)

And even more 'smattered' throughout are the little passing mentions of the coming Wrath, the Day of the Lord, the Resurrection, the Rapture. Yes, there are the 'famous' key passages in 1th4 and 2th2 that everybody rushes to, and wrangles about their meanings. But actually, -throughout-the epistles are little 'words' and 'phrases' tucked in here and there, that I think most people miss on their way to "twisting" (2Pt3:16) those famous passages. I said "passing" mentions. It's not like Paul is blurting them out and making a big deal about them, but is assuming they know and understand them. As if for us to comment: This that we know, of course this is the case...everybody knows it; it's part of our core beliefs.

But, just as people wrangle about them today, there were people twisting doctrine back then, too. Just as there are those today who claim that the "rapture" is a 'new' doctrine not found in Scripture, but we know it was taught by Jesus and Paul; so, too, there were today's scoffers back then, trying to lead astray the Believers and sow confusion. Just as the Scriptural doctrine of the Rapture exists today, and there are its detractors; so it was in Paul's day.

Since this is only the "introduction" to the series, and each topic will be taken in order, and the preparation of this series will be on-going 'as' we progress, I don't know 'now' how the Spirit will lead in covering each Resurrection/Rapture/Wrath topic as we come to them. But it is my thought now to note each such reference as we find them, and to create a sort-of "nutshell" list; and then, when we have reached the end, to specifically tie all those nuggets together into its own little epilogue-ish ending.

However, these two epistles -are- for [C]hristians. Unbelievers live like the world, so they won't much care for the parts about living holy lives. And since the rapture isn't for them, and the coming wrath -is-, they also will not understand that subject. But, being for [C]hristians, it is both earthly and Heavenly-minded.

How do we live while on this earth? But the earth is not our ultimate goal; we also wait for the return of Jesus Christ to come and retrieve us to Himself, just as He promised: "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I

will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also." (Jn14:3) We look to this earth in terms of our faithfulness; but the work we do here is also with our eyes Heaven-ward: "looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Tit2:13) Thus, with such expectation: "...everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure." (1Jn3:3)

That is what the Thessalonian epistles are about...

Testimony - (1Th 1:3-10)

"We give thanks to God always for you all...remembering...your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ..." (vs3) (Please: as we go through these studies, the reader will wish to have your Bible open, and read the entire passage, to include into your mind/heart what we edit for space considerations.)

As a person thinks about anybody else, what sorts of things come to mind when their names come up? George Bush: "bumbling vocabulary". Jay Leno: long chin. Hitler: goose-stepping "heil hitler". Kruschew: pounding shoe on table "we will bury you". Reagan: "well, there you go again". Casius Clay: "sting like a bee, stay pretty like a butterfly". Elvis Presley: obscene body movements and "thank you very much". Laura Bush: the embodiment of graciousness. Teresa Hines Kerry: the embodiment of a sorely foul mouth. If you see somebody you know approaching you, does your pulse quicken in anticipation of a friendly exchange; or does your mind go, "Oh no! Not them again! What do -they- want?!" ?

If we turn this around upon ourselves, to consider what others might think of us, what are we known for? Are we known for being honest, helpful, caring, peaceable? Or are we known for being moody, pugnacious, self-centered and uncaring? And furthermore, would we be remembered as being Godly Christians; or as just another Tom, Dick or Harry? And if they think of us as "christian", of what sort would that be...that they see us regularly, on-schedule, getting into our car with suit-and-tie going -to-church, carrying our big 'black' KJV Bible? Or would they remember us as somebody within whom Christ was 'alive'?

Notice that Thessalonica's testimony did not stagnate just in their own city, but was known throughout Macedonia and Achaia. (vs7) If you look at a map of the region, Macedonia was the vast area to the west and north of Thessalonica, and this area extended down the Greek peninsula to where Achaia was approaching the regions of Athens and Corinth. Their notoriety spread somewhat like the recent phenomenon of the "Pensacola Outpouring" or the "Toronto Vineyard" activities a few years ago. 'Everybody' knew about these things. These, of course, were demonic outpourings. But notice what Thessalonica was known for: -NOT- tongues, slayings, gold dust, visions, and other such hallyballoo; the things of wild demonic fantasies, only to see them still living in the lusts of the world.

But no! They were known for their Work, Labor, Patience. (vs3) And most of all, in stark contrast to Toronto/Pensacola, their TURNING TO GOD FROM IDOLS. They had turned away from the world, and were serving God. (vs9) And which god was it they were serving? The "living and true" God.

But also notice (since we reference Toronto/Pensacola), their transformation was not in "the spirit", but rather the Holy Spirit. (vs5) They were not "spirit-filled" with demons, but they were saved in the "living and true God's" (vs9) HOLY SPIRIT. They were not going forward, signing pledge cards, and merely giving lip-service; but were being saved in the "power" of the Holy Spirit. (vs5) And there was no wishy-washiness once they were saved, claiming to "not being sure" if they were saved or not.

There's a lot of people today who claim to be "christians", they "think" they are, but they are "not sure".

Please hear this: If you're not sure... YOU'RE NOT.

If you were saved through the hearing of God's Word (Rom10:17), and you have God's Word "abiding in you" (Jn5:38,8:31) and know it, that is the basis for your assurance. (1Jn5:13) And this is so, because you, like the Thessalonians, were saved "in the Holy Spirit" (vs5) When you have the Holy Spirit, you -know- it, because one of His functions in your heart is to "bear witness...that we are children of God" (Rom8:16) If you don't have the Holy Spirit, thus being minus that witness, you are "not His". (Rom8:9) The only way a person can be saved is the same way the Thessalonians were, "in the Holy Spirit". Thus, there is "assurance" (vs5)

What was their salvation based upon? Their own desires and efforts? Their own strength? No. What they saw around them from man was "much affliction". (vs6) Yes, the Jews had stirred up trouble, chasing Paul out of Thessalonica, and even following him to Berea. But even prior to their arrival, Paul and Silas had been beaten and imprisoned at Philippi; where Paul had cast the demon out of the girl, and then God had sent the huge earthquake in the middle of the night. Thus, Paul and Silas had arrived still physically sore from that beating they had received. And as we continue through the series, we will see that this persecution extended to the new Thessalonian converts, as well.

Something that satan never seems to get a grasp on is the concept that, when he afflicts and persecutes, thinking to diminish God's kingdom, that is actually when God's kingdom thrives. Remember when Egypt afflicted Israel, because of their fear how vast their population was growing, that God made Israel grow even more. (Ex1:12) If a person reads books related to Christian persecution, one finds that the courage and faith of God's True Believers in the face of persecution actually causes -more- unbelievers to turn to God, when they see the martyrs' faith.

While the church of "Philadelphia" experiences "wide open doors" (Rev3:8), it also leads to pockets of "easy believerism". When everything is going along smoothly and peacefully, human nature is to then become complacent. There is nothing to "stand up for". Everything that has 'life' experiences struggle. The birth of a child involves extreme pain and struggle. A seed sprouting must push up a proportionately 'heavy' weight

of dirt above it, to poke above ground. Birds must 'peck' at the inside of their shells to come out; if they don't peck, but are helped out, they die.

In a similar sort of way, when the Thessalonian believers came to faith in Christ, they did so in the midst of "much affliction". They saw what Paul and Silas had been through, they saw the hearts of such men who loved God sooooo sincerely to not only suffer at Philippi, but to come to them and endure more suffering, just so that -they- could hear about Christ. There is no greater love than to give one's life for another. (Jn15:13) Next-greatest love would have to be, to suffer persecution on behalf of another, just so they could be saved. And so, it says, they "became imitators" of Paul and Silas, in receiving the Word in the midst of the persecution.

Notice also... they weren't crying and moping at this persecution-ridden salvation. They came to the Lord "with joy of the Holy Spirit" (vs6) Remember how Paul and Silas had been singing hymns in prison at Philippi? (Ac16:25) Through their testimony in such a manner to those prisoners, when the earthquake ripped the place open, the prisoners did not run away and escape, and the jailer and his family got saved. Well, in Thessalonica the new believers also followed their example of "joy" in the Lord, in the midst of persecutions.

And in turn, their testimony became known to those in Macedonia and Achaia. -This- was the nature of their testimony. (Somewhat like the testimony of Believers in places like Korea and China, where true Christians meet in secret, but also it comes out that the True Church of Jesus Christ is thriving) In the midst of persecution, coming to faith in Christ, and thriving on through persecution: living Faith, Love and Patience. (vs3)

See how all these elements tie together?

And what is the patience? An empty patience with no focus? It is a patience based on Hope. (vs3) Hope in what? "...our Lord Jesus Christ.." And a question we asked above, but never yet answered: Was their salvation based on their own efforts? No. It was based on the same thing their hope was. They had -confidence- in the reality of their salvation because they knew their "...election by God" (vs4)

It is God who "draws" (Jn6:44) and saves, and it is hope in Jesus Christ that makes us persevere. Paul said: "For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep safe what I have committed to Him until that Day." (2Ti1:12)

While it is God who draws and elects us, it is Jesus' resurrection that guarantees Eternal Life. Our "hope" is the expectation and "waiting" for Jesus' return "from Heaven" (vs10) If God was promising a "resurrection of the just" (Lk14:14), but He couldn't even raise Jesus from the dead, would

that not be a hollow promise. But Jesus "has been raised from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1co15:20) Our hope is not in empty promises of "blind faith". We are not stepping out in blind faith into a black void. No! Jesus has gone before. He is seated at the Father's "right hand" (1Pt3:22), and as he promised, is coming again to "receive" us to Himself. (Jn14:3) Until that event, we "wait for His Son from Heaven" (vs10)

That "blessed hope" is of His "glorious appearing". (Tit2:13) And what is Jesus doing when He appears? Among other things, He "delivers us from the coming wrath" (vs10b)

Here is our first little "pre-trib" nutshell nugget. Notice those closing words of the chapter. Many so-called post-tribbers think the Church goes - through- a period of time they label "the tribulation".

First of all, you will not find any place in Scripture a period-of-time called "Tribulation". It simply is nowhere in Scripture. There is a 7-year period that might more appropriately be called Daniel's "70th week". (Dan9:27) A period of 7 years which is also prophetically split in the middle as 3 1/2 years (Dan7:25, 12:7 Rev12:14), and Revelation speaks of 42 months, 1260 days, etc. (Rev11:2, 13:5) This period of time will include peace as well as tribulations caused by human governments and agencies. It will include aspects of God's wrath meted out to the world by the "two witnesses" (Rev11:3-6), and will culminate in the time of "Jacob's trouble" (Jer30:7) and a relatively short period of a month or two of astronomical turbulence upon the earth which causes earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, meteoric bombardments of earth (Joel2:30-31), a complete remapping of earth's topography (Re16:20), as well as likely a displacement of earth into a different orbit around the sun. (Is13:13, Zec14:4-10) We've addressed these things at other times, so won't go into detail here with chapter-and-verse; but just mentioning them as a cluster of reference information for the current topic.

These so-called "post-tribbers" taunt a Church that would wish to escape "tribulation". Well, notice that Thessalonica is a Church that is ensconced smack-dab in the -middle- of "tribulation". And yet Paul speaks of being "delivered" from "wrath". Were the Thessalonians "chicken"? Were they trying to ride an 'easy' lift to Heaven and escape tribulation? No! They were in-the-middle of it! That was one of the very characteristics of their Faith and testimony....that they were turning to God from idols in the - context- OF 'tribulation'.

Thus, 'tribulation' and the coming 'wrath' are different events, are they not. Yes, the Church does experience affliction. Jesus promised it. (Jn16:33) But (God's) wrath is not intended for the Church. Jesus comes to snatch (rapture) the Church out of the earth to be "delivered" from that wrath. Does not simple logic demand that if wrath is coming, and deliverance

takes place, that the deliverance takes place 'before' the wrath....otherwise, deliverance is not deliverance. Yes?

We should be living such lives that, when that Day comes, we will be found "worthy to escape" those things and to "stand before the Son of Man". (Lk21:36)

Gospel Presented - (1Th 2:1-12)

"For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not without fruit" (vs1)

OK, so...the church at Thessalonica has gained a reputation throughout Macedonia and Achaia for its phenomenal growth through the midst of persecution. (1:7-8) But "how" did this all happen? What sorts of 'programs' were used? What famous movie stars or athletes did they invite as guest speakers? Which of the famous rock bands provided the 'opening gig'? What about the budget and fund-raising for all the brochures, TV spots, and stadium rental? Wardrobe? Spotlights and fireworks displays? And what of the "dynamic preaching"? All these 'necessary' ingredients to "grow-a-church"! ???

Please read those 12 verses and see if you find any of that there.

In fact, addressing the last item first, Paul was held in contempt by some. If you had continued on beyond Achaia and asked those from Corinth (Corinth in those days was considered like NYC is today, likely the most wealthy city in the world; it was the "happenin' place"; anybody who was anybody would be sure to have a good reputation in Corinth; it was the mecca!), they would have given you the scoop on Paul: "his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account." (2co10:10) If you want something 'dynamic' and with pizzazz, you -definitely- DON'T WANT PAUL as guest speaker!

So, since Paul was a nobody...and yet, the complaint was that he was turning "the world upside down" (Ac17:6)...-WHAT- was his "method"?

Paul's preaching was "in much conflict" (vs2) Like we reviewed earlier, his party had just come from Philippi: he had cast out a demon from a girl, they had been beaten, put in prison, and then there had been a big earthquake, and then politically-correctly (when it was discovered that: oops! we beat Roman citizens without due-process) chased out of town. I suspect if somebody had patted them on the back, they were wincing in pain. They were moving around 'stiffly' from the wounds.

Paul did not preach a "snake-oil" message, promising prosperity, if only people would give him their "seed" monies. Paul did not deceive people. (vs3) He did not seek to flatter people. (vs4-5) He did not go around gathering up collections to help "pay expenses"; but rather, they "worked" for their own living (vs9) so as not to burden the people to whom they ministered. He did not command people, boss them around, and play the big-shot barking out orders while he himself didn't lift a pinky.

First of all, Paul's obligation was to God; to "please" God. (vs4) Paul was "gentle" with them. (vs7) Paul's habit was not to brow-beat, but to "reason" with people "from the Scriptures" (Ac17:2)

They presented the Gospel of Jesus Christ. (vs8) But they did not stop with that. They didn't preach, and then with a little wave of the hand, OK...on your way with you. No. They also gave of themselves to the people, to nurture them along like parents do their children. (vs11) They 'lived' holy lives before the people. (vs10) They preached, and also demonstrated by their lives that which they preached. You did not hear them preaching against immorality at the crusade, and then later find them in bed with a strange woman at the hotel.

This particular study is shorter, because the methods God uses are 'simple'. It is God's Word (Rom10:17), followed up by the example to be "imitated". (1:6) Just as children imitate their parents, so too, Paul exhorted the churches to "be imitators" of himself and God. (1Co4:16, 11:1, Eph5:1) You have a holy example... follow it. It's how Moses taught Israel in the sacrificial rituals in the O.T. Paul's life was so holy before God, and with a clear "conscience" (Ac23:1, 24:16, 2Ti1:3), that he was able to exhort: I'm living righteously before God; live like I do. He did not have to cower behind the adage, "do what I say, not what I do". No! He could confidently invite: Follow me, as I follow Christ. (1co11:1)

Years ago I candidated at a small church that was on the verge of closing its doors, to be its pastor. Without going into any details here, I did not become their pastor. A year or so later, for other reasons, we moved to the city of which their church resided in one of its suburbs. By then, the church had disbanded. But I called up one of the men who had been a leader and asked to meet with him, which I did, at the 'building' where he and another man at that very moment were boarding up the windows. (You see: whilst candidating I had felt the Lord wanted me there, that the Lord wanted a Bible-teaching witness there) In conversation I offered myself to be their pastor for-free (no salary), to establish a "Bible-teaching ministry". I suggested to them that if they were to establish a place where nothing-but-the-Bible were taught, that they might be surprised at the growth that could happen. The elder of the two bitterly muttered under his breath that he didn't know of any place that ever experienced growth from -just- Bible "teaching". They were looking for somebody with "programs" to conduct Church-growth "methods".

A few years previously I had known just such a church. It was your run-of-the-mill (although, famous in its area) small church, with no life. Their choir director left with squabbles in the music department. (You know, don't you: when satan was kicked out of Heaven he landed in the church choir loft) Then, they got this new pastor. His sole ministry was as a -teacher-. He had no programs. They did not pass around the offering plate, and he never once spoke of money or giving...people gave through little collection containers in the back, somewhat obscurely. Where you used to have to

peer across the room to see if anybody was there, 'now', as it became known in the community that he was teaching the Bible, they regularly had to bring out the folding chairs to line down the aisles for people to sit, and it was standing-room-only in the back...the place was PACKED!! EVERY Sunday! He was not even a "people person", going around warmly shaking everybody's hand. But people were so starved for God's Word, that they came. Of course, eventually, satan's claws came out hissing and scratching, and after a few years, he was politicked out with -much- vitriol.

Hmmm....sounds just like Paul!

This is what he exhorted Timothy: "Preach the Word. Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching." (2Ti4:2)

Preach it! Live it! Nurture it!

Gospel Received - (1Th 2:13-20)

"For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the Word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe." (vs13)

It's been a long time now since this query has come in, but periodically, there, for awhile, I would get asked, "What's your name? I can't find your name anywhere!" Some, when taunting some teaching they've read that they don't agree with, taunt about not putting one's name with what they proclaim....that if a person believes so strongly about something, they should "own up" to it by including their name. Drive by some churches and prominently on the sign out front will be "Rev. Mr-preacher, pastor/vicar/rector" You buy a book, and quite frequently the prominent item on its cover is the author's name in big bold letters. Or you go to Somebody's Name crusade. Or the album is by So-n-so, with their face plastered on the cover. Visit websites to read articles, and prominently at the top it is announced, "By: So-n-so"

Paul said, "But may it never be that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ..." (Ga6:14) When John was preaching, and they asked the same thing, "Who are you?" he replied, simply: I'm a voice crying in the wilderness. He said of Jesus, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (Jn3:30) The O.T. prophets continually proclaimed, "Thus says Jehovah" (Ex4:22,etc)

Jesus was the only one who had the authority to say, "But I say to you" (Mt5:22,etc) Any prophet (preacher) who proclaims does so at the command and 'burden' (Is31:1,etc) of the Lord, "You shall SPEAK MY WORDS to them, whether they will hear or whether they will forbear, for they are most rebellious." (Ezk2:7)

In the previous lesson we observed how Paul's 'method' was program-less. He did not have fancy big shows to attract the crowds. He proclaimed God's Word, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, in gentleness and humility; and demonstrated what he preached through his own life. And what people saw was, "Christ in [him] the hope of glory" (Col1:27) The words Paul spoke were not of his own devising, but from God through the Holy Spirit.

When a program is put on, what people see is the show. When a rock band is brought in, what people see and feel is demonic sensuality. But when God's Word is proclaimed, what people see is Jesus Christ, because Jesus -is- "the Word" (Jn1:1-4) This was Paul's prime motivation, "For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified." (1Co2:2) And Jesus Christ is not proclaimed through carnal weapons (2Co10:4), but in the power of the Holy Spirit. (1:5)

Thus, when God's Word is proclaimed through the Holy Spirit, it is received in kind, as God's Word. The people might have been "imitating" Paul's lifestyle...but they did so because they had received God's Word. They weren't going around like carnal Corinth and saying, "I am of Paul..I am of Peter" (1Co1:12); but... THIS IS GOD'S WORD.

Paul might have spoken of them imitating him (1:6), but he was not assuming the ultimate authority to himself, as though to say, "I, Paul, say to you". No. "you..became imitators of the churches...in Judea" (vs14) Christ's church started out of Jerusalem. They are not Paul's churches. They are not Peter's churches. They are -God's- churches...in Christ Jesus. Jesus had said, "I will build My church" (Mk16:18)

Paul is also now shifting the focus away from himself. What they have seen is Paul and his afflictions. But he now focuses their view away from himself, and expresses to them how these afflictions are also experienced by the believers back in Judea, where the church started. (After all, had -he- not been one of the persecutors at one time!)

But He also focuses the persecution away from "us", to where it began, when they crucified Jesus. (vs15)

You see...persecution and affliction is not just our own little localized situation... such that we should mope around, "poor me! poor me! poor us! poor us! See how rough we have it?" No. Persecution is a church-wide characteristic. Jesus promised it. (Jn16:33) And the Church is persecuted because Jesus was persecuted. Jesus explained it: "Remember the Word that I said to you, A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My Word, they will keep yours also." (Jn15:20) The Thessalonians were experiencing it, just as the Judeaean believers did. And as all believers do, universally, as Peter says: "Beloved, do not be astonished at the fiery trial which is to try you, as though something unheard of was happened to you; but rejoice in so far as you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also rejoice with exceeding joy. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. According to them He is blasphemed, but according to you He is glorified." (1Pet4:12-14)

But notice that for those doing the persecuting, their just due is "wrath". (vs16) We'll add this to our little "nutshell" and discuss it in-depth at the end. But notice that "wrath" is not for the Church; but one of its purposes is to bring retribution upon those who persecute the Church. Thus, again: Why would God put the Church -through- something designed for those who punish the Church? Wrath is for "them", not 'us'

When Paul stands before his Lord, to receive his "well done, good and faithful servant" (Mt25:20-21), what is one of the "talents" that he gained? "Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His

coming?" (vs19-20) Paul would not boast of church buildings, and all sorts of other things. He would be bringing the Thessalonian believers before the Lord. They were the "fruit" (2:1) of his labors. And they were coming to the Lord, not with programs and rock bands; but with the Word of God. (vs13)

"And they overcame him through the blood of the Lamb and through the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives unto death." (Rev12:11)

Gospel Follow-up - (1Th 3:1-13)

"...and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith.." (vs2)

Why was Paul in Athens? (vs1) More persecution. After the beating at Philippi Paul had gone to Thessalonica; the church got started. Persecution chased him from there to Berea; where the Word was received. But the Jews from Thessalonica went to Berea to stir up trouble there. That's the point at which "the brethren brought [Paul] to Athens". (Ac17:15) A place of physical safety and refuge for a little rest.

But while Paul is at Athens, having been persecuted...what is it that's on his mind and heart? Oh, poor me! ?? No! He was -worried- for the new Thessalonian Believers (3:5) Why? He didn't want them to be like some of those 'seeds' in Jesus' parable, that got snatched up by birds, and choked out by weeds, and other means; not being fruitful. "...lest somehow the tempter had tempted you, and our labor should be in vain"

You see...Paul did not believe in that false doctrine of the Reformation that today is called, "Once saved-always saved". He didn't believe in the "methodology" of getting people to walk-the-aisle, pray-the-prayer, make-the-commitment, sign-the-card, shake-the-hand, get dipped under some water...and now you are "insured" of Heaven....no-matter-what.

He was always urging to "-CONTINUE- in the things which you have learned" (2Ti3:14) Scripture speaks of "endurance" (Heb10:36, Ja5:10, Re13:10) It speaks of Eternal Life as "..that you may CONTINUE TO BELIEVE in the name of the Son of God" (1Jn5:13) (Yes, that is the correct verb tense from John. I know it doesn't agree with tradition, KJV or Reformation. But it is what the Greek says. If you don't trust the NKJV, you can corroborate with the ALT. LITV, MKJV or Geneva won't help your comparison, because they are Reformation-based. I make this point, because this is one (of many) key passage that refutes the OSAS false doctrine...a simple thing like verb tense making -the- case, in this instance.)

You see...it wasn't enough to just preach the Gospel, and then leave the new "baby" converts to flounder. He had been with them, as a "father" is with his "children". (2:11) Parents do not procreate, stuff the baby full of milk and pabulum....and then run off, forcing the baby to fend for itself. Not hardly! And if something happens to the parent such that they are hospitalized with injuries, where is their heart? "How are my babies??" A friend comes along: "Will you go look after my babies, and take care of them for me! Tell me how they are doing!"

So Paul sends Timothy. (3:2) Paul considers Timothy like his own "son" (2Ti2:1) because he had nurtured him up in his faith. But Paul introduces Timothy to the Thessalonians as a "fellow laborer" (3:2); attributing to him full-status as a minister of the Gospel. Paul had said to Timothy, "Let no one despise your youth" (1Ti4:12); and Paul treats him in like manner before others.

How many parents -never- allow their children to grow up! How many live like "Raymond" (TV's "everybody loves raymond"), always under the belittlement of their nagging, intrusive, busy-body mothers. It's like I read in a publication recently about this small church where the young man was pastor, where his siblings and parents were church members. At church business meetings there were arguments; and as one sibling was arguing against the pastor (her brother), she came out with, "Well, I changed your diapers when you were little!" And after more strife, finally the father, having had 'enough', makes the statement to the family (and that sister): "He's not your brother... he's your pastor"

So...while Paul is side-lined from them for a time, he sends his "son", now "brother and minister of God" (3:2) to do some follow-up work at Thessalonica. What were the concerns Timothy dealt with?

1) Afflictions. Paul was "appointed" to afflictions. (3:3) Even when he was first saved, Ananias was told by God "for I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name" (Ac9:16) Paul had said more afflictions were to come, which they did. (3:4)

2) To verify and build-up their new-found faith: (vs5,10)

- a) that the tempter had not diverted them (vs5)
- b) that they were standing fast in the Lord (vs8)
- c) that their love would abound (vs12)
- d) they they would be blameless and holy (vs13)
- e) in anticipation of Christ's coming (vs13)

3) Paul was encouraged by their faith (vs7)

So yes, the Christian life includes afflictions. For some it is severe physical persecution. For others it might be only mostly -verbal- mockings; which is no-less acceptable in God's sight, as Jesus said, "Blessed are you when they shall revile and persecute you, and shall SAY every evil word against you falsely because of Me. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in Heaven, for in this manner they persecuted the prophets who were before you." (Mt5:11-12)

But also, they were not left to flounder. Paul had begun the work, and their faith. Now, he was sending Timothy (in his place) to give further nurturing. Yes, for further teaching in doctrine; and also for encouragement. Yes, open persecution is a rough way to get started; thus, there is a Godly

principle that Paul teaches... to "ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER" (4:18)(1co16:15, Eph6:22, Col4:8) Yes, and also those "in any affliction" (2co1:4)

But also to "establish" them. (vs2) The term "establish" involves strength, straightening, making firm. If you set up a tent for camping, or whatever, you don't just flop the tarp out there, and stick some poles in the grommets to raise the roof, and pronounce it "ready". No. (depending on the 'kind' of tent you have) You might stake out the floor panel, raise the poles, pound some stakes for the various ropes to stretch out the roof, flaps and so forth. Once things are 'up', perhaps you go around and 'snug' up the ropes. Then, you might go 'verify' that the poles are standing 'straight'. Then do some more rope-snugging, to make sure they are sufficiently tight, and 'even' all the way around. Now the tent is 'established' and ready for occupancy.

And so, once we get past the initial trauma of the persecution, and we are established in the fact that we are saved and in the Scriptures ("a" & "b"), what are the things to work on? What specific things do we need to watch out for? "c" thru "e" Love, holiness and readiness for Christ's return. That's what the rest of the epistle will be about.

Notice how, in an epistle that is divided into 5 chapters, 3 of those chapters are all introduction, reminder and encouragement. Introducing the epistle; reminding them how the Gospel had come to them; and encouragement in the context of the persecutions. And now, finally, in the last two chapters we finally get 'down-to-business' with the things he wants to teach.

-LOTS- of 'encouragement'. But notice that there is none-of-this "there-there" patting on the shoulder... Oh, my! But isn't this all sooo terrible! This cross that we must bear! Moaning, sighing, crying... sniff, sniff, sniff. (Kinda like, I saw a little snippet of the current "Big Brother" program, I think it was, and one of the females who had been 'evicted' previously was shown whining, and -proclaiming- "HOW STRONG" she was, as she then burst into blubbery tears, continuing to whine and proclaim her self-fortitude. I about laughed my socks off at that: Whiny-whine..."I (sniff) -really- am (sniff) a strong (sniff) person"...boo hoo...dabbing-at-the-eyes!)

No...the encouragement is: Yes, we have persecution. It comes with the territory, of being a Christian. Buck-up, suck-it-in, chin-up... all, whatever expressions athletes or marines might use to "encourage" each other to BE STRONG, don't go getting soft, etc. We don't have the option to fold and cave-in. Salvation is not for those who "put their hand to the plow, and then look back", such are not "fit" (Lk9:62); but for those who "endure to the end" (Mt10:22); ones of "whom the world [is] not worthy" (Heb11:38) who "do not accept deliverance" (vs35) in the face of persecution; but who "..having done all, to stand" (Eph6:13b)

Purity - (1Th 4:1-8)

"For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual perversion" (vs3)

For most of my life I have tended to be a sound-sleeper. But every once in awhile, for reasons totally unknown to me, I will wake up around 2am, and lie there in bed, sleepless, for a couple of hours. I am not ill, no pains or discomforts...just... I can't sleep. Typically, I am actually 'sleepy'. But am lying there, awake.

As this is being written (Aug13) a few nights ago I had another one of these events. Lying there, sleepless...when, the phone rang. Now, my phone, being 'unlisted', and only about three people knowing my number, it typically never rings. Once in awhile, somebody dialing the wrong number, etc. But, I don't have a whole rolodex full of people I have phone conversations with. If it weren't for the need for internet dial-up because of VW, I very possibly might not even own a phone. So, when the phone does ring at home, it is a major event.

This particular call was even more notable. I lay there, letting the phone ring (as I do with that phone) not answering it, waiting for the answering machine to 'beep', to see if anybody would then speak into the machine. And what erupted was a cacophony of the most vulgar, perverse bunch of ranting I've ever heard. In years-past I've worked in situations where fellow-workers didn't seem to know how to speak, but what every-other-word was something sexually explicit. But coming from the answering machine on this occasion -every- word had to do with anatomy, activities, the kinds of females that gad about from dog-to-dog, and their mothers. Ranting on-and-on. I got up, picked up the phone and -yelled- at the person to "Get off the phone!!!" Hung up. He was still going at it. I then turned and turned off the answering machine that was recording all this; picked up the phone, and he was still going at it. So when I yelled again, threatening to call the police, then he went into this extremely hi-speed 'chanting/muttering' of these perversities. When the 'message' first began, I thought perhaps a 'drunk' had dialed the wrong number, and was singing what he presumed (in his perverse state) to be a "love song" to somebody he had just been with. But as he went into his hi-speed mode, the speech became 'perfect' with the clearest enunciation one could imagine...and I never imagined a 'person' could speak so fast, and so clearly, stringing together -such- words as he was spewing out! Just utterly, totally foul! You could scrape the 'outside' of the bottom of the barrel, and still not be 'low' enough, for what his mouth was uttering!

I've been wondering "why?" such a call should come to my phone. 'Only reason I can figure is because satan also knows what this epistle contains. He knows what this passage speaks of. And he can see that I've been working on this series, and knew this subject was coming up. Perhaps I

needed a good strong dose to firmly understand the utter depravity of our world today?

I live a clean life. Sure, I get bombarded by the same commercials you-all do. But being somewhat of a hermit as I am, being self-employed, and when I write these VW writings, I'm in my little isolated 'corner'. My home and store are my refuge from the world. The world can be going crazy, and I can hear the sour 'mood' of traffic going by the store, but within my own walls, I live in a little sheltered place of "peace". I haven't been working in a construction crew type setting in many years, nor do I frequent the local taverns, nor do I make a point of driving where the working girls ply their 'trade'. So...perhaps I needed to see the wickedness for what it is? The same way Ezekiel was shown Israel's depravity? (Ezk8)

There have been occasions recently to converse with a male (across the fence) who prefers males. Did you know that they also have "prostitutes"? Males hiring themselves out to other males. Years ago I worked at a place where my 'work-station' was next to a (so-called) "working girl", and the female to the other side of her had a boyfriend who was a "pimp"; so, in overhearing their conversations I got quite an 'education' there.

Sorry...if you live a sheltered life like I do, sorry to be giving these glimpses of the dregs of immorality. But we need to understand the utter depravity of what God calls us to be holy and separate from.

I mentioned the commercials. I'm getting very disgusted with some of them as of late! If it weren't for the fact that there are some things that need watching, I wouldn't even turn the TV on anymore. Some of the commercials zoom the camera in on things that, if a male were looking at a female with similar focus, he'd be called a pervert, and in years gone-by, he would have received a severe slap across his face; or if another protective male were nearby, he would take the jerk outside and teach him some manners. They invite: "look at this"...and then show stuff otherwise considered "pornography". The stuff of so-called "men's magazines", or workshop pin-ups. And it's on prime-time!

So then...what about 'normal' everyday life? What do people wear? How do they behave? And then, let's get to so-called "christians"! What do -they- wear? How do -they- behave? Well...they more and more have learned to behave like the commercials!

Except for some of the 'fun' commercials, like the current Dodge one: after the road-race, chirping to a stop at the stop sign... "Duuude! What'chu got in that thing? Oh, an amp, guitar, surf board and some 2x4s" (for you Americans) ...pretty much -everything- is debauchery. If they aren't selling sex, directly, with close-ups of underwear, and testimonials of "the experience" after using Viagra or Cialis, they are selling other things with sexual overtones. Hardly anything involving male/female interactions is ever depicted anymore, but what there isn't innuendo or overt actions.

There is hardly any comedy anymore that doesn't contain a huge dose of (usually) explicit reference. Was it Richard Dawson who used to -always-kiss the female contestants on Family Feud? How many of these reality shows also make a point of featuring near-nudity, and appropriate camera angles. How many of the dating shows do so without the activity nearly going all-the-way on prime time TV before the whole world.

"...that you should ABSTAIN from SEXUAL PERVERSION..."

The word "perversion" was chosen for the VW-edition here (other versions say "fornication") because the Greek word is one that includes just about everything imaginable: adultery, fornication, homosexuality, lesbianism, bestiality, incest.

Before we go on...we are not talking about the God-ordained husband-wife relationship, which is blessed by God. "Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled; but prostitutes and adulterers God will judge." (Heb13:4) Sex is not sin. Sex is not perverse.... between a man and his wife. In fact, the Song of Solomon illustrates that it is a beautiful thing, full of passion and whatever variety the two desire. God devoted an entire book to the subject.

But God commands to abstain from sexual "perversion". Any of those things that are counter to God's beautiful design and creation.

Adam investigated all of God's creation, and found nothing designed for himself. And then God created the woman, and brought her to him. The man is to leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, as they become "one flesh". (Gen2;24) God lists all the taboo relationships in Lev18.

The man and his wife. Period. Anything else is 'perverse'.

What does perverse mean? To be "directed away from what is right and good". What does it mean to 'pervert' something? What was said, plus, to bring to a bad or worse condition; debase. To put to wrong or improper use. Isn't that the gist of Romans ch1?

"For this reason God gives them up to vile passions. For even their women change the natural use for what is contrary to nature. Likewise also the men, abandoning the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust toward one another, men with men performing what is shameful, and receiving the retribution within themselves, the penalty which is fitting for their error." (Rom1:26-27)

God did not give women beauty for them to pervert themselves into bitches (please read that word in context of this sentence) to entice every panting dog to come sniffing after them! But that's what they do. That often seems to be their #1 purpose in life. Their beauty was given to them for

their Song-of-Solomon experience. Men were not given reproductive drives for the purpose of bedding every woman they see, including those of their friends, and other married men. But if you are around men with fleshly lusts, that's what the locker room talk is about. And judging by the number of single-parent children and abortions there are, taking into account that most use contraceptives, it seems apparent that the talk is not empty talk...but is acted out on a regular basis.

It is contrary to God's design. God designed one thing, and man has perverted it into something else.

Thus, the "will of God" for the Believer? (vs3) SANCTIFICATION. What is sanctification? Holiness. What is holiness? A state of being "separated" from. When the world is one way, the Believer is -not- that way. When the world has perverted God's design, the Believer upholds God's design and lives accordingly. The believing man and woman are together and married in God's eyes. Or...if a man or a woman do not have their "helper to complement" (Gen2:18) each other, they abstain. They do not allow the "passion of lust" (vs5) to overtake them, but they "know how to possess [their] own vessel in sanctification and honor" (vs4)

As believers we do this because we know God. In a way, the world cannot help themselves, because they "do not know God" (vs5) They behave like "natural brute beasts" (2Pet2:12)

And notice whom Peter is talking about in that context. The ones who make claims to being "christian", but are not. Today, around here, we've given them the label of "charismania". And indeed, they "worship"...but they do so with the fleshly sensual music of the world, that has them moving their bodies in the same way the world does in its ritual sexual orgy invitation dances. That, too, the Believer is to "abstain from sexual perversion". God's worship is not about sexual lusts. Nor was the activity associated with sexual enticement intended to be called "worship". It is a "perversion" of God's design. The Believer "abstains" from it, as he follows Peter's other words: "you also become holy in all conduct" (1Pet1:15)

Not only does sexual misconduct pervert God's design, it also "defrauds" the brother. To whatever degree a man invites the attention of a married woman, to that degree he is stealing from the brother. And if it is the woman who is batting her eyelashes, and the man responds favorably, to that degree he is not helping his brother keep his wife in-check. (vs6)

Yes, men, we have to be on the look-out for these women. Today's climate seems to -specifically- target the women. They are told they are expected to be alluring, and goddess-like. And one way they receive affirmation of their success to that end is in the way they can get men to respond to them. Remember the July article: the "Strange Woman". Many of them claim to be "Christians", and claim to -reeeeeally- love the Lord, and are dedicated to Him: "today I have completed my vows" (pr7:14)

Remember, "God did not call us to impurity, but in sanctification" (vs7)

But most everything of the world is encrusted, down to its core, in perverse sex...!

One of the main themes of these epistles is the return of Christ. The next event is Christ's "appearing" (tit2:13) when He is "revealed" (hint: book of Revelation) At that day are we to be caught, "with our pants down"? No! Our anticipation of His revealing is as one who "purifies himself, just as he is pure" (1Jn3:2-3)

This is how we "ought to walk and to please God" (vs1)

Love & Industry - (1Th 4:9-12, 2Th 3:8-12)

"But concerning brotherly love...we urge you, brethren, that you abound more and more" (vs9-10)

What is the trademark of Christianity? "By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you have love mutually with one another." (Jn13:35) And in his epistle John proclaims that, if a person does not love fellow-believers, that he is not a true believer. In his claim to being a Christian... such a person "is a LIAR". (1Jn4:20)

But how do we demonstrate love? By being busybodies, always boisterously barging into each other's homes unannounced, all 'happy' and full of hi-fives and smiles, always showing up -just- at meal time, etc? After all, doesn't "love" mean -togetherness-. Doesn't love mean that we -tell- each other often that we love them, and we show our "concern" for them, and how much we "care"....by butting our noses into their affairs?

Eeeooo! Not when you say it like that!!!

But is this not -just- what many people are and do? If a person is a bit stand-offish against such people, are they not, then, labeled as sourly, not very friendly and stuck-up? Or if they don't like people butting into their business... what-chu got to hide, anyway???

Paul says: "lead a quite life" and what? "MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS" (4:11) And here let's combine the two epistles...Paul also says to GET A JOB and WORK. He commands to "work in quietness and eat their own bread" (2Th3:12)

Yes, in the 70s there was this outgrowth of the hippy "Jesus People" movement where they claimed they wanted to be like the church-in-Acts where they lived communally. Well, in Acts they did not 'live' communally, but they shared their possessions (resources) "in common" (Ac2:44, 4:32) But the 70s hippies took that to mean "communal living", so that's what they did. A few had jobs. But for the most part...there were many free-loaders. Rather than having the Acts attitude that "what's mine is yours", the people of the 70s said, "what's yours is mine". So, many free-loaded. They did not "work with [their] own hands" (4:11) By working for an honest day's wage they could not say that they "had need of nothing" (4:12)

But Paul's exhortation is: "if anyone does not desire to work, neither shall he eat" (2Th3:10)

Notice carefully what Paul says. He does not say that a legitimately "unemployed" person cannot eat. There are many reasons why a person - cannot- work: got laid off, injuries, and many other circumstances. Paul was not against meeting the needs of the "poor". (Ga2:10) But notice he

says, the person "does not -desire- to work". They are fully able-bodied, there is a job to be had, if only he will get up off his lazy-beehind and go apply for it! But he just doesn't 'want' to. He is like the sluggard: "The sluggard hides his hand in the dish; it wearies him to bring it back to his mouth." (Pr26:15) That is what Paul is talking about.

Notice also that Paul gives himself as an example: "...nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you" (2Th3:8) Remember, he begins the epistle saying how they were "imitators" of Paul-and-company. Paul -lived- what he preached, and invited: watch me. Do as I do.

Now, when a person is lazy, and not working, boy oh boy, don't they have lots of 'time' on their hands! That's the "busybody" Paul speaks of. (2Th3:11) When a person is industrious, working, and then comes home 'tired' from an honest day's work, his "sleep" is "sweet". (Ec5:12) He doesn't have any energy left to be gadding about, nosing into other people's lives. His life, thus, -is- "quiet". (4:11, 2th3:12) He is content.

Now...what does this have to do with "love"?

What is the "2nd" commandment? "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Le19:18, Mt22:39) Put into action, as Jesus taught: "And as you would have men do to you, you also do likewise to them." (Lk6:31)

Do you like it when people nose around into your business? No? Then, what makes you think others appreciate you nosing around theirs? See how that works?

Yes, I know there are the rare people who just Luuuuv it when people pop in, unannounced...the more-the-merrier. And they love to just add another cup of water to the soup, to feed everybody in that way. I really think, from some of those I have known in the past, such people often actually have personal emotional issues and struggle with self-worth (no...not psychobabelly)...such that they garner praise and 'approval' from people from their own 'generosity'...thus, the more people they entertain, the more 'approval' returns upon themselves; otherwise, they are typically not -really- very happy with themselves.

But for the most part, most people have lives that they live. They have budgets within which they try to live, keeping the bills paid. They have families who need their attention. And if you come along, when they are not expecting you, it disrupts their needs. The 'right' amount of meat was taken out of the freezer for the 'family' meal...you come along, and now you have given stress as they desire to be 'gracious' hosts. You see them being friendly to you, but you haven't stopped to think about what you have just put them through. You have thought about yourself, but you have not 'loved' them enough to consider how your actions impact them.

See what we're saying?

No...this is not talking about Christian fellowship where people get together over a meal "breaking bread from house to house" (ac2:46) where believers are being "hospitable" (1Pt4:9) This is exhortation against the lazy person, refusing to work, being a busybody...the ones Paul says who walk "in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies" (2Th3:11)

"..aspire to lead a quiet life... mind your own business... work with your own hands... walk properly toward those who are outside... that you may have need of nothing" (4:11-12)

Resurrection & Rapture - (1Th 4:13-18)

"But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who are asleep, that you sorrow not as others who have no hope" (vs13)

These next three lessons will be short. This is a subject that the 'wisdom' of the apostate [c]hurch "twists" the Scriptures "to their own destruction" (2Pet3:16) But in actuality, considering the "simplicity that is in Christ" (2co11:3), this is really one of the easiest subjects to understand. The matter of the Rapture of the Church, the Resurrection, the Day of the Lord...and the fact that the Church does NOT go through God's wrath...is SO SIMPLE that there is utterly no mistaking it. We could wax eloquent, looking up scads of other Scriptures about Noah, Lot, Daniel, the man-of-sin, and all sorts of other things. But we've already done that on countless other occasions, and if you are new to this ministry, you can find them at the website TopicSearch under "Rapture" and "pre-trib"

This study series is the epistles to the Thessalonians. Thus, let us merely observe Paul's straight-forward -simple- comments to them. If we take the Scriptures at face value, I think you will agree... there is utterly NO MISTAKING God's Truth.

But we are not going to limit ourselves to a few key words only in this 'famous' passage in ch4, but we are going to consider the entire context, also running along into ch5; these words that most people conveniently ignore along the road to their false doctrines. If we want God's Truth, we cannot pick-and-choose only those words that are convenient to our little pet biases, but we must consider the whole. And this passage is sufficient, even if all the rest of Scripture did not exist.

Please notice that this passage, for this lesson, does not address the "Day of the Lord", or "wrath", or Jacob's trouble, etc. It addresses only the Resurrection and Rapture of the Church. Notice that it doesn't even address whether or not the Rapture is "pre-trib", "pre-wrath" or "post-trib". It merely addresses the Resurrection and Rapture. Period. The timing of these two events are understood from other contexts. But we are not discussing that, now, because this passage does not address it, one way or the other. It only says that the Lord is "coming". (vs15) It does not address Jesus' coming to rule on David's throne; it does not address Jesus' coming to mete out judgment; it does not address Jesus' resolving of the battle of Armageddon to rescue Israel; it does not address Jesus' coming and standing on the Mt of Olives. (Zec14:4, Ac1:11) Many prophecy teachers, when proof-texting the "pre" aspect of the Rapture, quote this passage. This passage is not a proof-text for the "pre" trib doctrine. It only addresses the Resurrection and Rapture. Period. Please understand this clearly.

OK...so let's now see 'what' this passage has to say.

As a music major in college, while my major was voice, since I also already arrived at college with an extensive piano background, I also decided to minor in organ. And as such, then, I also became known in that community as one to hire for weddings and funerals. The sad occasions were the funerals in the smaller funeral chapels. They typically had a smaller organ tucked in a corner that was usually in close proximity to the casket, and all the flowers flanking it. Thus, naturally, as the people would be filing by, I'd be right there playing the prelude/background music...and also, I could hear the people's comments...and CRYING. I must say: What a devastatingly -SAD- day that is for the unsaved! I don't think I've heard such forlorn crying and sobbing, as I did next to those caskets. People of the world, at death, are without hope, because they are "without God" (Eph2:12)

Paul wishes for the Thessalonians to NOT 'sorrow'. The ones who "have no hope" are "others"; but not us! Perhaps the persecution they experienced also resulted in some martyrs from their midst? But Paul is encouraging them, and is giving them this information so they can remember and "encourage one another". (vs18) Remember the 'encouragement' from a previous lesson? (3:2,7)

When people die, the world nurtures those dead bodies. Nancy Reagan was seen weeping at her husband's casket, leaning on the casket, and patting it...as though, somehow, she was 'near' him -there-; and then as the casket is lowered into the ground, the dead -person- is also lowered into the ground.

Let us not forget that these bodies are not 'us'. Jesus exhorted to "not fear" the killing of the body, but to be concerned about the soul. (Mt10:28) When Ezekiel saw the valley of dry bones, and then the bones came together and received tissue...all those bodies were not alive. They still needed "spirit". (Ezek37)

Paul says that God will "bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus" (vs14)

Do not confuse this sentence with the proclamation: "And Jehovah my God shall come, and all the saints with You." (Zec14:5) Zechariah is not talking about the resurrection, but about Christ's coming to the Mt of Olives, also in the context of the other events of what we will see in the next lesson about the "day of the Lord". But in this passage, Paul is teaching about the Resurrection.

Also, do not confuse the words "coming of the Lord" (vs15) with Zechariah. The word "coming", or "to come", can mean many different things. Since I live in "Spokane", let me use it as an example. Supposing a distant friend said they were going to "come" to Spokane, that event could mean different things. It could mean that they are driving 'through' Spokane on the freeway, but not stopping. Perhaps they are travelling through by bus,

and the bus stops at the terminal, and I go visit them, before the bus continues to their ultimate destination. Perhaps they are travelling to Seattle, and I am also going to Seattle; their bus stops at Spokane, and I join them on their bus, and we travel together to Seattle? Perhaps in another scenario they come to Spokane and come to my house; or they buy a house and settle here. You see....in each of these cases the person "came" to Spokane, but each case was unique and different.

God is "bringing with Him those who sleep in Jesus".

So, if this is not Jesus coming to the Mt. of Olives, why is He bringing the Christians who had died?

Well, a -resurrection- requires the raising of -bodies-. Paul speaks of this in 1co15. In terms of Believers, the resurrected body is an incorrupted body; a spiritual body; a body of immortality. (1co15:42,44,53,etc) But remember that the body is not the person. Our bodies are merely "temples" (Jn2:21, 1co6:19), or "tents" (2Pe1:14) When a person dies, yes, their body gets buried "dust-to-dust"; but being "absent from the body" the Believer is "at home with the Lord". (2co5:8) Yes, if you've had a Believing loved one die, you may have buried -their- body; but -they- are with the Lord.

Notice the 'possessive' case of the word "their". "Their" body. In other words, the body is something that is associated -with- the person, but -is-NOT the person's essence. Their essence is soul and spirit. -They-, their spirit, are with the Lord. Thus, if there is to be a resurrection where -bodies- are raised, do not those bodies need occupants? Thus, God is raising bodies, and re-joining the occupants with their new bodies. And if bodies are resurrected from the ground, does it not make sense that their occupants must return to the earth to join up with those bodies?

Now Paul makes a point of encouraging that this resurrection will happen "first". As frail humans of "dust" (Ps103:14), we might give mental/spiritual assent to the concept that our dearly-departed loved ones are with the Lord. But in our human state, we can't -see- them. What we -saw- was their old bodies that got buried. Thus, even though we know they are with the Lord, there is a feeling of 'finality' to their deaths. They are 'gone', and we don't see them anymore, or talk to them, or do things with them. There is sadness at their parting.

Paul encourages that it is not final. We -will- see them again. In fact, we will see them -here- even before we go up to be with the Lord. We will not be caught up to the Lord 'wondering' if they are 'tagging-along, too?' We will see them because they will be resurrected, and "then" (vs17) we who are Believers, and alive at that moment, will join them; They and We "shall be caught up together at the same time with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" to (from that point forward) "always be with the Lord".

Jesus promised to "prepare a place" for us, and He also promised to "come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also." (Jn14:3)

This is not the occasion where Christ returns -to- earth (to come to my house), but He is stopping at the "bus station" and we are joining Him to "go to Seattle" to go be with Him. Jesus' promise was not to prepare a place for us, and then come back to earth to be "with us" -on- this earth (there are some who teach this false doctrine); but to take us to be "where I am"...-where- Jesus is. Thus, in our lesson, the resurrected Christians, and those alive at that moment, are snatched up "in the clouds to meet the Lord IN THE AIR" (vs17)

You know, it just now dawns on me... we think of the 'alive' Believers only being "raptured" (caught up/snatched up). But the truth is that both the resurrected Believers, as well as those alive at that moment, will be raptured together. The dead-in-Christ experience both the resurrection - and- the rapture.

No, not every Believer will die (physically). "Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed; in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." (1co15:51-52)

Now, many stumble over what they think they see as a discrepancy. If we are resurrected/raptured "to Heaven" (they say), but Jesus is coming "to earth" in judgment and to rule, they stumble over that. But notice it didn't say that we are raptured "to Heaven". It says that the Lord descends "from Heaven"; but to where are we raptured? To meet the Lord "in the air...in the clouds". And then, where do we go? To Heaven? It doesn't say. But it does say that we "shall always be with the Lord" (vs17) -WHEREVER- that may be. We do know that for a thousand years we will be ruling with Christ on the earth. (Rev20:6) That, then, also explains why we (as part of the "saints") will be coming "with" Him when He comes conquering and judging, and rescuing Israel from all the nations that will have surrounded her. (Zec14:5) If He is in Heaven, that's where we'll be. When He destroys this creation to establish the new, that's where we'll be. We will be "with the Lord".

So... you want a time-frame? That's not in this passage, but, here you are, speaking of the Resurrection: "But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God, even the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power." (1Co15:23-24) Notice the word "Then", understanding what it means...

We'll support this in the next two lessons.

Also, don't let the "trumpet" throw you for a loop.(vs16) 1co15:52 speaks of the "last" trumpet, and thus many associate it with the "seventh" trumpet of Rev10:7,11:15. They think that since the one passage says "last", and the 7th is the 'last' of those seven, that they are the same event. Not necessarily so. There is no Scripture that specifically ties those two trumpets together. And furthermore, Scripture is -full- of all sorts of trumpets. That's how Israel traveled in the wilderness, how various announcements were made in Israel, they were used for many aspects of worship, in battle, to announce the annual feasts, at the new moons, etc. Thus, whatever might be a "last" trumpet for one event should not be confused with a trumpet that comes 'last' for some other event. The last blast of the trumpet in battle is not the same as the final trumpet note for worship. We must be careful to not force Scripture into saying things that it doesn't actually say.

But we do know that the Resurrection and Rapture are with much fanfare: the shouted command, the voice of the archangel, and trumpet of God. Remember when Jesus raised Lazarus, He did so at the top-of-His-lungs: "Lazarus! Out here! Now!" (Jn11:43)

It is -NOT-, as scoffed by unbelievers, a "secret" slinking away. NO! It is a glorious event where Christ's victory over death is proclaimed against the one who thinks he has power over death, the devil. (Heb2:14) This is an event done before the whole creation of Heaven and earth!

Could this be the event Jesus speaks of? "Also I say to you, whoever confesses Me before men, the Son of Man will also confess him before the angels of God." (Lk12:8) "He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels." (Rev3:5) Would not that occasion be with much fanfare, such as is described in this passage?

"So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: Death is swallowed up in victory. O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the Law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." (1co15:54-58)

And... "encourage one another with these words" (vs18)

Day of the Lord - (1Th 5:1-3)

"But..." (vs1)

Let us remember that these epistles were not written originally by Paul with chapter/verse designations. Divisions between topics would come from the choice of words.

The word "but" is a word of 'contrast'. The dictionary opens with the definition: "on the contrary". One might be going along one topic, and then introduce a -contrasting- thought by saying, "BUT on the other hand" etc. As such, the word "but" might also be viewed as a 'divider' between topics.

In the preceding chapter we observed the Resurrection and Rapture of the Church. -BUT-...now we will discuss the "Day of the Lord". In other words, the Resurrection/Rapture are -not- the same event as the Day of the Lord. What is the Day of the Lord?

Well, first, the Resurrection/Rapture is an event that is cause for "encouragement". (4:18) It is the occasion where the Church goes to be with the Lord.

BY CONTRAST: the Day of the Lord has to do with words like, Thief in the night, sudden destruction, labor pains, and no escape. (vs2-3)

If you start up your Bible software and do a search of "Day of Jehovah" or "Day of the Lord" you find the expression beginning at Isaiah2:12 and continuing through the prophets and into the N.T. In pretty much every case it is in the context of God's -judgment- upon Israel and the world. Around the same place you begin seeing the expression "that day", or "the day". All, referring to the same things. The day of "retribution" for sin and corruption. (Is34:8, Ho9:7) Retribution being a "paying back" of the evil-doers for their wickedness.

As Paul speaks to Believers at Thessalonica regarding the Resurrection and Rapture, he speaks of "you" (4:13,15) and "we" (4:14,17,etc) But when he speaks of the Day of the Lord, he says "they" and "them".

God's blessing in His presence is for "we/us" who know the Lord; but the Day of the Lord is for "they/them" who have no escape. Joel2:32 says that "...whoever shall call upon the name of Jehovah shall escape." If they refuse to call upon God in 'that day', they "shall BY NO MEANS escape".

Thus, for this study the lesson is clear, short and sweet. The Resurrection/Rapture of the Church is a -different- event from the Day of the Lord.

Sons of Light - (1Th 5:4-11)

"But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief" (vs4)

There's that word "but" again...and is key to our understanding of this passage.

The prior three verses did not give the details of the nature of the Day of the Lord, because that Day is not for Christians. All those things are found in other contexts regarding rebellious Israel and the world, in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, minor prophets, Revelation, etc.

The Day of the Lord is for "they/them". BUT -YOU-, brethren are not part of "them". You are not part of darkness, such that the Day will overtake you. In other words, is it not clear just for -whom- the Day is? Jesus called His disciples the "light of the world" (Mt5:14) and as Believers one of our jobs is to "reprove" the works of darkness. (Eph5:11) The Resurrection/Rapture is for the Church, and the Day of the Lord is for unbelievers.

Now, this passage does not spell it out like 1co15:23-24 does. But did not God give us "minds" to use? (1Pe1:13) Let us "gird up the loins of our minds" a moment and consider, using the simplest of logic: 1) We are told, plainly, that the Day of the Lord is not for the Believer, but for those in darkness. 2) We are told, plainly, that the Resurrection and Rapture are -not- the same event as the Day. 3) We are told, clearly, that there -is- going to be a Resurrection and Rapture of those who are in Christ.

Thus, the Question: If the Day of the Lord is not for Christians (it clearly says that the Day will not "overtake" the Believer), how can the Church possibly "go through" that Day, -thru- God's wrath? You see: that false doctrine totally defies all logic, based on what God has given in the Scriptures. The only possible way the Church does -not- go through it, is if the Resurrection/Rapture happens -before- it. Yes? If the Rapture did not happen before, then by definition, the Church is still here when Wrath comes, and thus receives of that which Paul states, plainly, that it does -not- 'overtake' us.

They claim that the Church needs to be "purified" through the fires of affliction. Why? Do they not understand? Paul proclaims that "you, brethren (believers), are NOT IN DARKNESS" (vs4) We are NOT in sin, but by definition, due to Christ's work of cleansing, we -ARE- the "righteousness of God in [Christ]" (2co5:21) Through Jesus' cleansing, through His shed blood, we are -already- purified. (Rev1:5, Tit3:5, Heb9:22,28, etc) We may not always behave 'saintly', thus we sometimes need to confess (1Jn1:9) and have our feet washed. (Jn13:10) But in God's eyes, due to Christ's shed blood, and advocacy (1Jn2:1-1) we have

been "declared" righteous. (Rom5:19) and sin is not "accounted" to us. (Rom4:5,24)

REMEMBER: the Thessalonian Church was a church embroiled in the middle of persecution. They were -experiencing- affliction. It's not like they were trying to "slink" away. (that's what the apostasy claims we Christians are seeking to do!) No! They were 'in' persecution, affliction, tribulation (whatever you want to call it), and Paul tells them that the Day of the Lord is not for them. In other words, we can understand something else today: Just as the Rapture and Day of the Lord are not the same event; neither is persecution the Church receives now, and the Day of the Lord the same thing.

"You all are sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness" (vs5) Being sons of light, "...God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (vs9) What could possibly be any clearer than that..!

Thus, what is the summation? We are sons of light? Then, let's -live- like it!

What are the characteristics of the "night"? Sleeping and drunkenness; and whatever else the world grovels around in. Jesus exhorted us to "watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord comes" (Mt24:42) If we are of the night, sleeping...we are not watching, are we! But we are of the day...watching.

Thus, the "encouragement" (vs11) to "be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation." (vs8)

"The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk decently, as in the day, not in carousings and drunkenness, not in cohabitation and licentiousness, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts." (Rom13:12-14)

"Therefore encourage each other and build up one another, just as you also are doing" (vs11)

Relating to One Another - (1Th 5:12-15)

"And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves" (vs12-13)

Paul has finished the major doctrines he was giving them. Now, as he closes the epistle, he does as he typically does in epistles; he strings together a whole load of little nuggets of exhortation and encouragement. Since he strings them together quickly/briefly, that's how we'll look at them, too.

Don't forget your pastors and elders. In giving specific directives about church polity he exhorts regarding supporting them faithfully (1Ti5:17-18), as he also ordains that those ministering should be supported "from the gospel". (1co9:14) But Paul did not require this of them for himself. (2:9) And I don't address this with the idea that you-all should start sending me money. No! The Lord has those He burdens to support the expenses; but as for me, I'm like Paul...I 'work' for a living, and this has been my heart in the matter ever since VW began over ten years ago, that the Gospel might be given "without charge". (1co9:18) And to "gladly spend and be spent for your souls" (2co12:15) I've never had enough to save up for a retirement account, nor insurance, and usually scrape by month-to-month; but the bills have 'always' gotten paid, and I have everything I need. I am "content with such things as [I] have" (Heb13:5) But some of you are part of fellowships, where you have salaried pastors who are faithful servants of God, teaching His Word faithfully. Well, be sure to support them faithfully.

And also notice: "Be at peace among yourselves" (vs13b)

One of the best ways to insure that your pastor is free to teach the Word boldly, is to not engage yourselves in squabbles. Remember how Paul exhorted about "love" that they should "abound more and more" (4:10)? Well, as love abounds, that will also translate into peace. Don't squabble amongst yourselves....and also don't be nitpicking at your pastor. "Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses." (1Ti5:19) You know, one of satan's biggest tools against men-of-God is if he can try to discredit them; and all that takes is a piece of gossip that somebody starts. Perhaps somebody doesn't like the way the pastor picks his nose, so they whine to somebody; and by the time a whole gossip chain gets going, by the time the "news" breaks in public, the pastor was "caught in an affair"; when nothing of the sort was the case. Merely, the pastor "picks his nose".

Sorry...I know that is a stupid example. But you know...most gossip rumors get started with similarly 'stupid' things...but like the "fire" is started by a

"spark" (Jacob ch3), when a pastor's reputation is ruined over nothing; what does that do to the proclamation of God's Word?

Vss14-15 are basically the "Golden Rule".

Well, yes, a bit on "discipline" first: If somebody is behaving a bit like the world, do we "accept" them, because God "accepts us just as we are"?

Well, first of all, God does not accept sin, does He. Thus, no, He does - NOT- accept us "just as we are", but He corrects us, as a father does a son. (Heb12:5-11) And so, in the congregation, if somebody is sinning, Paul says to "rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear" (1Ti5:20) Ooooh...but they will be offended! They will get mad and leave! Well, yes, perhaps. If their heart is such, Paul also exhorts to "purge out the old leaven" (1co5:7)

Otherwise, if sin and "unruliness" are taken care of, -then- is the exhortation to "be all things to all men". Today's apostasy tries to be "all things" to sinners IN-THEIR-SIN. No! The Christian -CANNOT- "continue in sin" because "graeesss" abounds! (Ro6:1)

But when there is peace and righteousness in the fellowship, then it is possible to do all these things: comfort, uphold, show patience, etc. (vs14)

Now, notice that the Golden Rule says that: How you wish for people to treat you, is how you should treat them. (Lk6:31) But notice that it does - not- say to Treat them as they treat[ed] you. The O.T. "eye for an eye" concept was not for personal retribution and vendettas. It was their 'legal' code. (not going to look up chapter/verse right now) It was for when a person was brought up on charges before the judge, and he had knocked out somebody's tooth, the punishment, by order of the judge, was that his tooth should be knocked out. But people took that for personal revenge issues. Thus Jesus taught, "But I tell you, Do not resist evil. But whoever hits you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also." (Mt5:39)

In other words...do not be continually 'itching' for a fight. Looking for the slightest provocation. "...but always pursue what is good for yourselves and for all" (vs15) After all, isn't that what "abounding" in love "more and more" (4:10) is all about?

Relating to God - (1Th 5:16-22)

"Rejoice always" (vs16)

OK...a bunch of one-liners, anyone?

Actually vs16-18 are all one sentence, and make up a complete thought. Rejoice always? How is that possible? In another place he says: "as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing" (2co6:10) Isn't that a contradiction? Does this equate with an ear-to-ear grin, and jumping up and down continually? Let's continue...

"Pray without ceasing..." (vs17) How can anybody going around all day with eyes closed, hands folded, heads bowed? If you do that, you're going to run into things; and how can one, then, work for a living as he exhorted earlier?

"in everything give thanks..." (vs18) But there's some things that come along in life that I didn't ask for; and I don't want. Why should I be thankful?

That 'contradiction'? The context of that is "...commending ourselves as ministers of God" (2co6:4) "...this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." (vs18b)

The key is in understanding vs17. Prayer is not so much -us- getting on our (physical) knees, and uttering words to God. Remember, the preacher exhorts: "Do not be rash with your mouth, and do not let your heart be hasty to say a word before God. For God is in Heaven, and you are on earth; therefore let your words be few." (Ec5:2) But rather, prayer is more an 'attitude'.

Attitude can mean things like: being agreeable, being rebellious, etc. But those are more... emotions. But think of attitude as being a 'position'. Airplanes are at 'attitudes' (level/banked) relative to the horizon. A space vehicle might be at an 'attitude' relative to its orbit, or its angle to the earth, the way it is facing, etc.

What is our attitude towards God? Is our neck stiff and non-compliant? Or are we listening with "extended" ear? (Jer7:26) What is an extended ear? Well, most animals, when paying special attention, cock their ears in the direction of the object of their interest. They have that ability. If an animal that is used to obeying commands has got it in their head that they don't want to obey right now, they might lay their ears down flat against their head. A horse, paying attention to its rider, will cock its ears 'back' to hear the commands. A show dog that does tricks, I've noticed, typically are "all-ears" to their master. They are usually also looking at the master, facing him, eager and at-the-ready. Somebody else might come along and pet it, but they try to shake that off, and their attention is back fully on their

master. They are right next to the master....not running off in their own direction, doing their own thing.

Prayer is actually the essence of the Christian life. We've addressed this on other occasions, and there are things posted at the website, so we won't rehash here. But, prayer is living in the presence of God. If He speaks, we listen and obey. If we want to communicate something to Him, we don't need to go through an entire pagan ritual of mood music, candles, incense, bowing, clapping, sighing, moaning, etc...because we are RIGHT THERE in His presence. Like with the show-dog...the Master speaks and we obey; and we also might "bark" in response...being right there before Him.

Thus, remembering that this epistle is to a Church in persecution, yes, "rejoicing" is possible, because even though being persecuted, we are in God's presence. Even though we are hurting from the beating, we can "sing hymns" of thanksgiving in prison, while the other prisoners listen in. (Ac16:25)

We can rejoice and give thanks -knowing- that we are in the center of "the will of God" for us. (vs18) Even though things may be looking bleak, we understand that "...all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son..." (Rom8:28-29)

Paul rejoiced in suffering for Christ: "...[filling] up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, on behalf of His body, which is the church." (Col1:24) These verses are properly understood in the context of 'persecution'. Anybody can rejoice when things are pleasant. The world is even sometimes thankful when things go their way. But what is the heart when there is persecution? And... it cannot be without a life of prayer.

"Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies." (vs19-20) See? Charismania lives! And Paul approves it! After all, didn't Paul also say not to forbid speaking in tongues? (1co14:39)

Wait a minute... "But test all things; hold fast what is good" And "abstain from every form of evil" (vs21-22)

Thessalonica was not all that far from Corinth. It was in the same general part of the world entrenched in paganism and idolatry. Whatever pagan practices that troubled Corinth, you can be sure Thessalonica was also familiar with.

Is it possible that they needed exhortation like some Christians do today? Seeing as how charismania has gone so crazy with their demonic manifestations, there have been some Christian elements that have almost forgotten that there is, actually, -GOD's- Holy Spirit. They hear so

much about being "spirit-filled", knowing it to be of satan, that they have divorced themselves of anything 'spiritual' in their hearts. If it's not tangible, I can see it, feel it or hear it...it's not Godly, and is not to be trusted. They can read how the Holy Spirit propelled along the writing of the Scriptures (2Pe1:21), but if a true child of God speaks of the Holy Spirit's leading in their life, they -shun- them as being "charismatic".

Folks, if it is not through the Holy Spirit, it is not from God! Because "God - is- Spirit". (Jn4:24) If a person is not indwelt by God's Holy Spirit, they are not a Christian. (Rom8:9) And the indwelling Holy Spirit "witnesses" with our spirits. (Rom8:16) And any preaching had -better- be from the Holy Spirit. When Peter replies to the council it says that he was "filled with the Holy Spirit". (Ac4:8) When we give answer to those questioning us Jesus said to not worry about it, because what we reply is not us, "but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you." (Mt10:20) And anything we do is through the distribution of that ministry from the Holy Spirit. (1co12:4-13)

Thus, if we are told to not quench the Spirit...what sorts of things might quench? Does that mean to not resist speaking in tongues? Or is it something else? What sorts of things put a separation between us and God? Sins and iniquities. (Is59:2) And again: "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear" (Ps66:18) In other words, sin spoils the communion of that Life-of-Prayer we spoke of, above. Thus, how do we keep from quenching the Spirit? Don't be sinning!

"Abstain from every form of evil" (vs22) KJV says to abstain from all "appearance" of evil. And all the pharisees go around worrying about whether everybody is sticking their 'fists' under running water before meals (Mk7:2-3), and whether somebody is rubbing out some wheat in their hands for a bite to eat (Lk6:1)...they worry about -APPEARANCES-. What does it -look- like? ..."to be seen by men" (Mt23:5)

But Jesus said, "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment." (Jn7:24)

Paul says to "test all things" of what sort it is. John says to "test the spirits" (1Jn4:1) A newer Christian might see some 'spiritual' things happening that he questions. He might hear another person claiming to be a Christian talking about "the spirit". According to Jesus' own words, things of a spiritual nature can be hard to discern sometimes (Jn3:8)

Thus:

Keep a pure life, (vs19)

Do not dismiss things of God's Holy Spirit, -BUT- (vs20)

Test all things (vs21)

Holding to the good, and (vs21)

Abstaining from every -kind- of evil (every "form" it comes)(vs22)

And all this is possible in the context of the Life-of-Prayer. (vs17)

God's Preservation - (1Th 5:23-24)

"Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it." (vs23-24)

The previous lesson ended, mentioning the younger Christian who isn't yet fully-versed in the Christian life, and about things of God's Holy Spirit. The new Christian may be a bit 'scared'. Worse yet, they will likely be naive. And even worse yet, a full-grown mature Christian might see a new baby Christian, sitting there in the middle of satan's turf, being tugged and pushed from all sides. They've just come to Saving Faith in Jesus Christ, but for whatever reasons, they are 'alone' there, a young lamb surrounded by wolves. And so the mature Believer sees them, and worries -terribly-.

Nothing wrong with such worry. Isn't that how this epistle started? Paul's concern for the new Thessalonian believers was so intense that he says, "...when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest somehow the tempter had tempted you..." (3:5) That "nurse" taking care of the children. (2:7) The care of the "father" regarding "his own children" (2:11)

In the setting of the internet like this, I also worry for some of you. Most of you I have never met face-to-face, and likely never will until we meet in Christ's presence. When a 'baby' Christian e-mails, and writes about some of the things that might be written, knowing what I have experienced throughout my life, knowing how the wolves come gnashing their teeth, and also knowing all the various ones I've known throughout my life who did NOT stand for the Lord, but were sucked down by the undertow, I WORRY for them.

But -WHO- is it that preserves His children? "I planted, Apollos watered, but [WHAT?] -GOD- made it grow." (1co3:6)

Yes, I remember my past and all those wolves. I remember my failures. I remember, then, how -GOD- lifted me up. I may have stumbled, but I did not fall permanently. Well...perhaps I used those words backwards: "for a just man may fall seven times, and rise up again; but the wicked shall stumble into evil." (Pr24:16)

God knew my heart. When I stumbled, He picked me up. He strengthened me. Yes, there were many 'helpers' along the way. But you know...-MOST- of those helpers were helpers to evil.

So...when I see a baby Christian, struggling with any one of the various things that we struggle with, I give advice when asked....and like Paul, I worry. But ultimately, I have to understand that, just as God nurtured me through my stumbles, so He does with all His babies. And indeed, God

took my failures and made out of them something fit for His service. Rom8:28 -is- true. My life is proof of it: "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."

I have often been amazed at the mature 'wisdom' that comes from some babies. And guess where they typically get it? From all the books and commentaries of the "church fathers" and other famous authors? No! From God's Word, and God's Holy Spirit opening the Scriptures to their hearts.

There's one whose mailing list I'm on who, not long ago sent out a mailing about "commentaries". One would have thought from reading that mailing that, unless a person had at least a few commentaries, that it is well-nigh impossible to be a proper Christian. I guess Paul lied when he proclaimed that the SCRIPTURES were sufficient to make a "man of God [who is] complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2Ti3:17) John didn't know what he was talking about when he proclaimed that we "have no need for anyone to teach you" because of the "anointing" of the Holy Spirit. (1Jn2:27, Jn16:13)

So, you see, it is God who "sanctifies" us completely. (vs23) That means, 'to make holy'. Separating us from the world's filth. His work deals with the entirety of our being: whole spirit, soul, and body are "preserved blameless" at Jesus' coming.

And this I understand, too. For sure, I messed up my life royally. I expect that there's some people who know some of the things I did when I was spiritually compromised by being unequally yoked...and likely, if I ever enter their minds, those might be the only things they think about. But when I hit bottom, and the Lord lifted me up, He also forgave and cleansed me. (1Jn1:9) And so now, through His marvelous work of working things "for good" (Rom8:28), I understand what it is to be "blameless" before God. Otherwise, how would you expect I could do this ministry?

Paul looked at his past as having "persecuted the church of God" and as such, not being "fit" to be an apostle. But it was God's "grace" that made him what he was. (1Co15:9-10) And as such Paul "preached" (vs11); and so do I.

If you are a young Christian and are worried how you can stand up...? If you are a mature Christian and know some 'babies' about whom you worry...? Well, go ahead and worry. Paul did. But also be assured of - God's- ability where His own children are concerned. Jesus thanked the Father about those given to Him, that "...not one of them is lost.." (except the "son of perdition")(Jn17:12) And even Judas was foreknown by God.

Thus remember...

"He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it" (vs24) It is not our great strength that preserves us, but the One in whom we believe...

"I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep safe what I have committed to Him until that Day." (2Ti1:12)

Amen!

Faith Grows in Afflictions - (2Th 1:3-4)

"We are bound to thank God always for you...because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other..." (vs3)

This begins the 2nd epistle, and notice what Paul notices and comments about: their Faith and Love. What was it that he had exhorted them in the first epistle? What was their testimony to the world? Their "faith toward God". (1th1:8) And their exhortation was to "abound more and more" in their love. (1th4:10)

This is any pastor's -dream- church! The Word of God is proclaimed, the people receive it -as- the "Word of God" (1th2:13); but they don't merely give mental assent, nodding their heads, yelling out "Amen!" to the pastor's preaching, and then go home for the week and live like the devil. They are -LIVING- God's Word! They are not "forgetful hearers" but are "doers" of the Word. (Ja1:22-25)

So...since they are being praised for their faithful living, it must mean that the terrible persecution eased up somewhat..? Less obstacles, and easier circumstances; it's become an 'easier' situation where they can live their faith with less stress..?

Well, no! What is the context of their "patience and faith"? "...in all your persecutions and affliction that you endure" (vs4) Notice the word "endure" is not past-tense: as if to suggested that they HAD persecution in the past, but NOW things are better. No! They "endure" persecution. It's an on-going thing. It is -still- the context of their Christian walk... as we shall see more in the following lessons.

So, this is a 'healthy' church. They are growing strong and faithful. And yet it is in the context of adversity. This is a church that others could emulated. Do you want to know what a Christian church -should- be like? Look at Thessalonica!

But Paul left out one 'vital' piece of information! I mean...he's not a dynamic preacher; we observed that in the first epistle. And he doesn't use any "church-growth" -programs-. They are not studying each week from the famous book, "How to Grow-a-Church". So, naturally, he doesn't mention it. Perhaps it was an oversight? "What's that?" you say?

HOW -BIG- IS THE CHURCH ??? HOW MANY MEMBERS DO THEY HAVE ??? HOW MANY are GOING FORWARD each Sunday? How many pledge cards have they signed? Whaaaaat??? You don't have that information? Well, how can you possibly be "boasting" (vs4) of them to all the other churches?

Do we need to beat this dead horse? The N.T. Church is a different kind than typically proliferates today. Today's "Laodicea" is pitifully "wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked" (Rev3:17) compared to the faithful saints of Thessalonica! Today's church is about to be vomited out. (Rev3:16)

To those who view numbers, be reminded of Jesus' words: "Because narrow is the gate and distressing is the way which leads unto life, and there are -FEW- who find it." (Mt7:14)

Retribution vs Calling - (2Th 1:5-12)

"...since it is righteous judgment with God to repay with affliction those who trouble you, and to give you who are afflicted rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from Heaven with His mighty angels.." (vs6-7)

If there were not already the covenantal and dispensational reasons why the Church does NOT BELONG within the seven-year 70th week period of time where affliction and wrath is related to Israel and Babylon (if you are not already familiar, please check in the Library the "Covenants & Dispensations" series, particularly the section titled "Wrath"); these two verses give us the -core- understanding of God's 'heart' toward the Church. (Since most people erroneously call the 70th week of seven years "the Tribulation", thus, they speak of the Rapture in terms of "pre-trib", we'll also use that nomenclature here at times. But please be reminded that Scripture no-where speaks of a seven-year period-of-time, calling it "Tribulation")

These two verses, and the surrounding passage explains to us "why" the Church will -not- go through the 70th week; "why" the Rapture -must- be "pre-trib".

Laodicea taunts Christ's Church with variations of: You're afraid to go through the tribulation; you don't want to be purified through the tribulation; the Rapture is "escapist" theology; the fallacy of the "secret" rapture, where you want to "sneak away"; you want only God's blessing, but you don't want His cleansing through the fires of tribulation; the rapture cult; etc.

But this passage tells us the Truth of the matter. And since the apostasy is so militant in their desire to see the Church go through "the tribulation" (as they call it), we will harp on this theme a bit, and drum it. 'Make sure there is no misunderstanding it. In Paul's day there was also false teaching on this subject, which he addresses next chapter. Satan soooo hates the Church that he tries to wipe it out through persecution; and if he can't do that, he tries to get the Church to "deny the faith"...part of that faith being the truths about Christ's promise to "come and receive you to Myself" (Jn14:3) and the "blessed hope" of His "glorious appearing". (Tit2:13) Satan knows there is no such doctrine as OSAS; he knows that people can be persuaded to "draw back to destruction" (Heb10:39); thus, he keeps drumming away. So, we will, too. And this is the -KEY- passage!

What is God's "righteous judgment"? (vs6) To "repay with affliction those who trouble you". The angel proclaims in response to God's judgments: "You are righteous, O Lord, the One who is and who was and who is to be, because You have judged these things, for they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink, for they are

deserving. And I heard another out of the altar saying, Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments." (Rev16:5-7)

But... didn't Jesus teach, "Do not resist evil. But whoever hits you on the right cheek, turn the other to him also." (Mt5:39) ??

To -whom- was Jesus speaking? His disciples. Believers. Christians. But -who- is repaying judgment? GOD. Paul teaches "do not avenge yourselves" because vengeance is God's domain: "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord" (Rom12:19) Remember, this was the whole argument with David regarding Nabal...David being kept from avenging himself; and then -God- took Nabal's life. (1Sam25)

Let's have a real quick mini-lesson on dispensation here, comparing Israel and the Church:

Remember that Israel's covenant was of the "blessing and curse". (Deut30) If Israel was obedient to God's Law, God would bless them, giving them prosperity and peace. If they disobeyed, they would experience affliction and tribulation. The ultimate curse to Israel for "that day" is the time called: "Jacob's trouble" (Jer30:7) during which time Israel, indeed, will go through the fires and be "purified". (Mal3:3)

The Church, on the other hand, is characterized by "affliction" (Jn16:33) This is so because we are followers of Jesus Christ, who was persecuted. We are persecuted -because- He was. (Jn15:20) Paul even speaks of "filling up" in himself what is "lacking in the afflictions of Christ" (Col1:24) There is no reprieve from affliction "for good behavior". It is one of the characteristics of the Christian life. Period. And so, in contrast to Israel, when "that day" comes, the Church has "rest". (vs7)

Israel, while being the physical "seed" of Abraham, "not all those of Israel are Israel". (Rom9:6-7) They are yet in unbelief. Even the ones seeking to rebuild the temple today (Temple Mount and Land of Israel Faithful) do not acknowledge Jesus Christ, their Messiah, who already came 2000 years ago. God is yet going to deal with Israel as He did in the past, through affliction/tribulation, till they are brought to their knees to cry out to him, mourning for Him "whom they have pierced". (Zec12:10)

But the Church, by definition, -IS- righteous. But even though righteous, it suffers persecution from the "gates of hell" which are not able to "prevail" against it. (Mt16:18) And so, by contrast, in "that day" God's heart regarding the Church is to "enter into His rest" (Heb3, Rev14:13)

Please don't get tired of me saying this, but REMEMBER: the Thessalonian church -was- ensconced in tribulation! They were not teaching/believing "escapist" theology. They were in the middle of persecution, and THRIVING! Laodicea could not justify any sort of taunts against them: You just want to escape persecution, that's why you believe

in "pre-trib". They were a PERSECUTED CHURCH! Please be sure to understand this. (The taunt against them was a bit different. ...the next lesson)

God's vengeance is not upon Believers. It is to those "who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (vs8) When Israel experiences "Jacob's Trouble", it is because they "do not know God". When they are "refined" God will be giving them "a new heart" and "a new spirit" (Ezk36:26) The Church, by definition, is already indwelt by God's Holy Spirit. We don't need the "new spirit" Israel will receive, because we -already- have Him.

But those who have persecuted Believers will receive God's wrath. It is a repayment. (vs6) It will be "full vengeance". (vs8) It is an "everlasting destruction". (vs9) In addition, those who were pretending to be christians, but were not: "...indeed I will make them come and bow the knee before your feet, and to know that I have loved you." (Rev3:9)

God is meting out retribution. He is declaring to them His love for the Church. And He is being "glorified in His saints" (vs10) You know, I think I've said this before recently, but I've really gotta think that this is also the occasion where Jesus presents the Church as the "glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle" (Eph5:27) where Jesus "confesses" us before the Father and the angels. (Lk12:8, Rev3:5) He resurrects and raptures us up to Himself, and there-we-are before God's throne (Rev4:2), and Jesus announces: Here they are! "Here am I and the children whom God has given Me." (Heb2:13b)

And if I can be crude here a moment. The Church is Christ's bride. Imagine an earthly bride, about to be married, but is being harassed by some other males; maybe one in particular that keeps wanting her to change her mind and marry him instead; and she keeps telling them to "leave her alone!" The groom discovers what they are doing to his betrothed, so what does he do? He takes them outside and gives them a good thrashing. Is that not like what Christ will do to those who were harassing His bride, the Church?

"You shall have no other gods before Me...I, Jehovah your God, am a jealous God" (Ex20:3,5) His wrath against them will be like the jealous rage of a man on behalf of his wife: "For jealousy is the rage of a man, and he will not spare in the day of vengeance. He will not regard any bribes, nor will he yield to the giving of many gifts." (Pr6:34-35)

Notice the terminology that tells us 'when' this occurs. "...when the Lord Jesus is REVEALED from Heaven with His mighty angels" (vs7) We are given "rest" - "when" Christ is revealed. Keeping in mind that His "revealing/appearing" is a separate occasion from His "kingdom" (2Ti4:1) It is at the time when He is "revealed" that we become "like Him" (1Jn3:2) What is the occasion when we become like Him? When are we "changed"

into immortality and incorruptibility? (1co15:51~) The resurrection and rapture.

When Jesus is revealed, we receive rest/resurrection/rapture. On that occasion those who harassed us receive judgment. If we are receiving rest, and they are receiving judgment...a brief moment of logic here... are we 'with' those being judged? No? Well, then, we got raptured 'before', didn't we. That's "pre" trib. If you're still not convinced, we'll even take you by the hand and connect-the-dots next chapter.

With this knowledge, however, what is the attitude of our heart? Do we succumb to the enticements of that other male for one-last-thing before wedding day? Our "bachelorette party"?? Will the wedding dress be "white", as everybody admires (vs10) the radiant bride (Is61:10), or will it be tainted?

"...that our God would count you worthy of this calling..." Why? "...that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ" (vs11-12) Jesus speaks of being "worthy to escape" God's judgment (Lk21:36) But you see, it is more than just escaping judgment; but it is being worthy (through salvation and the "robe of righteousness" Is61:10) to stand before God, to be able to look into the Groom's face and proclaim... "FORSAKING ALL OTHERS"

That is the essence of holiness! That is our calling! (vs11)

Order of Events - (2Th 2:1-8)

Now brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of our gathering together to Him, we ask you not to be quickly disturbed in mind or alarmed, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the Day of Christ has come. Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless..." (vs1-3)

[If this was a public speaking event, we would take a few moments right now to read this entire passage. Before you progress further, please read vs1-12.]

Today's Laodicea taunts Philadelphia (Rev3) that the "pre-trib" doctrine is not true, that it is escapist theology; taunting: so you don't want to go through the tribulation; what makes you think you should be exempt? And some of them even go so far as to come up with a "word" (from their spirits) from alleged visions to further their deceptions.

The church at Thessalonica, on the other hand, as we repeatedly observe, -was- IN THE MIDDLE of persecution. They were experiencing "tribulation". Thus, the enemy's tactic needed to be a bit different with them. They could not be taunted for preferring a life-of-ease, because they were being afflicted, and yet were thriving.

"...the Day of Christ has come" (vs2)

Today they taunt, either that there won't be a rapture, or that it won't be till after God's wrath. To Thessalonica it was: The rapture ALREADY HAPPENED, and you are 'now' -in- the "day of Christ"!

What they knew about end events was as we've just been studying them. They knew that Believers were not to be experiencing the Day of Christ, but here they were...in the middle of tribulation. Thus, what would be the only logical conclusion, as the enemy twisted their emotions? The Lord came, and WE MISSED IT! (You see: they clearly understood that the Church was not to go through God's wrath, that the Church would be caught up to Christ 'prior' to the Day of the Lord) And further, if we missed it... we WERE/ARE NOT SAVED! (Oh! Don't you suppose satan's demons would be cackling in gleeful delight at such consternation in the hearts of Christ's Believers!)

Notice that these messages were fraudulent. People telling lies, claiming that this word was from Paul, or the Holy Spirit. (vs2)

But Paul says, "Let no one deceive you by any means" (vs3) About what?

Two things: 1) the coming of the Lord, and 2) our gathering together to Him. (vs1) The same way he speaks of it to Timothy, in reverse order, as

1) His appearing, and 2) His kingdom (2Ti4:1) Two events. Remember from 1Ths that the Day of the Lord is distinct from the resurrection/rapture, and that the Day of the Lord is NOT for the "sons of light" (1Th5:5)

Before "that Day" (vs3) comes, there will first be 1) falling away (apostasy), and 2) unveiling of the son of perdition (antichrist).

Is this apostasy a -specific- apostasy? Do we not already see apostasy today? I don't know of a single 'famous' so-called "christian" leader, teacher or preacher...that I may know anything about them...that is not a false prophet. I'm sure there surely 'must' be somebody out there, with a big name, who knows the Lord..?? If there is, they are unknown to me. (but I don't know 'everybody') All the ones I know about are on the "beware/shun" list. Is this apostasy like the "anti-christ" issue? John speaks of "the" antichrist, but also observes that "even now 'many' antichrists have risen up" (1Jn2:18) In the same way, even though we see 'much' apostasy now, is there yet to also be "the" apostasy? Perhaps. But this matter isn't necessarily specific to the order of events, in the same way the next item is.

"...the man of sin is unveiled, the son of perdition" (vs3b) (We'll look at his characteristics next lesson)

There is apostasy, and the son of perdition is unveiled. What is an unveiling? Does this person sorta 'slip' onto the scene, unnoticed, keeping everybody guessing? Jesus did say that people would be saying, "here is the Christ, there is the Christ" and that there would be a lot of performing of signs and wonders by false christ[s] and prophet[s]. (Mt24:23-24) And we certainly see a lot of that today, particularly in the charismatic "outpouring" movement. But that is not "THE" son of perdition. There is to be one, spoken of in Daniel and Revelation, and Paul says he is "unveiled". Like when a new model of car is released, the people are gathered around, and somebody goes up and pulls the cloth off, to reveal the new car. It was just "unveiled". It was specifically announced, and designated as being the object to focus on. Today, while there are many speculations, no 'one' person has yet been thusly unveiled to the world.

He is not yet revealed because there is a restraint. His unveiling is to be "in his own time". (vs6) Just as the four angels from the Euphrates are designated for a specific "hour and day and month and year" (Rev9:15), so, too, the antichrist is for a very specific period of time. But he is presently "restrained".

As John said, that "many antichrists" exist, so, too, the "mystery of lawlessness is 'already' at work". But there is a restraint to the evil "...until it is raised from out of the midst". (vs7) What is the (personal pronoun) "He" that restrains evil? The coming of Christ is likened to the "days of Noah". What was it that was "striving with man" because of sin then? God's "Spirit". (Gen6:3)

For those who know the Lord, whose hearts are able to understand this, this is the Rapture tucked in here.

The Holy Spirit "convicts of sin" (Jn16:8) as Believers also "reprove" the works of darkness. (Eph5:11) The men of Sodom complained against Lot, "this one acts as a judge to condemn" (Gen19:9) The characteristic of the Church is the indwelling Holy Spirit; and without the Holy Spirit a person is not a Christian. (Rom8:9)

It takes the removal of the 'restraint' for the "lawless one" to be unveiled. (vs8) When the Rapture happens is this not precisely what happens? The Church arises "from out of the midst" of the world. Part of the work of the Church is the "reproving" of the world's "works of darkness" (Eph5:11) Is that not the Holy Spirit working through the Believers? Christians do not forge out on their own authority, but it is "Christ in you the hope of glory" (Col1:27); "it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Ga2:20) If God's restraint comes to an end, by definition, that means the removal of the Church; because that is one of the Church's functions. And as the Church comes "out of the midst", does that not aptly describe Jesus' words: One (righteous) is taken, the other (sinner) left. (Mt24:40-41)

The antichrist CANNOT come on the scene as long as the Church is here. (Dear Believer: we will not see the unveiled antichrist while we are on this earth.) As we know dispensationally the Church "does not belong" here, because it is again Israel's time. Due to Christ's groom-like love for His bride, He is not going to force His bride to suffer His wrath. And until the restraining work of the Holy Spirit indwelt Church is removed, there cannot be total darkness on earth until the "light of the world" (Mt5:14) is removed. As long as there is any light, total darkness is not possible.

"And then..." (vs8)

Relatively speaking, there are very few -specific- time-stamps in prophecy. There are some that prophesy years and days. But most prophecies are somewhat generalized. There are even fewer that specifically line up the prophetic ducks-in-a-row. But here is one of those few places.

There is apostasy. Lawlessness is already in full swing; just as violence filled the earth during Noah's days when the Holy Spirit was restraining...but then stopped. In similar fashion, God's restraint of this world's evil is also going to stop. And that will be the event of the Rapture, when the Church is removed.

THEN...the lawless one will be unveiled. The one who will be destroyed at Christ's coming, at the Day of the Lord.

You see, it is quite clear: "But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. -THEN- comes

the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God, even the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power." (1co15:23-24)

The Holy Spirit (Church) "arises from out of the midst. And -THEN- the lawless one will be unveiled..." (vs7-8)

And one of the first things that will mark his evil reign will be the Confirming of the covenant (treaty?) with many for one week (seven years) (Dan9:27) And this little nugget assures that the Rapture is before the entire seven-year period, not just the very end when Christ returns in judgment. To reiterate: the last seven years dispensationally is not -for- the Church, it is the closing fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy regarding Israel. (Dan9:24)

Our "gathering together to Him" (vs1) is the arising "from out of the midst" (vs7) and "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (vs1) is when He comes to "consume" the man of sin "with the brightness of His coming" (vs8)

Lawless One - (2Th 2:4,9-12)

"...who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is honored, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, declaring himself that he is God" (vs4)

Many in Israel thought this was Antiochus IV ("Epiphanes"), during the time of the Maccabees; before Christ's birth. If I remember history correctly, I believe he was the one who sacrificed swine on the temple altar. Thus, as KJV states, the "abomination of desolation". (Dan9:27) But Jesus also makes reference to the matter as being yet future tense (Mk13:14), thus, Antiochus IV was not it. Some from the preterist view make other similar type claims for around 70AD as Jerusalem fell, and Israel ceased to be a nation, again. But Daniel speaks of "until the end".

This person takes on a role that satan desires. To take the place of God, and declare himself to be God. Satan's desire... to be "like the Most High". (Is14:14) But this will be a 'man'. (Ezk28:9) He will claim Deity upon himself. But it seems that he may not arrive at that place until mid-point through those seven years? He will start out being a global hero, having resolved the middle-east conflict with a treaty. (Dan9:27) Will this be at the end of the Ps83 war? A lot of details we don't know. Perhaps of Jewish lineage, such that Israel will receive him as a false messiah? This is what Jesus warned about the false "Christs" (Mt24) (Christ == Messiah) And since Israel is yet in unbelief, they will easily believe what is false; if that person can stop all the suicide bombers, rockets and other continual attacks, they'll welcome him with open arms.

However, it speaks of him sitting "in the temple of God" (vs4) We know that the final temple will be built by THE BRANCH. (Zec6:12) Thus, what is this temple spoken of here? Will they actually begin building an interim temple? The Temple Mount and Land of Israel Faithful people would sure like to get building. They've already got two cornerstones that they continually ceremonialize. But they do not believe in Messiah. They do not speak of the need to repent before God, and receiving Jesus as Savior, but they think their prime disobedience to God is in not building the temple. So, will they get started building? Is that where the antichrist will make his self-proclamation?

We know that as there is "the" antichrist, even now there are "many" antichrists. (1Jn2:18) What do we see today? We know that our human bodies are called "temples". (Jn2:21, 1co6:19) And what do we see today, as the apostasy is in full-swing? We have many people proclaiming themselves to be gods. They become "spirit-filled" and as a result of that, they proclaim themselves all-powerful. And do we not see "power, signs and lying wonders" (vs9) ??

For those morning and evening sacrifices (Dan9:27) we know that a completed temple building is not necessary. In Ezz3:6 we see how the returned exiles began offering sacrifices when only the foundation was laid. And notice how Dan8:11 speaks of "the foundation of His sanctuary". How long would it take them to build such a structure? With modern building techniques and equipment, buildings can go up rather quickly. But even if there isn't a finished building (since we know that Christ will build the millennial temple), an 'area' designated can also be called "temple". In Dan9:27, the text is really hard to discern, thus you find it rendered variously in different translations. But one thing is clear...that is the word "corner". The way the "Temple Mount" group keeps driving the truck around with their corner stones, and they regularly do oil-pouring ceremonies, and water-drawing ceremonies, and have done some sacrifices on near-by locations in-view of the temple mount...I keep 'wondering' if Dan9:27 could possibly be speaking of "corner (stones)". Could it be that permission will never quite be granted to build the temple, but they will be allowed to carry those stones to the temple mount, and begin sacrifices? They already have it mapped out, where they think the original Holy-of-holies was...and in their minds, that's where it is...even though the Dome-of-the-rock now sits there.

There's a lot we don't know, until it happens. But it seems most likely that, just as there are many antichrists today but 'the' antichrist is yet to be unveiled; so, too, there are many self-proclaimed 'gods' today, but the son-of-perdition will be THE MAIN EVENT prophetically.

Thus, what we see today, with these people doing their signs and wonders, will be like nothing compared to what this one will do. He will even call fire down from heaven. (Rev13:13)

But whatever those details will be, the thing that is important to understand -now- is all of humanity.

The "...working of satan" (vs9) Satan who is the "father" of lies. (Jn8:44) The signs the son of perdition will perform are "lying wonders". Many people are wowed by charismania's "miracles"...but they are "lying wonders". For what purpose? Why does anybody lie? To -deceive-.

Notice the wording: "unrighteous deception among those who are perishing" (vs10) Things will be different. How many places does Scripture warn us to not be deceived (De11:16), to not be led astray (1co6:9, 15:33, Ga6:7, etc) If we are warned to "not" be led astray, that means we presently have a choice. But then it will be different. They will be deceived, because they are the ones who are perishing.

Why? "...because they -did- not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved" (vs10) Where presently the Holy Spirit through the Church is "restraining" evil and deception, then that restraint will be gone. The Holy Spirit is no longer restraining; the Church is no longer there. They had a

choice, but they scoffed, "where is the promise of His coming?" (2Pt3:4) They were taunting regarding the Rapture, "My master delays his coming" (Mt24:48) They were not among the "ones loving His appearing" (2Ti4:8) And so God says, "...the time is at hand. He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still. And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to what his work shall be." (Rev22:10-12)

Notice the verb tense: they "-did-" not receive the truth. It is no longer that they -do- not want the truth. The time came and went, and so when that day arrives, it will be said: They -did- not believe, so -now- let them have deception. They -did- not want the truth, so -now- let them have the lie. They -did- not receive Jesus (Jn1:12) when it was proclaimed to them "now is the day of salvation" (2co6:2), so -now- let them be judged.

As long as the Church was on earth, the Holy Spirit was a witness to their hearts and consciences. But -now-, the Church has been received up to Jesus' presence; and due to their unbelief, and their persecuting of the Church (1:6)...

"For this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie.." (vs11) to give "full vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." (1:8)

In that day there will not be any complex doctrine. There will no longer be many denominations of the saved. Those who are in all the denominations of the one-world-church have already been rejected. But for those who had not known any better: Their salvation will be based on their refusal to take the "mark" of the beast. (Rev14:9-10) And notice what their fate is: They will be "...beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the Word of God, who had not done homage to the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands." (Rev20:4) The basis (the "how to") for salvation during that time:

"And it shall come to pass that everyone who shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." (Ac2:21)

But, the Saved - (2Th 2:13-17)

"But we owe thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief in the truth..." (vs13)

Again, the word "but". Just like we saw in the first epistle: there was the resurrection/rapture (ch4), the day of the Lord (5:1-3), -BUT- you are not part of "that Day" (5:4-11) In like manner, here we see: Rapture (vs7), unveiling of the lawless one (vs8) and his description (vs9) and those who follow him (vs10-12)... -BUT- you have been chosen for salvation (vs13) You (Believers) are not part of that scene. 'They' are for deception and destruction, -BUT- 'you' are for salvation.

Believers are chosen "through sanctification of the Spirit". Sanctification is another word that means "holy". Being set apart, separate, distinct, away from. What kind of God would he be to call Himself "holy" (Lev11:44), if He did not also 'sanctify' His own from the devastation of the wicked!

Instead we are "called" for the "obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (vs14) This is part of the "gospel". Gospel means "good news". We receive the Gospel of Jesus Christ...Good news, we are going through God's judgment! ??? NO WAY!! The Good News is that we are saved from sin, and Jesus has promised to come and "receive" us to Himself. (Jn14:3) Jesus coming for us is the "blessed hope" (Tit2:13)

Are we harping on this? Are we drumming it too much? Well, satan does not want Christians to be assured of this Gospel, so he continually sends around his false prophets detracting from, and refuting this Gospel. Even today as I was preparing these three studies, there was another email from a person who doesn't believe in "pre-trib"... exhorting me to "be a berean" and read a certain book by so-n-so. Those kinds of gnats I swat away from my face, and continue harping-n-drumming at you. Repeating. As Paul says, to be repeating things all the time is no trouble to do, and for you "it is safe" (Php3:1) If satan sends these messengers to me, he certainly is to you as well. So, I will keep reminding you all of them.

Thus, being assured of all this, what do we do? Get our reminders and then go lie around by the pool, sipping our iced teas?

"STAND FIRM and HOLD ON to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle" (vs15) Remember, satan had some at Thessalonica confused, worried that the Lord had already come, and they had missed the boat. They lived in persecution. Most of us have an easier life (so far) in our societies of "tolerance" and "free speech". So, the enemy comes at us differently, telling us either: that there won't be a rapture, that Christ is not coming to receive us to Himself, but rather that we are preparing a place for Him; or, that His coming to receive us will be some

time later than Scripture says plainly. In either case, anybody who adheres to such doctrines will not be watching. Jesus exhorted us to "watch therefore". (Mt24:42) And to those who would not watch, the warning is clear: "Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not at all know what hour I will come upon you" (Rev3:3)

However, knowing the truth, if we are holding on and watching, we have "everlasting comfort and good hope by grace" and God encourages our hearts and established us in all things. (vs16-17)

Guarded from the Evil - (2Th 3:1-5)

"Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the Word of the Lord may run freely and be glorified, just as it is with you..." (vs1)

Having left the organized false-church years ago, it's been a long time since I've been in a typical "prayer meeting". Prayer requests? I need prayer in making a business decision. Pray for me in deciding about which car to get. We're going on vacation...pray for that.

When was the last time you heard a request: That I might be bold proclaiming God's Word. When the first apostles prayed such prayers, they were filled with the Spirit and "spoke the Word of God with boldness" (Ac4:31) That prayer was in the context of persecution. The prayer wasn't even "help me bear up under persecution". They were not sitting around licking their wounds. They were tugging at the harness, eager to -GO- and proclaim God's Word.

The request isn't to be freed from persecution, but from "evil and wicked men; for not all have faith" (vs2) Does this not sound like a prayer for caution against 'pretend' christians? If the opposition was overtly evil, that's easy to spot, and deal with. But he adds the clause, "not all have faith". Not all are believers. Just like he said that "not all those of Israel are Israel" (Rom9:6), here he's saying the very thing we speak of regularly, and will continue harping and drumming. Just because something has the label "church" doesn't mean its part of the [C]hurch of Jesus Christ. Not all those claiming to be "christian" are [C]hristians...they are not "disciples" of Jesus Christ. (Ac11:26) They are 'pretenders'. Wolves in sheep skins.

Indeed, for a true Believer, it can be easy to be deceived by somebody coming along, claiming to be a Christian. Most of them will repeat the mantra similar to: I've been blood-washed and spirit-filled. Well, if they say "spirit-filled", you can know immediately that they are demon-possessed. That is charismania's mantra. But others will talk about having gone forward, prayed-the-prayer, made-a-commitment, given their lives/hearts to Jesus, accepted Christ, etc. Some of those, even though in ignorance of fully-correct doctrine -may- be saved. But many (most) are not. With some of them, you might get an initial 'twinge' in your spirit that "something-is-not-right" with that person, that you can't quite put-your-finger on; but then, as they spin out words you exercise caution lest you turn away a true believer that might yet be a "baby" in Christ; and then, after 'time' has gone by, you receive verification that they are -not- in Christ. They are a "changeling" who is skilled at holding its shape for a certain period of time, but eventually changelings need to "regenerate" in their buckets (for you Star Trekkies), and they revert to their 'original' gelatinous state. Thus, that original 'twinge' proved true...the "witness" from the Holy Spirit. (Rom8:16)

But this sort of discernment does not happen on our own. It comes through prayer. And remember from "pray without ceasing" (1Th5:17) that prayer is our "life" in the presence of God. We can only know these things through the Holy Spirit, who is in contact with Jesus (Rom8:26-27) who knows the heart/s. (Heb4:12-13)

Thus, what is Paul really praying for? That we might faithfully be in Christ's presence in our daily lives, looking unto Jesus. (Heb12:1-2)

But also notice how Paul's attitude and concerns for them has shifted since the first epistle. In the first epistle he was in-a-panic concerning their spiritual welfare, "lest somehow the tempter had tempted you" (1Th3:5) and they had become spiritual casualties. But they have been thriving through persecution; they have been growing; and he expresses confidence in the Lord's faithfulness in establishing and guarding them. (vs3) And based on their growth thus far, he encourages them that they - are- doing well, and that they -will- continue doing well. (vs4)

He exhorts, as we do continually, to... Keep looking toward the Lord. Be in the Word, looking unto Jesus.

"Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ" (vs5)

Withdrawing from Evil - (2Th 3:6-15)

"But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the teaching which you received from us" (vs6)

In the first epistle Paul exhorts to "mind your own business" (4:11) and we also at that time looked at this passage, to observe how minding one's own business is in contrast to the "busybody". (vs11) So, we won't cover that ground again; except to notice that Paul had given 'gentle' exhortation on this topic in the first epistle, but there were apparently some who didn't 'get' it. So now he strengthens his words.

So, if we put everything together that we've seen, you mean to say that, just because somebody is a free-loading busybody, that that's reason enough to shun them? Well, is that not the context here? If people continue being disorderly, "withdraw" from them. (vs6) And what are they being disorderly about? Being lazy, no-good, busybodies. (vs10-11)

B'but.... Won't that drive them away? Isn't their soul/spirit more important than 'things' (food and money it takes to buy food)? Isn't the 'person' more important than our own personal comfort? Aren't we supposed to "give ourselves" (2co8:5), and to "spend and be spent"? (2co12:15)

In that prior lesson we observed how the 70s communes had many free-loaders, and how the attitude was "what's yours is mine". If anybody were to criticize the lazy slobs for their laziness, the prevailing attitude of the day was to label the criticizer as being "judgmental" and not being "accepting" of people, whatever their makeup.

Paul teaches to "bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Ga6:2) But in the same context he also says "...let each one prove his own work...for each one shall bear his own load." (vs4-5) While that passage starts out talking spiritually, he works into the financial regarding the support of ministers. (vs6)

There is a basic Godly principle, which is also seen a lot in Proverbs: That when somebody is in need, to care for them. When Israel was exhorted to care for the foreigner, orphan and widow, they were reminded how they had been foreigners in Egypt, and reminded how they had been treated. But if somebody is 'able'...don't be a free-loader. Pull your own weight. Don't be a (purposeful) burden on others.

And if a person refuses...withdraw from them. "...do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed." (vs14) What will 'shame' do? Perhaps provide for an emotional kick-in-the-pants to get off his duff, and -WORK-. What? Isn't the reason he's not working, because he lacks "self-esteem"? No!

Again, Paul leads by example: "For you yourselves know how you need to imitate our example, for we were not disorderly among you" (vs7)

Nutshell

In the "Introduction" we suggested a little list of verses, words and phrases related to the relationship of Believers and unbelievers to the resurrection, rapture, the Day of the Lord, the coming of the Lord, tribulation, persecution, etc. I think the narrative of the series has pretty much exhausted the topic, so I'm not going to do as was suggested I might do. We don't need to re-hash what's already been said.

These two epistles cannot possibly support any of the false doctrines traditionally known as: mid-trib, post-trib, pre-wrath, etc. But there is ample evidence to support the "pre-trib" doctrine.

For your interest here is the "nutshell" list in bare-bones format:

1th1:10 -waiting for Jesus
1th1:10 -delivered from coming wrath
1th2:16 -wrath upon Israel
1th2:19 -in Jesus' presence at His coming
1th3:3 -appointed to afflictions (Jn16:33) from satan (Mt16:18)
1th3:13 -coming with all His saints (Zec14:5)
1th4:14 -Jesus brings those who died
1th4:16-17 -descends from Heaven, dead rise,
 living join them in the clouds, meet in the air
1th5:1 -"but" (divider between 2 topics)
1th5:3 -"they" day of the Lord-destruction
1th5:9 -not appointed "us" to wrath
1th5:10 -watch or sleep (alive or dead Jn11:25-26), live w/ Him
1th5:23 -coming of the Lord

2th1:6 -repay those who persecute
2th1:7 -afflicted have rest when Christ revealed
2th1:8 -vengeance on unbelievers
2th1:10 -glorified in His saints
2th2:2 -deception
2th2:3 -apostasy first
2th2:7 -arises out of the midst
2th2:8 -"then" lawless one revealed
2th2:12 -judgment of those who didn't believe
2th2:13 -But...believers chosen for salvation

Do these last two items not summarize God's character! He has not appointed the Church to 'wrath' (1th5:9) because His character is to bless the righteous and judge the wicked. God does not send His Church through tribulation because His character is as a father with a son: "Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more

will your Father in Heaven give good things to those who ask Him!" (Mt7:9-11)

"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of Lights, with whom there is no change or shadow of turning." (Jac1:17)

Amen!