An illustration of an hourglass with red sand, set within a dark, ornate frame. The hourglass is positioned on the left side of the top half of the cover, against a dark blue background with a teal geometric shape on the left.

**LIVING**  
AT THE  
**END**  
OF  
**TIME**

**1 Thessalonians Study Guide**

Spring 2023





The Bible tells us that Jesus will return one day in power and in glory. Until then, how should we wait and live?

In anticipation of this climax to history, people have adopted different responses. Some have left their jobs and climbed to the top of some mountain to wait in excited anticipation. They have faced the jeers and the ridicule of many for their actions. Others have felt that if indeed they were living in what are often called "the last days," they were free from any responsibilities and moral obligations so the daily routine of work and caring for home and family could be neglected.

Still others have felt that this great event should urge them on in at least two ways. First of all, it should stimulate them to a greater sense of holy living. Secondly, it should spur them on to an increased urgency to share this good news of the Gospel so that in the final days many will respond to the love of God and experience the reality that in fact God does desire everyone to be saved (I Thess. 5:9).

This is the theme of I Thessalonians. This short book brings a challenge to Christians in the 21st century who, like the believers of Paul's day, are still waiting for the return of Jesus Christ (I Thessalonians 1:10). Until then, we are challenged to encourage one another, to live holy lives, and to continue to live responsibly.

It is my prayer that our study in this short letter from the Apostle Paul will fulfil the goal that it had for its original readers. With holy lives, responsible actions, and expectant hearts may we press on LIVING AT THE END OF TIME!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Cowan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish underneath the name.

Tom Cowan,  
Victoria, B.C.

## Living at the End of Time!

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This study guide has been written by Tom Cowan for the ministry of Central Baptist Church, Victoria, B.C. for the spring of 2023.

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## **COMMUNITY GROUP AND SUNDAY TEACHING SCHEDULE Central Baptist Church, Victoria, B.C.**

In 1924, H. H. Halley published Halley' Bible Handbook. Halley emphasized that the Bible is God's word, and he recognized Christ Jesus as the heart of that word. He said that the most important thing in his handbook was this simple suggestion: that each church have a congregational plan of Bible reading and that the pastor's sermon be based on that passage.

This study guide further develops Halley's simple idea by adding the level of home-based community groups. Weekly personal preparation leads into discussion and application shared in small groups, which in turn anticipates the sermon on the following Sunday.

This study guide is written for Central Baptist Church in Victoria, B.C. Its primary purpose is to integrate personal preparation, community group study leading towards the teaching ministry on the following Sunday.

<b>Study</b>	<b>I Thessalonians</b>	<b>Week Beginning...</b>	<b>Sunday</b>
#1	1:1-10	Monday, February 6 <sup>th</sup>	February 12 <sup>th</sup>
#2	2:1-12	Monday, February 13 <sup>th</sup>	February 19 <sup>th</sup>
#3	2:13-20	Monday, February 20 <sup>th</sup>	February 26 <sup>th</sup>
#4	3:1-13	Monday, February 27 <sup>th</sup>	March 5 <sup>th</sup>
#5	4:1-12	Monday, March 6 <sup>th</sup>	March 12 <sup>th</sup>
#6	4:13-18	Monday, March 13 <sup>th</sup>	March 19 <sup>th</sup>
#7	5:1-11	Monday, March 20 <sup>th</sup>	March 26 <sup>th</sup>
#8	5:12-28	Monday, March 27 <sup>th</sup>	April 2 <sup>nd</sup>





**YOUR COMMUNITY GROUP - PRAYERS AND PRAISES:**

This page is a good opportunity to record prayers and praises during this study series. It will give you a record of what people prayed for, and also how God responded.

Date	Name	Prayer Need	Praise Item

## Introduction & Overview

**A**s we begin this 8 week study in I Thessalonians, it is important that we have an understanding of the history of the book. When Paul and his companions visited Thessalonica in AD 49 or 50, they found a well-established city with a long history. It had been founded sometime in the 4<sup>th</sup> century by Cassander, who was one of Alexander the Great's army officers. It occupied a strategic location, because it boasted a natural harbor. Luke tells us in Acts 17 how Thessalonica came to be evangelized during Paul's second missionary journey. Acts 17:1-15 is great reading!

The Jewish population of Thessalonica was large enough to justify a synagogue, and Paul preached there on three successive sabbaths. Jealous of Paul's influence in the city, the Jews recruited a gang of thugs and started a riot. One night under cover of darkness, Paul and Silas had to be smuggled out of the city.

Read through this short letter to the Thessalonians several times. As you read it, write down some of the key ideas or thoughts that you hear Paul writing about. This will create in your mind an overall impression of the letter and will prevent it from becoming a collection of unrelated verses or ideas.

We must keep in mind that every book in the Bible was written for a specific purpose. In the New Testament, each of Paul's letters was written to address a particular situation. Some of the letters address moral problems. Others may deal with theological difficulties that arose in that particular church. Still others are filled with warm memories and encouraging advice. Many believe that I Thessalonians was the first letter that Paul wrote. However, there was a problem, in fact several problems, that Paul felt that he had to address.

We read in I Thessalonians 3:6-7 that Timothy had brought news to Paul about the church. His report included the following comments:

- He was encouraged by the stamina of the Christians in the face of the opposition they had to endure.
- He was alarmed by the attempts to undermine Paul's reputation and question his sincerity.
- There was confusion and misunderstanding about the Lord's return (or "parousia") and the part of believers who had already died. This had created a loss of hope.
- Some aspects of their ethical and moral life could be improved.

Paul's first letter is a reply to this report from young Timothy. It includes warm words of pastoral care and affection (2:7-8), mixed with firm words of pastoral challenge (4:1). We can summarize the main purpose of the letter as follows.

## Living at the End of Time!

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1. It expresses thanks to God for the healthy condition of the church. We will see this in the warm way in which Paul addresses the Christians at Thessalonica.
2. He makes a strong case for his own reputation and that of his associates in ministry.
3. The teaching on the Lord's return is to bring hope and also stimulate Christian holy living. In this regard, both letters contribute a great deal to our understanding of the Lord's return. What we must realize, however, is that Paul is not interested in stimulating our curiosity, nor does he allow us to set dates and times. The reality of the "*parousia*"<sup>1</sup> is to bring encouragement (I Thess. 4:18), to stimulate holy living (I Thess. 5:8), and to encourage responsible behavior (II Thess. 3:10-12).

The theme of the second letter repeats and intensifies some of the concerns of the first epistle. Some Christians thought that the Day of the Lord had happened, and they had missed out on this glorious climax to history. Paul outlines what still has to happen in history before that event will take place. He says in II Thessalonians 2 that the stage of history will grow dark with lawlessness and deception.

Some Christians had become apathetic while waiting for Christ to return. Their use of the welfare ministry of the Church had moved from enjoyment to exploitation. In the final chapter of the second letter, Paul delivers some strong words, saying that this kind of attitude will not be tolerated. Such people must be admonished. Finally, some Christians were getting weary of both the work and the wait. His last words give them a strong incentive to encouragement, reminding them that they should not become weary in doing good (II Thess. 3:13).

We will find that like the original recipients of the letter, there is much to encourage us in what it says. There is also much to stimulate and challenge us to holy living, as we too wait *LIVING AT THE END OF TIME!*

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<sup>1</sup> One of several words used to describe the second coming of Jesus.



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## Living at the End of Time!

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One helpful way to get an overview of an entire book is to write a brief summary of each chapter. Remember that when the Bible was originally written, the verse numbering and chapter divisions which we use were not part of the original text.

Chapter	Key Thought or Idea
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

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## Living at the End of Time!

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Here are some things to look for.

- Note how Paul is concerned about the vitality of the Church. He does not have an individualistic approach to Christianity. He sees the Christian life through the lens of the Church.
- The thought of “*love for the brethren*” is mentioned many times.
- We are called to holy living in the light of Christ's return.

How would you summarize the main message of this letter? If you were to write one short statement that captures what this letter is saying, what would that be?

What was the most important truth for your personal life that you read in this letter?

Each week the study guide will outline some questions for your community group discussion. It is important that each group not feel restricted by these questions. The best questions will always be your own questions! You may find that you deal with only one or two of the questions as they lead the group into other fruitful and practical discussion.

The best questions will be your own questions!
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- The Thessalonian Church never did see the Lord return, even although they lived with that expectancy. Were they mistaken in their understanding?
- From your reading of the entire letter, what for you is the most important issue that is linked to the return of Christ?
- The theme of Christ's return is often the material for many cartoonists and comedians. Why do you think this is?

## Living at the End of Time!

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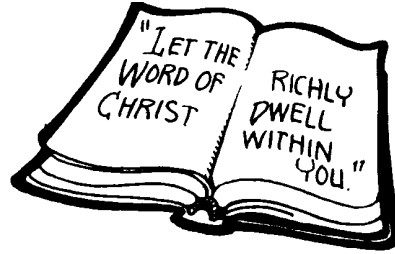
- How do you think our society today responds to this truth? Do they believe it? Are they unsure? Do they think it is a great joke? Is this an aspect of Christian truth you are comfortable talking about outside of church?
- In what ways should our lives change after reading this letter?
  - what changes should take place in our personal lives?
  - what changes should occur in your local church?

### **SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT!**

The Thessalonian Christians never lived to see Jesus Christ return in power and in glory, but they were challenged to live “until He comes!” This is God's will for us in our hour of history.

Study #1

I Thessalonians 1:1-10



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**SECTION I: PERSONAL PREPARATION**

Read chapter 1:1-10 several times. This first section of each study is where you can do some serious Bible study. You are encouraged to look up other verses and see how the truths of Scripture support one another. This will help you to develop a personal commentary on I Thessalonians, in which you can record what God teaches you in His Word.

1:1 This is the opening greeting. It follows the usual custom of ancient letters in that the writer puts his name at the beginning of the letter and not at the end as we do.

Paul, or Saul as he was originally known, was a key figure in the early Church. Silas was also known as Silvanus. His name appears many times in Acts. What do you find out about Silas in Acts 15:22-41?

Timothy is the third person who is listed at the beginning of the letter. He enjoyed a special relationship with Paul, who trained him in the work of the ministry. You will find Paul's affection for him in the two letters that are addressed to Timothy.

1:2-4 What are three things Paul is thankful for in the life of this church?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

## Living at the End of Time!

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In which of these areas do you sense that your life needs to improve the most? How might you go about that?

Verse 4 brings us to an important truth in the Scriptures. It is the recognition that the basis of our becoming Christians is the calling and choosing of God. Look up the following verses and see what they teach us.

John 15:16

Ephesians 1:3-6

What kind of response should we make from this realization that God has chosen us?

1:5 Paul says that the Gospel came to them in four ways. What do you think he means by each of these phrases which describe how the Gospel came?

1. in word
2. in power
3. in the Holy Spirit
4. with deep conviction

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## Living at the End of Time!

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What happens to us and to those we are seeking to reach when we have only the "words" of the Gospel, and not the other things Paul mentions that give the gospel its full meaning and impact?

1:6-8            Changed lives is the evidence of the authenticity of our faith. This is the only way in which we can say to people that Jesus Christ is truly in us. How did these Christians demonstrate the reality of Jesus Christ, so that people would see how they were changed?

In verses 7 and 8, Paul says that these Christians have "imitated" the Lord, and also have become an "example" to all believers. Why do you think he can state this with such confidence?

1:9-10            We can easily get the picture that Paul was seeing the Thessalonian church as a model of Christian fellowship. He says that they had turned to the living God from idols. What might those idols have been, and what would that have involved?

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## Living at the End of Time!

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Having turned from idols, Paul says that this has brought them to do two things (verses 9 and 10). What are they?

1.

2.

What does Paul mean by "the wrath to come"?

How will Jesus deliver us from this?

As you look back and review your reading and study of this opening chapter, write down the most important truth or idea that comes out of it to your life.

The most important truth for me in the chapter is...

The Thessalonian Christians lived in their culture with the strong realization that they needed to turn from the idols that surrounded them to serve God. As we will see as we progress through the letter, they also lived in the expectation of the return of Jesus Christ. So, they had to wait (1:10) for His coming. But this waiting was not to be without action or responsibility. There was work to be done in the waiting, and moral obligations of family and work were not to be abandoned (2 Thess. 3:10). We are also called to work and wait in a spirit of expectation.

The opening section is important for personal growth, and also for preparation for your community group study. While it is helpful to review the Bible study section and to deal with any questions, the group meeting really benefits when everyone has done their personal preparation and are ready to share in the following questions.



## **SECTION II: COMMUNITY GROUP DISCUSSION AND APPLICATION**

Here are some questions that may stimulate ideas for discussion and application from this chapter. However, do not be limited to these questions. Think about what this chapter has been teaching you and develop other lines of discussion that you can share in your community group Bible study.

- ❑ Imagine that you were transported back in time to this Christian fellowship in Thessalonica. From this opening chapter, what would you expect the church to be like?
  
- ❑ What marks or characteristics of this church, which Paul has described for us, would you like to see with much greater evidence in the church here and now? What do we learn about these Christians that we should be copying?
  
- ❑ What are some of the idols (see 1:9) we have in our culture? Are people willing to turn from them to serve the living God?



## Living at the End of Time!

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- What does it mean for us to serve the living God? What might this involve?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- We are also called to *"wait for His Son..."* However, some 2,000 years have passed since this letter was written. What would help us to wait with a full spirit of expectation that does not lose hope?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- In the culture in which they lived, it appears that these early Christians were known for a faith that was REAL! People knew that they had really come to God. What are some of the key things which make our faith authentic today in the eyes of our society?



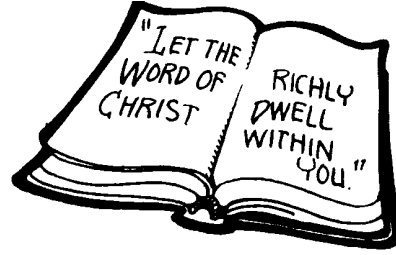
February 12<sup>th</sup> will be Communion Sunday

“Until He Comes...”

## Study #2

# I Thessalonians 2:1-12

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When Paul wrote this first letter to the Christians at Thessalonica, he had three main purposes in mind.

- First of all, he wanted to express his joy and satisfaction to God for the healthy spiritual condition of the church. He was grateful to God for the authentic reality of their faith.
- Secondly, he wanted to encourage them to continue their strong Christian behavior while they lived in the expectation of Christ's return. The hope of His coming was not to make them wait passively, but rather to spur them on to continued holy living.
- His final purpose had a more personal tone. He needed to address some false accusations which had been made about himself and some of his associates. This is what he deals with in 2:1-12.

There are often occasions and circumstances in our own lives when we are misunderstood, or our motives are questioned. We feel hurt and challenged at these difficult times. Here in this chapter, we are given some insight into the feelings of this great apostle, and how he sought to react to this kind of situation.

### **SECTION I: PERSONAL PREPARATION**

Begin your study this week by reading through 2:1-12 several times, keeping in mind this third reason for the letter. This chapter contains Paul's defense against those who had persecuted him.

- 2:1-2      In spite of what others might say, Paul knows that the Thessalonian Christians have no doubt about his motives and the value of his ministry to them. Look up Acts 16:16-40 to find out what had happened at Philippi. What are some of the things they had to endure?

In spite of this, what attitude had they displayed?

2:3-8 In verses 3 and 4, Paul says that his appeal (Greek *paraklesis*) was free from 3 things. What are they?

1.

2.

3.

Who has approved Paul's ministry?

He says that there are two ways in which he knows that he has that approval. The first reason is because of what he did NOT do. How does he outline this in verses 4-6?

What are the positive reasons he gives for knowing that his ministry is approved by God? (verses 7-8)

## Living at the End of Time!

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2:9-12 Not only can Paul appeal to what was in his own heart, but he can also appeal to what the Thessalonians have seen with their own eyes about his ministry. What does he ask them to recall in:

verse 9 -

verse 10 -

verse 11 -

What does verse 12 teach us was the purpose of this hard work and ministry? What was Paul striving for in their lives?

On this same theme, look up the following verses in Ephesians. How do they reinforce this truth?

Ephesians 4:1

Ephesians 4:17

Ephesians 5:8

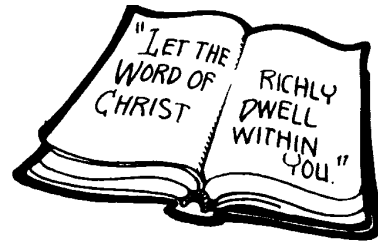
Ephesians 5:15

## **SECTION II: COMMUNITY GROUP DISCUSSION AND APPLICATION**

- ❑ There are many different occasions when what we have said may have been misunderstood, or people have challenged our motives. We are often hurt in these situations, and we wonder how best to respond. This is the kind of situation Paul was in. From your study of this chapter, and how Paul responded, what help and advice can you get about how to respond when your motives are challenged?
  
- ❑ Do you ever find yourself using the kind of strategy or tactics Paul describes in verses 5 and 6? What kind of situation would make you use these kinds of methods?
  
- ❑ In what area of your life right now do you have to walk with a greater sense of Christian responsibility?
  
- ❑ How will you be encouraged to do this?
  
- ❑ What does this chapter teach you about the qualities needed for ministry today? Make a list of the characteristics of a Christian worker that you find in this passage.
  
- ❑ There are many times when we do not know how to express such warm feelings about someone, or we do not take the time to express what we feel. We assume people will know. But do they? Do they know the way you feel about them? Perhaps you need to express this in a letter this week (just as Paul did!), or a phone call, or a visit!

## Study #3

# I Thessalonians 2:13-20



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As we continue our study in chapter 2, we see how the friendship between Paul and the Thessalonians is a model for meaningful relationships.

### SECTION I: PERSONAL PREPARATION

2:13-16      What is Paul thankful for in how the Thessalonians received what he told them?

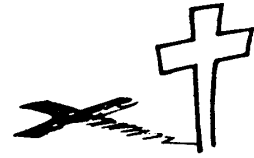
Verse 13 says that the word "*performs its work in you who believe.*" What is the work that the word of God has to do in us, and how does it do it?

Paul expresses some very strong feelings toward the Jews. How does he describe them, and why do you think he expresses his feelings in such strong language?

2:16              What conclusion does he come to about them in verse 16?

In contrast to the strong feelings just expressed about the Jews, he has equally strong feelings of affection toward the Thessalonians.

This is the point of the closing paragraph of this chapter  
(2:17-2:20)



2:14-16 This is a difficult section. Some commentators feel that this anti-Jewish sentiment was added later. However there is no manuscript evidence to indicate that. In Acts 17, Luke makes it clear that Jewish opponents of the gospel pursued Paul from Thessalonica to Berea and from Berea to Athens.

In this indictment of the Jews, he lists 5 things. What are they?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

2:16 What do you think he means by “the wrath of God has come upon them at last”?

2:19-20 What do these closing two verses indicate to us about the way Paul really feels toward these fellow Christians? Note that the word "coming" is the Greek word '*parousia*' which is the word used in the New Testament to refer to His coming again. For other verses which refer to *parousia*, see I Thessalonians 3:13; 4:15; 2 Thess. 2:1,8; I Cor. 15:23. You are encouraged to look up these verses and see what they teach us. This also helps us to see how to follow a truth or an idea through various books in the Bible.

In verse 20, note that Paul calls these Christians his "crown." In Greek, there are two words for crown. One word "diadema" was used almost exclusively for the royal crown. Here Paul uses the other word "stephanos" which means the victory crown given to the winning athlete.

## **SECTION II: COMMUNITY GROUP DISCUSSION AND APPLICATION**

- ❑ We need to remember that our Christian story has its roots in the Old Testament. How are we to understand Paul's strong words against the Jews in the light of his assault against the Jews? Would you describe this as antisemitism?
  
- ❑ How are we to understand Paul's words many evangelical Christians today support God's concern for Israel?
  
- ❑ We must remember that there is a Jewish synagogue right round the corner from Central Baptist Church here in Victoria. If we were to stand in front of it on a Saturday, which is their Sabbath, and proclaim what these verses say, what might happen?
  
- ❑ There is a strong multi-faith climate in Canada. To what extent can we support its programs, and participate in its work? Where do we draw the line about our involvement? When we withdraw, how is our isolation perceived?

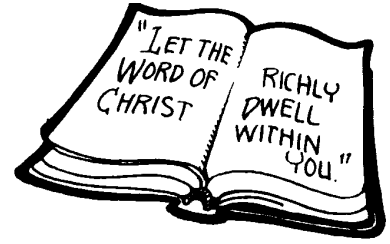
Imagine how the Thessalonians felt when they received this warm letter and read how Paul regarded them as his "glory and joy." It must have made the church glow with pleasure and joy.

- ❑ In your circle of friends, do you have any people that you could refer to as "your glory and joy"?
  
- ❑ There are many times when we do not know how to express such warm feelings about someone, or we do not take the time to express what we feel. Why is that?
  
- ❑ Do your friends really know the way you feel about them? Perhaps you need to express this in a letter this week (just as Paul did!), or a phone call, or a visit!



## Study #4

# I Thessalonians 3:1-13



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The theme of chapter 2 continues as Paul expresses his continuing affection and care for these Christians. Read through the chapter several times so that you will get a sense of the warm spirit Paul has, and which he wants to express.

### SECTION I: PERSONAL PREPARATION

3:1-5 Paul now sought another way to ease the pain of separation that he felt very keenly. What steps did he take to rectify the situation?

What did Paul want Timothy to do for the Thessalonians?

What are some of the ways in which he might have carried out this mandate?

In our day, it seems that we will do all we can to avoid any affliction or difficult times. Paul teaches us some vital things about affliction (Greek *thlipsis* means "pressure." Jesus uses this same word in John 16:33).

A. What does he teach us in verse 3?

B. What does he teach us about trials in verse 4?

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## Living at the End of Time!

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James teaches that the trials of life can sometimes have a positive result in our life.  
Read James 1:2-4.

<sup>2</sup> *Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds,*

<sup>3</sup> *because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.*

<sup>4</sup> *Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

What attitude does James say we should take towards the trials of life?

What can they produce in us?

Is this always the case?

What were Paul's fears for these Christians? (3: 5)

3:6-10      In contrast to what Paul was afraid of hearing, what was the report which Timothy brought back?

How did this report help Paul in the struggles he was going through (verse 7)?

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## Living at the End of Time!

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In verse 8, we get the feeling that this good news had almost given Paul a new lease on life! It had rejuvenated him! Note the word "if" in this verse. Look up Colossians 1:23. Note also how this verse begins with "If we continue in the faith. . . ."

What might we learn from the way Paul uses this little word "if"?

What kind of emotion and feeling does Paul express in his prayer for them in verses 9 and 10?

In verse 10, what do you think the final phrase means, "may complete what is lacking in your faith"?

Often in his letters, Paul's thoughts burst into a doxology or a spontaneous outburst of praise. We can see another example of this in Ephesians 3:20-21.

*<sup>20</sup> Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, <sup>21</sup> to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen."*

We find the same kind of thing in the closing paragraph of this chapter. Verses 11-13 are a burst of praise, as Paul thinks of all that the Lord will still be able to do in their lives.

3:11-13      What does Paul pray that the Lord will be able to do?

How are we able to be "unblamable in holiness" before God?  
See Jude 24-25.

It is interesting for us to note that the Greek word for "strength" which is used in verse 13 gives us our English word "steroids." We see that we are called to a new level of strength, not by taking steroids to make our bodies stronger, but in our inner spirit through the work of God.

## **SECTION II: COMMUNITY GROUP DISCUSSION AND APPLICATION**

- ❑ We usually want to avoid trials and difficulties. From this chapter and from reading James 1:2-4, what responses are we encouraged to make when we face difficulties?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- ❑ How would this help you to work through some difficulty you are facing just now?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- ❑ Do you know someone whose faith seemed to fail and they gave up? How might 3:5 relate to that situation? Did you have the same kind of feelings that Paul was afraid of?

## Living at the End of Time!

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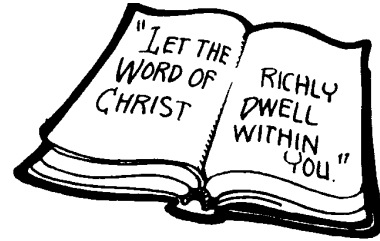
- The emphasis of Paul's prayer in this chapter is that God will continue to be at work in these people whom he loves. For whom are you praying that same kind of prayer? Or, we might have to ask . . . is there someone for whom we should be praying in this manner?
  
- Paul seemed to get a new lease on life when Timothy brought back a good report about these Christians. What gives you that same kind of feeling? What sort of news encourages you to keep on going?
  
- If you know that you are encouraged by a good report, then think of how others are probably also like you. They too are encouraged by good news of how God is at work. Is there somebody you need to be in touch with this week and sharing with them how God is alive and at work in your life? Who knows, that may be just what they need to encourage their spirit!

The closing verses of 1 Thessalonians 3 are a great benediction!

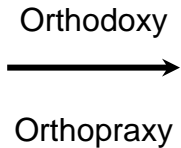
*<sup>11</sup> Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. <sup>12</sup> May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. <sup>13</sup> May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.*

Study #5

# I Thessalonians 4:1-12



The last three verses of chapter 3 in many ways could have brought this letter to a powerful conclusion. In one sense, Paul did not really have to add anything. But as he does in so many of his letters (or epistles, as they are often called), he begins a new line of thought. The normal pattern for Paul is to move from instruction in Christian belief to instruction in Christian behavior. This is no accident. The Scriptures are always moving us to consider what we believe and see how that must be translated into practice in how we behave.



**Orthodoxy** (or right Christian thinking) is to lead to what is called **Orthopraxy** (which is right Christian living).

The other thing that we will see in the Bible is that Christian holiness is not a vague idea. As we will see in this next study, holiness calls for specific action and a practical response from us in daily life.

Paul is not one to mince words! He is not afraid to deal with any subject, matter, or topic. Our study this week will examine 4:1-12. Here Paul gives us some detailed advice on how we can live a life that pleases God. Read this section through several times, so that you will be familiar with its content.

## SECTION I: PERSONAL PREPARATION

4:1 "Finally." Like a lot of preachers, Paul uses a word like this when he still has quite a long way to go! As he begins this practical section, what does he want them to do?

Is this new for them, or is it something they are already experiencing?

How might this refer to what he says in 3:10?

4:2           What do you think he means by the commandments he had already given to them?

We have said that Paul is not one to be vague when it comes to practical living. He says that God has clearly stated His will for all of us. We often use the phrase "God's will" to refer to some direction or guidance which we are looking for. Many people, especially young people, talk about "wanting to know God's will for their lives." What they are usually saying is that they would like guidance about a career or direction about some job. They want to know what God wants them to DO. But when the Bible talks about the will of God, it is not primarily referring to direction or guidance. Rather it is talking about our CHARACTER!

Here in this passage in I Thessalonians 4:1-12, we are given some very clear and unambiguous truth about what the will of God really is. Spiritual character is God's ideal for all of us. Christian holiness comes as we deal with specific issues that we face each day.

What does Hebrews 12:10 teach us that God wants us to share with Him?

What process is used so that this will be realized?

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## Living at the End of Time!

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4:3-5 Paul defines God's will for each of our lives in a single idea. SANCTIFICATION. The root meaning of the word is "*hagios*," which means "holy" or "set apart." Holiness is not a vague concept for Paul. It has to be worked out in the tough reality of life. So, he defines an area in which Christians are called to walk and please God with holy lives. Paul knew that one of the greatest areas of temptation that faced his fellow believers was sex. It seems that his day is no different from our day! This is the first area of specific holiness.

What attitudes and activities would you list under the heading of "sexual immorality"?

4:4 What attitude and responsibility are we to show for our bodies? (verse 4).

See also what 1 Corinthians 6:18-20 says about the sanctity of our bodies.

*<sup>18</sup> Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.*

*<sup>19</sup> Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own;*

*<sup>20</sup> you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.*

There is a very important truth in these verses that is made clear by understanding the Greek word that is used. New Testament Greek has two different words of "temple."<sup>2</sup> The word that is used here (Greek *naos*) means the inner of the temple, or the Holy of Holies. This is teaching us that the Holy Spirit regards our bodies as the holy dwelling place of God. Note that verse 20 teaches us that we are to honor and worship God, not just with our spirit, but also with our body, which is the vehicle of our whole being.

How does Romans 12:1 reinforce the same truth about our bodies?

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<sup>2</sup> The first word *hieron* refers to the whole temple area. The next word *naos* is used to mean the innermost area of the temple. We often refer to this as The Holy of Holies.

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How do these passages help us see how important our bodies are to God?

What does Paul see as the reason for immorality amongst non-believers?

4:6            What is the second area in which Paul says we have to practice the holy nature of God in our daily lives?

What kind of things might this involve?

4:7-8            Some people might say that Paul had no right interfering in their daily lives. In these two verses, he gives two challenges to anyone who is thinking of opposing what he is saying. What are his reasons?

1.

2.

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## Living at the End of Time!

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4:9-12      The final section in this passage deals with a subject which is close to the heart of the Lord Jesus. Look up John 13:34-35. Here we read what Jesus saw as the way in which His disciples would be identified. See also I John 3:16-17. What is the common theme in these passages?

4:10        It seems that the Thessalonians were already good at showing love for other Christians. The word he uses is "*philadelphia*," which is usually translated "brotherly love." But in case they might ever become complacent, what does Paul encourage them to do (verse 10)?

Christians sometimes struggle with the whole question of ambition. We wonder how much we should be seeking to get ahead. The issue of competition can sometimes be a difficult one. In verses 11-12, we are given some practical advice.

4:11-12     Paul says that ambition has three characteristics. What are they?

1.

2.

3.

What will this kind of life demonstrate to those outside of the church fellowship?

What will it also do for us?

**SECTION II: COMMUNITY GROUP DISCUSSION AND APPLICATION**

- ❑ If you have always thought that asking for God's will means seeking some direction in your life, what does this study teach you about what it really means?
  
- ❑ Why does our society place such a high emphasis on sex? In this kind of environment, how can Christians have a healthy view of sex?
  
- ❑ How would you respond to a young Christian who said that they were planning to move in with their boyfriend or girlfriend? Would you try to talk them out of it? How would you do that?
  
- ❑ If someone cheated you out of something, how would you deal with that in a Christian fashion?
  
- ❑ What place does ambition have in your life? How ambitious should a Christian be?
  
- ❑ In our society, how practical is Paul's advice in 4:11-12?
  
- ❑ How can we apply the principle of what he is teaching to our daily lives?

**A final challenging question for personal reflection.**

We see in this passage that holiness is not something that is vague. It is something to be lived out and practiced in the reality of daily living. Holiness is God's will for us. What issue are you facing and struggling with right now which is the crucible in which God wants to forge holiness into your character?

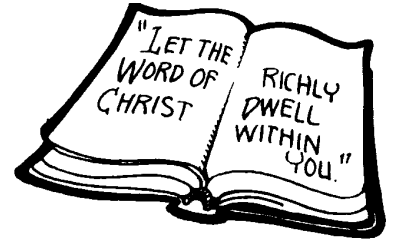
Hebrews 12:14 gives us a sobering challenge when it says: "*without holiness, no one will see the Lord.*"

**Holiness is not an option!**

## Study #6

# I Thessalonians 4:13-18

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For nearly 2,000 years, there is one subject that has fascinated Christians and drawn their eager attention. It is the promise of the return of Jesus Christ. Every communion service in one way or other closes with the truth that we do this **"until He comes!"**

Along with the sense of eager anticipation which it arouses, the subject has also attracted those who wanted to speculate on the exact date and time, despite the clear teaching of Jesus that this was not to be done (See Acts 1:6-7).

<sup>6</sup> *So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"*

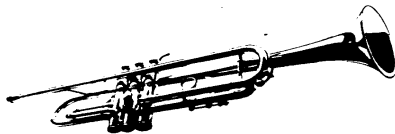
<sup>7</sup> *He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority."*

Some people have left jobs and homes and waited on some mountaintop for the appointed hour. They have had to go back to face ridicule from many, as well as disappointment in their own souls.

This kind of speculation is not new. In fact, the same kind of questions and struggles were also in the minds and lives of early Christians. In the final studies in I Thessalonians, we find that Paul addresses three questions that were troubling the Christians in this church. So we are helped by their uncertainties in this area.

The questions they had were:

1. What happens to those who die before He comes?
2. How can we know when He will come?
3. How shall we live while we wait for His coming?



*"For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel, with the trumpet call of God."*

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## Living at the End of Time!

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There are actually three different Greek words that are used to refer to the Lord's return. Each has a different emphasis or focus.

- **Parousia** is often used with a sense of pastoral encouragement. We will see this emphasis in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.
  
- **Epiphany** (or appearance) has the sense of a coming or an intervention that changes the direction. This word can refer to both Christ's first coming in his birth and also his second coming. We find these two appearances referred to in Titus 2:11-14. Epiphany is also used a number of times in 1 John 3. Epiphany often is associated with a moral impetus.
  
- The final word is the word "apocalypse," from Greek **apocalypsis**. This is the opening word in Revelation 1:1. It does not necessarily mean that we are seeing into the future. Rather it has the meaning that we are seeing something that was always there, but we were not able to see before. The best illustration we have of is of a photographer working in this darkroom developing pictures. He is making a picture visible to us. It was always there, but it was in a form that we could not see. So in Revelation chapter 1, John is seeing a picture of the risen and exalted Jesus, not as He will be ... but as He is right now!

We talk about "The Lord's Return," or "The Second Coming." These are not phrases that we find in the New Testament. The most common term used in the New Testament to describe the Lord's return is the word "*parousia*." We have seen this already in 2:19, and again in 3:13. It was a word that could be used to describe the visit of royalty. So we are waiting for the greatest royal visit ever to come to the earth!

We need to be careful and understand what the Bible does say about this *parousia*, and what the Bible does NOT say. The basic purpose of passages that teach about this *parousia* is not to answer our intriguing questions, nor do they allow us to set our prophetic watches to the right time! As we will see in I Thessalonians, the basic purposes are both redemptive and moral.

They are REDEMPTIVE in the sense that non-Christians are challenged to receive the saving grace of God before it is too late (See Acts 17:30-31).

They are also MORAL in that Christians are called to live holy lives in the light of this *parousia*. We are called to be children of the light and live in a state of moral readiness (1 Thess. 5:6).

**SECTION I: PERSONAL PREPARATION**

4:13           The negative "not" comes first, showing us that it is emphatic.  
What does Paul want them not to be ignorant of?

What does the Christian have even at the time of death, which others do not have? See also John 14:1-6 and 1 John 3:1-3.

4:14           The resurrection of Christ is central to the whole question of the hope of eternal life. Note that Paul says "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again..."

Read 1 Corinthians 15:12-19.

*<sup>12</sup> But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?*

*<sup>13</sup> If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.*

*<sup>14</sup> And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.*

*<sup>15</sup> More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised.*

*<sup>16</sup> For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either.*

*<sup>17</sup> And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.*

*<sup>18</sup> Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost.*

*<sup>19</sup> If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.*

Here Paul lists a number of things that cannot hold true if the resurrection of Christ did not take place. From this passage, list at least four of them.

1.

2.

3.

4.

- 4:15           What does Paul say about those who are still alive when the Lord returns?
- 4:16-17       In these verses, we find three major movements in this final episode of history. What are they? Write a brief summary of each one.
- 1.
  - 2.
  - 3.
- 4:16           The trumpet being sounded is mentioned twice in 1 Corinthians 15:52, and Paul clearly regarded it as having a special place in the sequence of events relating to the parousia.
- See also Matthew 24:31.
- What is his conclusion about what this event will mean for us?
- 4:18           The word “comfort” is the Greek word *parakaleo*,” which has the idea of coming alongside. It is the word which is often used of the presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit. See John 14:16, 14:26. We are to do more than extend passive sympathy. We are to actively comfort one another with this truth. We have the assurance that the power of God will ultimately triumph, and that His Coming, or the PAROUSIA, will usher in a new age.



What are some of the ways in which this passage will bring comfort, especially for those who have had loved ones who died?

Here are some questions and issues for PERSONAL REFLECTION that come out of this passage. In our society, it seems that death is a subject that many people don't like to talk about. We say that people have "passed away" rather than saying that they have died.

- Have you ever thought about your own death?
  
- How does even this kind of question make you feel?  
Afraid? Nervous?
  
- Why do you think you feel the way you do?
  
- Does 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 help you to deal with your feelings in a different way?

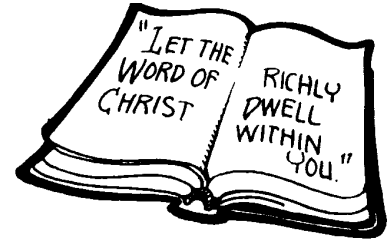
## **SECTION II: COMMUNITY GROUP DISCUSSION AND APPLICATION**

It is obvious that the Christians in the time of the New Testament expected the return of Christ at any time. They lived in the light of that hope. We are now some 2,000 years after this period. It might be easy for people to say that this hope is misguided. We are merely deluding ourselves.

- ❑ How would you answer someone who gave you this kind of argument?



## Study #7



# I Thessalonians 5:1-11

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We believe in the return of Jesus Christ! Each communion service finishes with the words that we do this "until He comes!" How is this to make a difference in the way we live each day? This is what Paul is going to deal with in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11.

Read through this section several times. Paul is giving us some of the practical conclusions and moral instructions that flow out of his teaching on the return of Jesus Christ.

### SECTION I: PERSONAL PREPARATION

5:1-3 Notice that Paul is now addressing a second difficulty. Having dealt with the question about what has happened to those who have already died, now he turns his attention to the issue of when we will know that this climactic event in history is going to take place. It seems that predictions about the end of the world and the coming of Christ are not new. In every age there have been people who said that they knew when the end was going to come.

It is helpful for us to note the two different words that are used in the opening phrase of 5:1 for "the times and the seasons".

The first word is "**chronos**." This refers to time in the sense of the hours of the day. It gives us our word - chronological. We are using the idea of chronos when we ask "what time is it?"

The second word is "**kairos**." This has the idea of the "seasons of time," or time in its qualitative aspects. We are using the idea of kairos when we ask, "when will it be the right time for . . .?"

How does Jesus answer those who want to speculate on when this event will happen? See Acts 1:6-8.

### **“The Day of the Lord”**

This is an important Old Testament idea. Look up the following passages and see how it is used.

- ❖ Isaiah 22:5, 13:9
  
- ❖ Zephaniah 1:14-16
  
- ❖ Amos 5:18
  
- ❖ Jeremiah 30:7
  
- ❖ Malachi 4:1
  
- ❖ Joel 2:31

William Barclay says that it communicates three main ideas to us.

1. It would come suddenly and unexpectedly.
2. It would involve a cosmic upheaval in which the universe would be shaken to its very foundations.
3. It would be a time of judgment.

As we would readily understand, the New Testament writers identified the Day of the Lord with the Second Coming of Christ. What phrase does Paul use to describe how Christ will come?

What picture is he trying to draw when he uses this analogy?

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What kind of attitude is being conveyed by people who are saying “Peace and safety”?  
See also Matt. 24:32-44.

What will happen to them?

5:4-7            In contrast, how are Christians to live with regard to:

A. their spiritual lives?

B. their moral lives?

5:7            Read 1 John 3:1-3.

*<sup>1</sup> How great<sup>3</sup> is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.*

*<sup>2</sup> Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.*

*<sup>3</sup> Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.*

How does John say our daily lives should be changed and influenced because of the hope that we have?

---

<sup>3</sup> The word used here for “great” originally meant “from what country did this come” meaning it was not from here. We might say that God’s love is out of this world!

How does Paul use the theme of “light/day” and also “darkness/night” to instruct us about how to live in our culture?

5:8            What does he mean by “sober” in this verse?

With regard to the picture of Christian armor, we need to turn to Ephesians 6:10-17.

*<sup>10</sup> Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.*

*<sup>11</sup> Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.*

*<sup>12</sup> For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*

*<sup>13</sup> Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.*

*<sup>14</sup> Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place,*

*<sup>15</sup> and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.*

*<sup>16</sup> In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.*

*<sup>17</sup> Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word<sup>4</sup> of God.*

Read these verses carefully. In Ephesians 6, the idea of spiritual armor is for conflict against evil.

Here in 1 Thessalonians, it has the purpose of moral protection as we wait for the Lord's return. As we put these two passages together, what is Paul saying to us about our responsibility as Christians?

---

<sup>4</sup> This is not the usual word “logos” but “rhema” which has the sense of a specific word or truth that we need to apply to a specific situation.

5:9-10      What is the desire that God has for us?

How does this challenge the notion some people have that God wants to condemn everyone, and actually finds delight in doing so?

5:10      How is verse 10 intended to bring comfort and assurance to the first recipients of this letter, and also to us?

5:11      Just as the teaching on the Second Coming of Christ came to a practical conclusion (4:18), so this section of moral and ethical encouragement also finishes with a conclusion. There are two things that we must strive to do as a result of the truth of 5:1-10. What are they?

1.

2.

**SECTION II: COMMUNITY GROUP DISCUSSION AND APPLICATION**

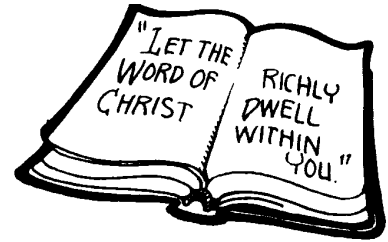
- How does this passage help us to respond to people who do want to set a specific date for the Lord's return? How do you answer people who want to do this?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- List some of the different ways in which you think our society is living in “darkness.”
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- In contrast, how should Christians display the quality of being “children of the light”? How should this relate to our daily lives?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Paul says that we should “encourage one another, and build up one another” (5:11). How can we do this, so that we will live in the light of the Lord's return?



## Study #8

# I Thessalonians 5:12-28

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We need to remember that almost all the New Testament letters were written to local congregations. These churches struggled with many of the same problems and issues with which we struggle. In whatever century we may find ourselves, there are often difficult circumstances to work through, and in church life, there are sometimes difficult people to face!

So this first letter closes with some practical advice about life in the church. Here are some ways in which we can work and worship together.

### **SECTION I: PERSONAL PREPARATION**

5:12-13      The first thing which Paul draws attention to is the kind of attitude that people in the church should have toward the leaders of the church. What attitude does Paul call for on behalf of the church members towards the spiritual leaders?

The other side of this question is the kind of attitude that church leaders should have over the members of the congregation. What three contrasts does I Peter 5:2-3 draw for us about church leaders?

<sup>2</sup> *Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers-- not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve;*

<sup>3</sup> *not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.*

1.

2.

3.

5:14 This verse is almost like a mini-counseling course! It teaches us that there are different ways to respond to different people at different times. The wisdom of counselling is to respond in the right way to the right person at the right time!

1. **Admonish the unruly.**

The word "admonish" has the sense of having to come face to face with someone, and confront him or her over an issue. We are to do this to those who become unruly.

Who might Paul have in mind when he says "unruly"? What kinds of actions might be interpreted as being unruly in a church?

2. **Encourage the fainthearted.**

Who do you think Paul has in mind here?

Why do they need to be encouraged? What are some of the ways in which we might encourage them?

3. **Help the weak.**

These are the people who have no strength left at all. What are some of the ways we might respond to them? See I John 3:17-18.

What happens when we deal with people in the wrong way! For example, when we admonish the weak?

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Living at the End of Time!

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What spiritual attitude does Paul call for in dealing with all these groups of people?

5:15            The truth of this verse is not always easy to live out! Why is that? How do we normally want to respond when we are treated badly?

5:16-18        What essential spiritual quality is Paul inviting us to display?

In what kinds of circumstances do you find it easy to do this?

In what kind of circumstances do you find it hard, perhaps even impossible for you to display this kind of quality? Why is that?

5:19-21        There are two things that Paul says we should not quench. What are they?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

What are some of the ways we can quench these things?

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## Living at the End of Time!

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In case we should think that this means we are open to everything without any criteria for discernment, he tells us to “examine everything carefully.” The word here is “*dokimazo*,” which is the word that would be used for refining metal so that it could be tested for purity. As we bring these two words of counsel together, we see that we are to avoid being so open minded that we accept everything without question, but on the other hand, we are not to be so close minded that we reject everything.

What are some of the tests that we might use when we examine the credibility of something? Look up 1 John 4:1-3.

5:23-28      Many of the letters in the New Testament close with a doxology reminding us of the continuing activity and work of God in our lives and the promise that lies before us. In this lovely benediction, what speaks most to you about how God's peace will be active in your life?

5:26            “Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss.”

Leon Morris gives us helpful insights into this practice, and what it means. He says:

*“Not a great deal is known of kissing in the Early Church, but it is usually held that men kissed men, and women [kissed] women, and that the kiss was on the cheek. There does not seem to be any connection with liturgical practices; but the kiss would naturally be exchanged on the Lord's Day when the brethren came together, and thus it is not surprising that in later days it came to be included in the services of the Church, notably the service of Holy Communion (though not confined to this). In time it became the custom for the kiss to be exchanged between men and women, and Clement of Alexandria objected to 'resounding kisses in Church which made suspicious and evil reports among the heathen'. Abuses of this kind led to its restriction, and there are several regulations dealing with it in early Church Councils.”*  
*(The Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians, p. 109)*

## **SECTION II: COMMUNITY GROUP DISCUSSION AND APPLICATION**

In the light of 5:12-13, how would you respond to those in leadership in the church if they took some direction that you disagreed with?

We are told there are different ways to respond to people in different situations (5:14). There are times to admonish. There are occasions to encourage. There is need to help. What happens when we take the **WRONG** approach? For example, we may encourage when we should admonish, or vice versa.

How do you know the approach that you should take with a person in a given situation?

What is a recent situation in which you felt so angry that you wanted to "get even"? How did you choose to respond?

How can you seek the good of someone else in these kinds of situations?

Do you find that you can give thanks for everything as 5:18 instructs us? Where do you find this hard, if not impossible?

What happens both to the situation and to us when we are able to give thanks for it?

## Living at the End of Time!

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What would happen if every day this week you actively thought of something and expressed thankfulness to God for it? Try it! It may revolutionize your week! In your life, where do you need to be

- A. More open to God? What are some of the ways in which you tend to quench the Spirit?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- B. More discerning and thoughtful? Where do you need to examine and assess things with greater care? How will you go about doing that?

Try memorizing the lovely benediction in 5:23-24. Here is something that might help you live out its truth. Personalize the prayer. Here is what you can memorize.

***<sup>23</sup> Now may the God of peace sanctify me entirely; and may my spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming<sup>5</sup> of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>24</sup> Faithful is He who calls me, and He will also bring it to pass.***

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<sup>5</sup> This is the Greek word “*parousia*” which we met in Study #6.

## Postscript & Reflection:

I must confess that I feel sorry for some of the New Testament books such as 2 Timothy, 2 Peter, 2 and even 3 John, and 2 Thessalonians. They seem to stand in the shadow of the ones we call “the first.” So now that you have finished reading and studying 1 Thessalonians, take some time and read through 2 Thessalonians. It is only 3 chapters, and it continues the theme Paul started in 1 Thessalonians.

It finishes with a lovely benediction:

*<sup>16</sup> Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you.*

Take your mind back through these 8 weeks of study and discussion.

- What did you learn that you did not know before?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- How will that change your life?

The closing words of Revelation 22 should always be on our lips.

*<sup>20</sup> He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon.”  
Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.*

*<sup>21</sup> The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people. Amen.*

