

**Record of Sermons delivered during the month of
December 2020**

(added progressively after each Sunday)

(see following pages)

1 Thessalonians 2:1-16

How to Advance the Cause of Christ per S Olyott

1 Thessalonians 2:4b

4 ... so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts.

As we saw previously, this letter comes from three great preachers: Paul, Silas and Timothy. In Chapter 1 we saw that these three men of God spoke of the Conversion of the men and women at Thessalonica. This Conversion had happened when these three men visited that town. So now in Chapter 2, Paul talks about that first visit. He reminds the Thessalonians of that visit, some months before. It's an interesting passage because it shows to us how to advance Christ's cause.

Should you be at school, university or work and need advice in how to advance Christ's cause this will be of value. Or even for unconverted members of your family, or neighbours to whom you speak about Christ.

This passage breaks down into 5 main questions:

- What message did these 3 men bring to the people of Thessalonica?
Verse 2. ² ... *we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict.* Or verse 4. ⁴ *but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak,* Or verse 8. ⁸ *So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves,* And the end of verse 9. ⁹ ... *we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.*

Christian friends, God has a Gospel. It's a message that can be defined clearly and He's entrusted this Gospel to us.

Paul and Silas and Timothy, when they came to Thessalonica, they came into a world where there was paganism, philosophy and high-powered reasoning. But they didn't engage in philosophical discussion. They didn't engage in lengthy, complicated reasoning. These three men stood in front of ordinary men and women – some sophisticated men and women – and with their own lips they announced the Gospel that God had given to them.

Where is that Gospel found? Where can you find the Gospel? Verse 13. ¹³ *And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.* The Gospel isn't found in the human head, if it were it would change from year to year and generation to generation. The Gospel isn't found in the annals, archives and history books of the Church – however important they may be, and they are important. The Gospel is a divine revelation. It's something that God has revealed. The Apostles of course spoke the Word of God. This has now become Scripture – that Word of God has been written down. So the only place where you can find that message which was transmitted, and by which the Thessalonians were

saved, is in that Word of God.

It's not an invented message. It's a message in Scripture.

It's also a very demanding message. You will see that briefly if you look at verse 12. ¹² *we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.* This Gospel is a Gospel which insists that the lives of those who receive it: change! It's by the 'call' of this Gospel – only by the call of this Gospel – that people are actually brought to God's Kingdom and glory.

Of course. We really are lost. Lost from fellowship with God. We are under His wrath and curse. Because of our sin. We are guilty before God because of the way we speak and think and act and react. If God had decided to leave us completely to perish as we deserve. He would have been totally justified. Wouldn't He?

Before the world was made God chose certain men and women, young people and boys and girls, not to perish in their sins, but to be saved by His kindness. Jesus Christ was sent to die for them. God had ordained that those people will enter into the enjoyment of their salvation only through the preaching of the Gospel.

The God who chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, had also chosen to give us our everlasting life and to give us our salvation through the announcement of the Gospel. When the Gospel transforms us and calls us and makes us God's children, the same Gospel feeds us and sustains us so that we persevere in our faith right to the end.

When you go to witness at work you are walking into a cemetery! When you speak to your unconverted friends you also are walking into a cemetery. If you're at school and you want to win others to Christ, your class is a cemetery. It's a grave yard! How can you raise the dead? There they are dead, motionless and buried. How can you raise the dead? Can you do it? Can they do it? So how can you raise the dead?

One of the tragedies of the modern age is that people try to raise the dead in all sorts of ways. Some people literally stand in the grave yard and sing. Well that's lovely. It's a lovely song. Songs don't raise the dead.

You could hardly believe this! Some people actually go into the grave yard and mime. But mimes won't raise the dead.

Some people organise theatre and plays in the cemetery, but the dead aren't raised.

Some people give long, complicated discourses. Some history lectures.

All those things might be good and beautiful in their place, but their place isn't when it comes to raising the dead.

Who can raise the dead? Can the preacher? No! Can the Church? No! Can music? No! Mimes? No! Philosophy? No! Can the dead themselves raise the

dead? No!

ONLY God can raise the dead! God raised the dead by His voice. As we see many times in Scripture. And God raises people from Spiritual death. By His voice. Wouldn't it be great if we could get some sort of technology to be able to play the voice of God to the dead. No we can't do that either.

The voice of God is in the Word of God. The Word of God is the voice of God. It's as we sound out the Word of God, we sound out the Voice of God as we sound out the Gospel of God, that the dead are raised. That is the means which God has ordained. Here is someone, like every dead person, who is totally insensitive. You may speak to dead people. They don't talk back! They can't hear you, and they can't talk even if they could hear.

What God does. The very Word which calls them, is the very Word that gives them life. The first thing that happens is that the person is convinced of his sin. He's made miserable. Miserable. He sees in fact how miserable he is, because he's in sin. Then what happens is that his mind is enlightened, to understand that it's only in Jesus Christ, dead and resurrected, that there is any hope for the sinner. There is no hope in himself. The next thing that happens is that this very Word which is raising him from the dead, renews his will and turns it around, because the nature of the person has been changed. Now this person is persuaded, sweetly, but also enabled – made capable – of embracing Jesus Christ, who is offered freely to all men by the Gospel. All that comes about by Gospel preaching. By 'preaching' we don't just mean from the pulpit, but by people who by their words announce what God Himself has said.

That's what happened at Thessalonica. That's how all Conversions happen. They happen when a pure message is announced. That's the first question. Now to the second:

- Announced! But by what sort of people? Verse 2:
Paul, Silas and Timothy were really resilient, weren't they? ² *But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict.* In Philippi they had been cruelly beaten. Their wounds were still open when they arrived at Thessalonica. They had been there less than three weeks, when there were riots in Thessalonica.

With backs that were still bleeding it would have been easy for them to say, "We won't preach the Gospel there, there is too much trouble in this area." Or when the new trouble started you would think they would give up and run away. But they were bold in God. God came to their rescue. God came to their help and they were trusting in God. There was a spiritual resilience in these people, who announced the Gospel.

Verse 4: ⁴ *but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts.*

We all know that when we are preaching to others that we have this horrible temptation to tailor the message so that it is not offensive. Many things about the Gospel aren't offensive. The Gospel is always a friend anyway. But unconverted people do find the Gospel offensive. Because it tells them that they are lost and sinful. That it's their fault! The temptation always is to play that down.

But Paul says, "We weren't like that! We came trusting in God and we were determined not to please you, but to please God." The Gospel in history has only ever been faithfully spread, by people who were determined to please God and not men. They're out to save men, yes, but you don't save men by trying to please them. You save men by pleasing God.

Let's go on. See how selfless they were: Verse 3. ³ *For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive,* "We didn't come with deceit." And verse 5. ⁵ *For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness.* "We didn't come to get anything out of you, especially not your money." Now verse 6. "We didn't even try to get glory from you. We weren't trying to make for ourselves a reputation. We weren't cashing in on the fact we were well known preachers, so that we could get further known. Or respected. Or admired or even loved. All we wanted was that God would be glorified. When God saved you, we glorified Him. This is what he said in Verse 13.

"Now as an Apostle," says Paul, Verse 6, "we could have asked you to give us money to support us in our preaching. We could have demanded it. But far from that (verse 6 & 7) we didn't cash in on that right. We laboured day and night so that we could bring the Gospel to you freely. We didn't use any tricks. (Verse 3) No flattering words. (Verse 5) No, we came to you because we were aware that we were in the presence of God." He tells us that 3 times in the passage. You'll see that in verse 4: ⁴ *... not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts.* Then verse 5: ⁵ *... —God is witness.* And in verse 10: ¹⁰ *You are witnesses, and God also,...*

So these men came with their message, that God had given them. But they were men of integrity and holiness. The thing that characterised them the most, was that as they spoke, they knew that they were speaking in the presence of God. They were more conscious of the presence of God than of the presence of the people they were speaking to.

God sometimes uses unholy people to bring about conversions. God being God, could use a crooked stick and draw a straight line. One can wonder if perhaps many thousands of people have been genuinely saved through the preaching of failed American Evangelists. But normally God does not use unholy people, to save others. Because God's purpose in sending out the Gospel, is not just to save men and women. His purpose is to glorify Himself. His purpose in sending out the Gospel is that whoever hears, whether they are saved or not, they should have glorious thoughts about God. When an unholy man preaches the Gospel and you find out what he is. God is not actually glorified. Is He? People are dis-

gusted to find that such a wonderful message comes from such an awful life. It is God's will that this should not be so. Yet sometimes he does use such awful instruments. But nevertheless, His will is that whether they are converted or not, the people who listen, should have a sense of God; a sense of His holiness and a knowledge that He is Lord.

So we are finding out how to advance the cause of Christ. With the answers to five questions: What is the message and announced by what sort of people? Next week we will consider the three further questions starting with: In what way was the announcement made?

[2242]

**Pray for God's grace, through the Spirit of Christ to live in us all, that we may live the new life made possible by the Spirit, for all the saints present today.
Amen**

1 Thessalonians 2:1-16

How to Advance the Cause of Christ – Pt 2 per S. Olyott

1 Thessalonians 2:1

¹ For you yourselves know, brothers and sisters, that our coming to you was not in vain.

We are finding out how to advance the cause of Christ. So far we have answered: what is the message and when this message is announced what sort of people do it?

And now the third question.

- In what way? Is it enough for someone to come with the Gospel – someone with a holy life – and say, “There You are. There’s the Gospel – like it or lump it!” Then off he goes to the next place.

No! That won’t do.

We see two things in answering this question: In what way?

First of all we find that the message was applied through the conscience of the people who were listening. Verse 1: “We didn’t keep our distance, says Paul, “We came to you.” Verse 2: “We didn’t shout at you. We spoke to you.” There are very many words for speaking in Greek, but the word he uses here (translated as ‘declare’ in the ESV) is the word which means: you just speak as you would to anyone else.

“We exhorted you”, he says in verse 3. That is we spoke directly to your conscience. “We didn’t just say, ‘The Gospel *talks* about repentance, but you are to repent.’ We didn’t just say, ‘The Gospel’s about faith, we said believe.’ We didn’t just say, ‘God wants people to believe, we said you believe.’ We exhorted you!”

He uses the same word in verse 12 and in some versions of the Bible it’s in verse 10.

“We used words”, verse 5. “We spoke as a herald,” verse 9. “We spoke frankly to you. It was the Word of God which came to you,” verse 13.

It’s not enough to just have the right message. The message must be applied to the conscience. If you are witnessing to people, it’s not enough to say to them, “Here is the Gospel! Now take it or leave it.” You’ve got to say, “Here is God’s Gospel. It is for you. You must believe. You must turn your back on sin. You must repent. You must embrace Jesus Christ. It is you that is perishing. If you don’t believe you are lost!

The Word must be applied.

Today many people believe that, the truth of the Gospel does not have to be ‘pressed’ on people. “They are not children nor stupid. They just need to hear

the Word of God and they can work out the implications and applications for themselves!”

But this does not take account of the fact the ‘fallen’ human heart is so wicked, that it will try every dodge in the book to make out that the Word is for somebody else, but not for me. The Word of God must be applied to the conscience. We must speak to the conscience of people. We must speak to them and we must not let them duck out of it. The Word puts them in a corner and we must keep them in the corner until the Word hurts, bites and pricks their conscience ... and saves.

But of course we’re not boxers, punishing their punch-bag. Which brings us to the second point of the third question. Paul, although he speaks to the conscience, he speaks with loving words. If you look carefully at this passage you can see that it’s filled with tenderness. Verse 1. ¹ ... *you yourselves know, brothers (and sisters);* verse 9, *brothers (and sisters);* verse 14, *brothers (and sisters).* And look at verse 7: ⁷ *But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children.* With all this tenderness. It’s certainly not of case of being picked up and shaken roughly. You need to be firm, but gentle.

Again in verse 8: ⁸ ... *affectionately desirous of you,* ... Also, “We love you so much,” he says in verse 9, “that we were willing to go without sleep and work day and night so that you could receive the Gospel for free!” And verses 11 & 12 are striking, because although in verse 7 he describes himself as a mother in these verses he describes himself as a father. Here’s the children at the table and the father is speaking to them firmly, but affectionately. Correcting their faults. Telling them things, but tenderly.

We must speak to the conscience. We must apply the Word, but it must be done with love. Why must the Gospel be preached with love? Because it’s a message of love. God loves the sinner! The sinner doesn’t love God, but God loves the sinner. The Cross is the greatest demonstration and truth of the love of God that anybody could ever imagine. It’s there that God’s love is unveiled and revealed and seen. Everything about the Gospel is love.

We deserve damnation! But God doesn't damn us! He saves us in Christ. We deserve to just be forgotten, but God sends out His Word for men and women to hear it. It’s all love. Men and women can’t save themselves, so God gives them the life and the strength to respond. They can’t repent, but they can’t be saved without repenting. So God gives them repentance. They can’t believe, but they can’t be saved without believing. So God gives them faith. It’s all love. So wouldn’t it be very strange if a message of love was proclaimed by unlovely people. And unloving people. Sarcastic, biting and rejecting.

So Paul makes sacrifices for the Thessalonians. What sacrifices are you making? So that lost people can hear the Gospel.

What message; announced by what sort of people; in what way? Question 4:

- With what effect?

Well the effect is first mentioned in verse 1. ¹ *For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain.* It wasn't a failure our visit to Thessalonica! "Why wasn't it a failure, Paul?" Because lives were permanently transformed, by the Gospel. He gives us the details in verses 13 to 16.

When a preacher preaches two things happen. Some people hear and they say, "That's his opinion." So they receive the Word as the word of men. Other people hear, but behind the voice of the preacher they hear the Word of God. To which they submit. They receive the Word of God for what it is: in truth! In Thessalonica, these ordinary men and women, for the most part, received the Word for what it is, in fact: the Word of God. It effectively works in you who believe!

Now says Paul, in verse 14: "What happened to you, is just what happened to the first Christians in Palestine. I preached to you in Greece, but other people had already preached in Palestine. I preached to you in the year 52. But other people had already been preached to nearly twenty years before in a different country. But what happened to you is exactly what happened to them." What Paul is saying is that if you had taken one of those Thessalonian Christians out of Thessalonica and dropped him in Palestine when the Gospel was first preached on the Day of Pentecost, or by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself before, he would have felt perfectly at home. Because the experience of these first believers was his too.

If you took an evangelical Christian – a genuine one – out of a Church in 2020 and took him back 20 centuries and dropped him into any early Church ... he'd be dressed a bit differently. There might be some cultural things that he might not like. Like kissing and all that stuff. But he would feel at home. Because it would be the same message. The same Christ and the same experience of Conversion. However, you could take a Christian out of a very liturgical church, with their swaying, incense, dressing up, crosses, surpluses, palaces and all the rest. Then, back 20 Centuries: He would feel like a fish out of water.

Put him in any culture you like, where people believe the same Gospel and have the same saving experience, once you get over the 'culture shock', he will feel completely at home. Wonderful! Isn't it! That's what is meant by the (small 'c') catholic church in the creed. That is the 'universal' church. We belong to a family, which is found not only in all cultures but in all generations and all centuries.

This leads Paul to talk about the Jews. He says. "When you came to believe you had terrible persecution." He talks about it in verse 14. "You're going through what the early Christians went through in Palestine 20 years earlier. You suffered from your countrymen, but it hasn't put you off your Christianity, what they had to suffer from their countrymen, but it didn't put them off their Christianity either."

“Oh the Jews,” says Paul. “The Jews. They killed the Lord Jesus. They killed their own Prophets. They persecuted us! I’m a Jew, but a Christian, and they persecute us. They don’t please God. They’re contrary to all men. Here we are. All we want is that the Gentile be saved.” Verse 16. “But they don’t want the Gentile to be saved! Every day they put more and more of God’s anger into their cup. And now that cup has burst under that weight. It’s fallen down on the Jewish Nation as a nation. The Jewish Nation as a nation has no more place, no more room in the plan of God.”

The world isn’t divided into Jew and Gentile – not anymore. There are still Jews and always will be, but the Jews as a nation have no more place in the plan of God. The world is not divided into Jew and Gentile. The world is divided into those who are for Christ and those who are against Him. Those who embrace Him and those who reject Him. Those who are saved by Him and those who aren’t saved at all. Those who know the blessings of the Gospel and those that are deaf to the Gospel and outside it’s blessings.

But when the light of the Gospel is announced it can bring people out of that deafness. Out of the darkness! Into that light.

What message; announced by what sort of people; in what way; and with what effect. Here’s our last question:

- What is the importance of this teaching for us?
Here we are in Bunbury, about to ‘turn the calendar’ to 2021– where everywhere you look there are those practising man-made, man-popular religion, in the name of Christ. (See WCF 25:5) What is the importance of this chapter for us? Well first of all it shows us how God brings about Conversion: He uses a pure message; holy people; frank, loving words, to bring about this miracle. That’s what you need to have if your are to do the work of God. Some say that they can’t do the work of God because one needs special training to do that. One needs great talent – to be really gifted. No! You have to have a pure message. You have to be a holy person and you’ve got to speak frankly and lovingly.

How can I have a pure message? Perhaps you’re a young person. You’re at the stage in development, where you can learn great reams of knowledge. Nothing to stop you learning the Shorter Catechism. Then you have ready answers to important questions you will be asked. While your young! Now is the time to do it. It’s a wonderful summary of the Gospel! There is nothing stopping anyone having a pure message.

Holy people? That means putting ourselves in the presence of the Scripture. Joining the Church. Having a prayer meeting. Going to the Lord’s Table. (LC 153 & 154) That’s how we become holy people.

Frank, loving words? You can’t be frank with people and be loving with people unless you call to mind that we live in the presence of God. It is God to be pleased, even if they are not. Then you can be frank. Then you can be loving. This is how God saves people.

Sometimes in larger cities, travelling evangelist come. Then there are evangelistic meetings. People ask, "Is this good or is this bad?" With this passage in mind we can evaluate that.

Is the message pure? Is the preacher holy? Nobody's perfect, but is he really seeking to be a man of God. Does he speak frankly and does he speak in a loving way?

Others may ask, "Can we use 'such and such' a method in evangelism?" Now it's easy to answer that question. Does it keep the message pure! (If not! Abandon it straight away!) Does the character and life of the person giving the message come across by the method? And does it speak frankly and lovingly.

Let's go back to verse 1: Wouldn't it be a wonderful think if you could say to the members of your family, your friends, or those who work with you, or study with you: *¹ For you yourselves know, brothers and sisters, that our coming to you was not in vain.*

[2194]

**Pray for God's grace, through the Spirit of Christ to live in us all, that we may live the new life made possible by the Spirit, for all the saints present today.
Amen**

1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:13

How We Can Encourage Each Other

1 Thessalonian 3:13

¹³ so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

Let us open God's Word at Chapter 2 of 1 Thessalonians. We believe that expository preaching is important in Reformed Evangelical Churches where the Bible is the supreme Standard of the faith, with the Westminster Confession of Faith the subordinate Standard. Such preaching is performed by the preacher by explaining the Bible (the WCF is useful in bringing related truths together), telling what it means, and telling what it means to us. Otherwise we are 'left at the mercy' of the preacher's ideas.

Why are we looking at 1 Thessalonians? Because with the possible, single exception of Galatians, this is the very earliest Christian document that we have! If you want to find out what real Christianity is. What it was like in the early Church. This is a good start.

Chapter 1 told us about Conversion. We thank God for what we learn. Most of us are Converted people – we know what that miracle is! What happened two thousand years ago to the Thessalonians, we understand it very well because it's what happened to us.

Chapter 2, verses 1 to 16, told us about his first visit to that city and in doing so he told us how to advance the cause of Christ. Do we want to see other Conversions? Then humanly speaking, our responsibility is clear: we need a clear message; we need holy lives; and we need frank, loving words.

That's where we are up to in this letter. We now come to this next message and we will start at Chapter 2 verse 17 and continue to the end of Chapter 3. What we will be learning about is: How We Can Encourage Each Other. Paul is here encouraging these new Christians. At the same time he tells them that he is encouraged by them!

Now, we do need encouraging. Whatever else Christians need at the moment, they need encouraging. Because of the world. The world is increasingly wicked. Our nation is wicked. In addition to all the common outcomes of 'fallen' mankind manifest in our society. More so than in more regulated times, we live now in a nation (or more accurately a pervasive opinion generating media) which loves what God hates, as frequent parades and opinion protests reveal. The popular media gives priority to promoting and applauding the views of the ungodly. Christians have to live in this Australia. We need encouraging!

Who's going to encourage Christians? It won't be the world as fostered by the media. So we must encourage each other. The world is hostile to us.

We also need encouraging because of the 'flesh'. Our own hearts. There's not one of us this morning, who can't look back over the past week and say, "I failed there! I made a mess there. I did that and I shouldn't. I didn't do what I should, then." Sometimes it is too much for us and we need encouraging. Who's going to encourage us? We shall have to encourage each other.

Then, we need encouraging because of the devil. Sometimes the Christian, even when things are going well, for a reason he can't understand, he feels down. Even at times of great blessing he feels discouraged and depressed and disorientated. In his stupidity, he starts looking for explanations. "Perhaps it's my diet." (Well perhaps that does need looking at.) "Maybe it's lack of exercise. I spend too much time sitting down." (Well look into that also.) But actually it's the devil! He's always trying new tricks to trap us. Then there are those moments where inexplicably, there are moments of doubt and depression and darkness. It's the devil. He's not going to encourage us. Who's going to encourage the Christian? We are.

So we come to today's passage of Scripture, and learn how we can encourage each other. There are young Christians here who have just started the warfare. There are some older soldiers here – you need to encourage these new servants of the Cross! To the younger Christians – you might not realise this: that older Christians get discouraged. You, a young Christian, perhaps Converted recently, you can encourage the older Christians here. Just like the Thessalonians, who had only been converted a few weeks, were an encouragement to Paul.

We're going to learn four things from today's reading.

- Encouragement is a matter of the heart. Chapter 2:17 to the end.
Let's follow what Paul, in effect is saying. "Look," he says. "I was snatched away from you at Thessalonica. I didn't want to go but I was snatched away. But although I'm no longer there, I've left my heart. I want to get back to where my heart is. I want to get back to see you." (Verse 17)
"Believe me", he says, "I've tried to get back, and the only thing that stopped me getting back to Thessalonica, to see you, is Satan." What Paul is talking about is the enormous opposition, that was in Thessalonica which actually put his life in danger, which made it humanly impossible for him to go back to that city.

But he says that he is looking forward to when the Lord Jesus Christ bursts into the sky. Looking forward to the day when we all will be gathered unto Him. On that day I'm going to look around and what will I see? I'll see you, Thessalonians, and my heart is going to burst with joy. I don't care if I don't receive any crown, or any reward. Because all the crown that I will want, and will get, is because you will be there. My crown of rejoicing. Even with you in the presence of Jesus Christ at His coming. You are our glory and Joy.

You can see that this man's heart is with the Thessalonians. ¹

Where's your heart this morning? Look round the church. In the week did you think about these men and women, boys and girls, who are here with you this morning? In the week, did you say? "Just two more days to Sunday. We'll be back together again! It'll be so good to see them. I'll be with them once more." Early in the week did you say? "Wednesday we can meet for Bible Study!" Are the Christians in your heart? Is your heart with them?

When people start knocking Christians does something in your heart say, "No, no, no, I'm not going to let my family be knocked like that!"

Where is your heart? Because there is no encouragement possible unless your heart is with the Christian church. Your local church. Unless those people are in your thoughts and your mind. And they will not be there unless they are also in your prayers. Who this week prayed for the men and women of this church? Who prayed for the boys and girls? Who prayed for the young Christians and who prayed for the older ones? Who prayed for those who are 'well on' in years and who have been faithful for such a long time? Who prayed for those who are starting out and are working through all sorts of doubts and questions. Where is your heart?

Paul was able to bring encouragement to the Thessalonians, because his heart was in Thessalonica with them. Is your heart in the Christian church. In Bunbury Region Presbyterian Church?

Encouragement is a matter of the heart.

- Chapter 3 verse 1-5: Encouragement is given by the mouth. "I couldn't endure it", said Paul, "I just had to know how you were getting on in Thessalonica. It was a tremendous sacrifice to be left alone in Athens, but I made that sacrifice and I sent Timothy to you.² I couldn't come myself!" Why do you think Paul sent him? Because encouragement is given by the mouth. "That's why I sent him," says Paul (verse 2), "I sent him to 'establish' you, that is to make your faith stronger, and encourage you!"³ Of course the word 'encourage' comes from the old Latin⁴ and means to 'put the heart into somebody'. "I sent him to put new heart back into you. That's why he came."

1 Sometimes we say of a musician that his heart's in his music. When he plays, he doesn't just play the notes: his whole soul is in it. You may talk to this musician and mention something such as Eb minor, and immediately his mind will go to some composition in Eb minor. You will see by his gaze that he's not listening to you any more. His mind has gone to music and it reveals that's where his heart more properly is.

Some times you get the same sort of thing with a sportsman. He wakes, thinks and breathes sport. He lives for his sport! The moment you mention to him anything about sport, he's really on your wavelength immediately. You try to change the subject but he stays on that original road – where his heart is. He thinks always about it. He wants to be back on the ground or the track.

2 As an aside one might admire Paul at this point: Timothy was not an Apostle, he was an Evangelist – a lesser Minister – yet Paul calls him, "Our brother"! Timothy was less gifted, but Paul calls him, "Our brother." Timothy was younger, but Paul calls him, "Our Brother." Timothy was not a Minister of Paul. He was a Minister of God! Said Paul, "and he worked with me in the same vineyard, the same field."

3 Olyott's (KJV) translation uses 'encourage' while the ESV uses 'exhort'. Thayer's Greek Lexicon – commenting on Strong's NT 3970, *parakaleo* (par-ak-al-eh'-o) says: 5. it combines the ideas of exhorting and comforting and encouraging in Romans 12:8; 1 Corinthians 14:31; 1 Thessalonians 3:2. Reflecting the fact that this Greek word is variously translated in these ways in the 109 instances of it in the NT.

4 The Latin diminutive: †corculum has the meaning of 'heart' and relates to 'core', 'courage' etc in English.

Discourage means you have the heart knocked out of you. You don't have the heart for it anymore. "And I knew," says Paul, "that there was a risk that you would have been discouraged, because ever since you became Christians you've had a life of trouble (verse 3). I told you about this trouble when I was with you. It's all come to pass. My words have been confirmed. But it doesn't make the trouble – less trouble. And so I sent Timothy to you to put new heart into you."

"And I sent him to know about your faith because I also need encouraging. I needed to know that the people that I love so much, and have laboured among, haven't forsaken it all. Haven't 'turned in their badge'. That you're still firm and solid in your new faith. That the devil hadn't crushed you! I needed that someone would come back to me, and with his mouth, tell me about you."

Encouragement is best given by the mouth!⁵

"I've got nothing to say." says somebody, "I wouldn't know what to say!"

Well if you wouldn't know what to say it would be because you don't know what you believe. Or you don't know how to behave. Therefore it's up to you to get as much Christian teaching as you possibly can, because it's out of the performance of the mouth, that the heart speaks.

Come to hear more Biblical preaching; more Bible Studies; read more Christian books; talk about the things of God more often with others. Before long you'll know what to say! So what needs to be said: say it! Because that's how Christians are encouraged. Encouragement is given by the mouth.

- A third thing. Verses 6-8: Encouragement is received by the ear. (Obviously if encouragement is given by the mouth it is received by the ear!)
"Timothy has gone and Timothy has come back," says Paul, "O wonderful! Timothy tell me how you got on." (verse 6)
"It's good news, Paul."
"Do they still believe?"
"Yes. They know what to believe and they believe it! They put their whole weight (trust) upon it." He's brought good news about their faith.
"How are they getting on with each other?"

⁵ Ulyott describes a personal experience: "I spoke to a very, very discouraged, lady Christian a few month's back. She was absolutely flat as a Christian could be. I said, 'You have a Christian friend who comes round, don't you? She comes several times a week and sometimes twice.' The lady said, 'Yes. But do you know that although she is a Christian, we go to the same church. Never, ever does she talk about the things of God to me!' You see a Christian presence isn't enough. Encouragement is given by the mouth!"

There are boys and girls in this Church this morning who will be going to school tomorrow. What needs to be said to Christian boys and girls, before they set off for school? Then say it! What needs to be said to Christian housewives as the week begins? Then say it! Christian businessmen; Christian factory and office workers & elsewhere; retired people: need to have said to them things so that they can live for Christ in a wicked world? Then say it! Because encouragement is given by the mouth.

“They love each other. They’ll go to any length to help each other!”

“And what do they think about us?” Says Paul.

“They have a good remembrance of our visit and they can’t wait to see you, Paul. They can’t wait to see us all. They want to see us just as much as we want to see them.”

“Well,” says Paul (verse 7), “In all our affliction and distress we were comforted, concerning you - by your faith. How to live if you stand fast in the Lord.”

“I’ve really come to life again. I feel alive. I’m encouraged, because you stand fast in the Lord!”

You see, when you talk about the Christian to another Christian, you will encourage him. When that Christian hears good news about Christian lives he will be encouraged. There is nothing more discouraging than to hear about defective Christian lives.⁶

You younger Christians: want to encourage older Christians? Live like a Christian. When they talk about you, they’ll be encouraged, the quality and stability of that Christian life.⁷

When you think of the lovely people that you know, despite their many faults as we all have. You ask where else do you find such people? Does the world produce people like that? When you think of Christian people you know or know of you’re encouraged.

When Christians talk about someone who’s going on with the faith. When they talk about love and the other Christian qualities that they see in those lives and you hear about it. It’s encouraging.

So encouragement is received by the ear.

- Now the last point. Take up Chapter 3 and we’ll begin at verse 7 to the end of the Chapter. Encouragement is sustained by prayer.
“I’ve heard about you,” says Paul. “I’m in a lot of trouble right now,” verse 7, “all sorts of *distress and affliction*, but I’m comforted when I think about you. I feel absolutely alive because you stand *fast in the Lord*. When I think about you it causes me to pray. I just can’t tell you what thankfulness to God I have for you. *All the joy* which is coming into my heart. For the rejoicing which is mine. As in prayer I think about you. In the night time I think about you in prayer and in the daytime I pray for you. And I’m praying exceedingly.”

“I want to see you. You’ve got faith but it needs strengthening. I want to come

6 “There is a young man, he looks very, very promising, my heart is thrilled as I think about him. Then he embarks on a fatal marriage and his Christian life falls to bits! As well as his wife’s. So discouraging. Here’s a Christian to whom I looked up for many years and now he’s in trouble with the law. It’s printed in the papers. Very discouraging!”

7 “Sometimes when I get discouraged, I just sit down and think about the new lives that Christ has made. There used to be a young man that sat in a certain part of the Congregation. He used to come into this Church fuming. He hated everything he heard. But he wouldn’t stop coming. (That’s a bit strange isn’t it?) Then he got Converted – and he hated even more what he had heard. (That’s strange also!) It was because he didn’t believe the great old doctrines of Grace. So he left. Then he came back. Today he’s in the Ministry and is shepherding a flock of Jesus Christ.
When you think about that fuming young man and the Minister of the Gospel which he’s become it’s encouraging.

and strengthen it. Oh,” he says verse 11, “*may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus*, make it possible for me to come to you. You love each other but may the Lord make you *increase and abound* in love towards one another. May the Lord establish you as *blameless in holiness* so that when the Lord Jesus Christ comes back, there in Thessalonica will be a group of holy people.”

Can you see the logic of what is going on there? You’ve made progress in faith and love; that causes my heart to dance; that causes me to pray, in turn, that you will make even more progress with faith and love. Paul is encouraged in the ear, also he is encouraging them by his prayers. His constant Ministry of prayer. Because that’s where his heart is!

And now we’ve done the full circle. Do you pray for other Christians? Do you thank God for them? You make requests for them that love so they can love a bit more? That they who have faith will have more?

Do you pray urgently and earnestly and specifically. Do you pray remembering that the great panoply of God will soon be assembled for the last time when the Lord Jesus Christ comes back? Wouldn’t it be lovely if every Christian today was already holy. Encouragement is a matter of the heart, given by the mouth and received by the ear and sustained by Prayer.

The world thinks that what is most powerful at the moment is pictures (images –what is seen). God’s Word ... Word: contradicts that. What is most powerful in the world is words. If you want to encourage people speak words: words to God; words to them; and words about them to others. Well you can’t speak words to people that you don’t speak to! Do you speak to everyone in your Church? You can’t speak words to people you don’t spend time with. Everyone can be hospitable. If you haven’t got a home of your own to invite them, you can take someone to a shopping centre for a coffee or a milkshake. While most can be hospitable in their own home from time to time. Even if not as regularly as they would like.

You can spend time together and talk. And it doesn’t have to be about the latest gimmicks on your phone – however wonderful and interesting that might be. You could talk about the things of God. You could make the opportunity. Take the opportunity. Everybody can encourage others. We’ve all got a mouth. We’ve all got a life. It’s a Ministry that is open to us all.

[2589]

Pray for God's grace, through the Spirit of Christ to live in us all, that we may live the new life made possible by the Spirit, for all the saints present today. Amen

1 Timothy 3:16

God Manifest in the Flesh

Per S Olyott

Today's 'observance'⁸ is not to remember santa claus and the attendant 'spirit' of good-will and giving – that is so valuable to the retail industry – nor principally to remember the angels nor the shepherds, Mary nor Joseph, Simeon nor Anna nor even the 'wise men' – who do not appear at Christmas Day. What we have come to remember is the astonishing truth found in 1 Timothy 3:16.

*¹⁶ And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness:
God was manifested in the flesh, (NKJV)⁹*

From this we have 3 questions to ask and three points to make.

The Questions:

- God was manifest in the flesh. **Why** did this happen?

For sinners to be 'saved' somebody must live the Law which they had broken. For sinners to be saved someone must bear the penalty which they deserve. Christ merely as God, was not capable of the obedience required. Christ merely as God was not capable of bearing the suffering required. Therefore it was necessary that the Godhead, to save us, must not only take upon Him a created nature, but our nature.¹⁰ There is a necessity that the Saviour must be a man, because those who are 'fallen' are men and women. That's why this event took place.

Why did it happen? Because it was a necessity for God to be manifest in the flesh.

- The second question is **how** did this happen?

First of all there was a conception in the womb of one of the race of mankind. It was in that way that the Lord Jesus Christ truly became the 'son of man'. Which is a title He constantly used throughout His ministry.¹¹ He became a descendant of Adam; a child of Abraham; a son of David – through the genealogy of Mary.

8 Church tradition, since the sixth century, has kept December 25 as Christmas Day. There is some value in recognising this celebration:

A way of expressing unity with the rest of the Christian Church and an association with the Christians who have gone before, in previous centuries.

But there are also dangers in observing Christmas Day. Historically the tendency has been for churches who recognise 'special days' to de-emphasise the observance of the 'Lord's Day'. Those traditions (some of which are Christian in name only) which observe a 'church calendar' most strongly are generally those who think the least of the (Christian) Sabbath Day – which is alone commanded by God.

Today then is a day of Christian liberty. If you wish to observe Christmas Day then it's in your liberty to do so. And vice versa. It's not part of your liberty to 'bind' Christmas Day on another. This is not a 'Sabbath Day'. However it has some value from a family and friends point of view and it provides evangelistic opportunities, that may not be as apparent at other times of the year. Of course it's always a blessing to meet with the 'Lord's Family' as we come together like this this morning.

9 This translation is used because: There is dispute about various of the Greek manuscripts that are presently available. See:

<https://www.tsbibles.org/resource/collection/156A9AA2-2086-4C4E-BE0A-08A4508415DA/God-was-Manifest-in-the-Flesh.pdf>

10 We 'fell' because we had a federal head and if we are to be saved we must have a new federal head. The stage where the fall of mankind took place must be the stage where the redemption of mankind takes place. There must be a man who is the new head of a new race amongst mankind.

11 Daniel saw a vision he described in this way, which was a vision of Christ: Daniel 7:13. Coming in the clouds of heaven and having everlasting dominion. The One like a man who nevertheless originates in heaven and comes by divine initiative. All descriptions of deity!

Three great ways, predicted of Him, just as God had promised.

But this conception in the womb of Mary was not an ordinary conception. It was a conception by the 'power of the Holy Spirit'. (Luke 1:35)

The power of the highest overshadowed Mary. He was formed of the substance of Mary's body, but without the agency of a man. So He was the 'seed' of a woman, but not in any sense the seed of a man. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit. That was a remarkable fulfilment of the old – the first – Messianic promise. That the 'seed of the woman' would crush the serpent's head. (Genesis 3:15) Though He is the Son of Man, He was not the son of a man.

So there was a conception, and then a birth. The conception was supernatural and therefore the child in the womb was holy. But the birth was not supernatural. There was supernatural protection of the child in the womb, so that He was not defiled by sin in any sense, but the birth was not supernatural. It was a natural birth with the exception: that He, who was born, was without sin. (which otherwise, every human – born of a woman – since Adam – does inherit) This exception was because, and only possible because: He was God manifest in the flesh!

- **When** did this happen?

Galatians 4:4: ... *when the fullness of time* ... When everything was ready! However you look at it, the birth of Christ was at the proper time.

It wouldn't have been appropriate for Christ to have been born before the 'flood'. The ground was cursed – yes. There was violence everywhere – yes. And yet the dire effects of sin hadn't been seen in their fullest measure – man had been in existence for at least 1000 years. In comparison with us he had a measure of immortality (consider Mathusula's age 967: – Genesis 5:27) There had to be an universal judgement to show to men the dire effects of the 'fall'. To show to men and women, that left to themselves there was no hope of any recovery. So Christ did not come then.

Even before Moses: wouldn't have been a fitting time, because the need for Christ was not so evident even then as it later became. From the beginning there had been a primitive remnant religion in all the tribes (but it was mostly corrupted) from the days of Adam. However at the time of Moses there were still people – beside the Jews – who had true faith.¹² It wasn't until the whole world was pagan – with the exception of Israel. Until the rest of the world had lived in spiritual darkness for some time, that it was the 'right' time.

Until, in fact it was clear to the whole world (including the regularly 'backsliding' children of Israel) that the necessary heavenly physician, the Saviour, should come. When darkness was at its blackest and there had been centuries without any prophetic witness – 400 years between Malachi to John the Baptist. And when it was plain to all that the Jewish Kingdom had lost, for ever, its glory and power to bring light to the world. When paganism had run its course for centur-

¹² In the time of Abram a 'priest' of 'God Most High', Melchizedek, blessed Abram in the name of God, creator of heaven and earth. Genesis 14:18-20. To distinguish Christ's priesthood from the Levite dynasty (who all died and were often corrupt) he was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek. Hebrews 5:10, 6:20, 7:1-21.

ies so that men and women knew that they, by themselves, could not give themselves new characters; nor bring themselves to be right with God; nor pardon their own sins. When it was plain to all that man unaided cannot bring himself into favour with God. It was then, that God was manifest in the flesh!

Now three things to note:

- The **greatness** of this event.

The birth of Christ was a greater and more wonderful thing than had happened in the history of the world until then. The Creation of the world was a great thing – for God to speak and for everything to be created out of nothing, by His mere Word, was a great thing, but not as great as the incarnation of Christ. It was a great thing for God to create a creature and to rule a creation, but a far greater thing for God to become a creature. God becoming man was the greatest event in history up to that moment. That person, so born, was the greatest person who ever was or will be. Because He was God manifest in the flesh.

- The **circumstances** of the event.

Mary was a poor virgin – you know that from the details of her 'purification' ceremony.¹³

She was espoused to a husband who was a poor man.

Yet ... we have the genealogy of both. A list of ancestors. They were both of the royal family of David. Both, in some sense, were heirs to the throne.

The tabernacle of David had fallen, yet Amos had promised (800 years before) that when the tabernacle of David had fallen then God would raise it up. That's exactly what happened! (Amos 9:11)

God moved the Roman Emperor to require a census – each one was to return to the home of their ancestors. Mary and Joseph, set off for Bethlehem. Demonstrating the marvellous sovereignty of God, whereby although the Messiah was to be brought up in the *Land of Zebulun, Land of Naphtali, Galilee of the Gentiles*, He would be born in Bethlehem as predicted by the prophet.¹⁴

Think of it: no room at the inn; only a stable. At last God Himself manifest in the flesh – laid in a manger.

- The **concurrence** of events.

Several things may occur together. A man & woman marry. Each marries the other – concurrently.

13 She should have offered a lamb, but the law said that if you are too poor to offer that, then you could offer two turtle doves (pigeons). Mary could only offer those.

14 Micah 5:2

2 "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
Though you are little among the thousands of Judah,
Yet out of you shall come forth to Me
The One to be Ruler in Israel,
Whose goings forth are from of old,
From everlasting."

In our case today, there were three concurrent events.

The first was **the return of the Spirit**, at the birth of Christ: the spirit of prophesy had ceased with Malachi, 400 years earlier. No visions or immediate revelation. Now it was granted again:

Zachariah had a vision of an angel; Mary does; Elizabeth bursts into divinely inspired song; Mary, Zachariah, and the shepherd also. Anna and Simeon have a 'revelation'. Also the 'wise men in the East' And ... Joseph's dreams. (Luke 1:5-2:20)

400 years of 'silence' had been broken! The return of the Spirit!

Secondly, **heaven and earth took note** of this event.

Heaven's is shown by the angel and angels: In Job we read that the angels sang together at Creation (Job 38:7). Here they are again: in the Greek language they are not said to be singing, but nonetheless they are shouting to one another in the skies, declaring the birth of Christ. Longing to look into the prophecies, says Peter. (1 Peter 1: 10-12). They had seen the prophecies being given – now they see the accomplishment that God has declared for so many centuries. Heaven bears witness to this event.

So does the earth: Elizabeth – before it takes place; Mary also; Even John the Baptist: before he's born 'leaps in his mother's womb'. Because he recognises Mary as the mother of his Lord, to whom he is to be the forerunner. And the witnesses in the Temple. *And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple. (Amos 3:1)*

The lowest of the Jews – shepherds. The highest of the gentiles – the 'wise men' from the East. Heaven and earth came to bear witness to the 'birth' of God

- Finally the **'sceptre' then departed from Judah.**

Back in Genesis 49:10 a promise had been given: *The sceptre shall not depart from Judah ... until Shiloh come ...*. A prediction of the Christ! So far it hadn't. The 10 tribes had revolted, but Judah remained; during the exile in Babylon the sceptre temporarily ceased; the Nation returned to Jerusalem under Persian rule – but they had restored political power under Jewish governors. The kingdom was restored under the Maccabees. Then the Romans came, but they allowed the Jews to rule themselves, with a king of their own. Herod the Great reigned for 40 years as a vassal of Rome – he gave little more than 'lip service' to Rome and had the power of life and death. Shortly after Christ was born, this Herod died and his successors in Judah were replaced by direct rule from Rome through Governors (such as Pilot) removing the power of the Jews over life and death. At this point the 'sceptre departed Judah' – no more Temple Jews ruling Judah. The sceptre passed to Christ and His Temple was the hearts of believers.

Christ is the ruler of His new people of Judah. God was and is manifest in the flesh. His flesh is now with God in heaven and He will return in the flesh.

So today we remember and celebrate:

*God was manifested in the flesh,
Justified in the Spirit,
Seen by angels,
Preached among the Gentiles,
Believed on in the world,
Received up in glory.*

[1764]

Pray that this may be so for all the saints gathered here today! Amen.

1 Thessalonians 4:1-18

The Christian Life – Now and In the Future

per S. Olyott

1 Thessalonians 4:3a

³ For this is the will of God, your sanctification:

This is an explanation of 1 Thessalonians Chapter 4. Here Paul, Silas and Timothy continue with their letter and their theme is The Christian Life – Now and In the Future.

In verses 1-12 the Christian Life, now, is described. In turn, these verses can be divided into two. Because to walk ‘the Life’ you need two shoes. Have you ever tried to walk with just one shoe? Yes! You’ll walk – but with a limp! If you want to walk with even greater disability, wear two shoes, but make sure one is about eight sizes bigger than the other. If you are to walk well you need to wear two shoes that are both the same size.

In verse 1 Paul is telling these Thessalonians how to walk. In verses 1-8 he tells us what the first shoe is, and in verses 9-12 he tells what the second shoe is. Woe betide the Christian who only puts on one of these shoes! His walk will be, at best, an odd way to walk.

The first shoe is called sanctification. “Now”, says somebody, “Is Paul going to be complicated; harangue us; and tell us off?” Well we can relax. (Verse 1) ¹ *Finally, then, brothers, and sisters,* So this great Apostle is speaking to us in a familial¹⁵ way, as to brothers and sisters. Nothing to fear. We can all relax and listen to his teaching. But don’t let that rob you of the force of what he is going to say.

Again at verse 1: *we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, ...* . “You’re not in the world anymore. You’re ‘in’ Christ! If you are going to walk as a Christian should. You must listen to me.” Further, look at what else he says in verse 1, at the end. “I’m going to show you,” he says, “how you ought to walk to please God. You’re a Christian and you want to please God. Then you must listen to what I have to say.”

Verse 2: There he describes the teaching he is giving as a commandment. ² *For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus.* “Christ sent me to be an Apostle. I give you these commandments,” says Paul. “You’re to receive this teaching, although I give it in a brotherly way, as if Jesus Christ Himself were giving it to you!” Let’s take this seriously. Let’s imagine that our Lord Jesus Christ is here physically giving us the teaching. Then we are to receive it with the same authority, even when we can’t see Him. While His teaching is coming through human lips, we’re to receive it. In the same way.

¹⁵ relating to or occurring in a family or its members. "familial relationships"

Verse 5. He says. "People who don't submit to this teaching, are the people that don't know God. Therefore to reject this teaching is to reject God." As he will explain again in a minute.

Verse 6. "Not to obey this teaching is to put yourself on the wrong side of the anger of God." ⁶ ... *the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you.* So although Paul is talking in a very brotherly way, he's stressing the importance of what he is saying.

Verse 7. ⁷ *For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness.* If you turn your back on this teaching, you are turning your back on the 'call' that God gave you when He called you out from your unbelief to become a believer.

Then most strongly of all verse 8: ⁸ *Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.* The teaching then, this morning, comes from God! Although it comes through very imperfect lips, to reject it is to reject God Himself.

"What is this first shoe then, Paul? What does the Lord want of us in the Christian life now?" Verse 3: ³ *For this is the will of God, (This is what God want's from you.) your sanctification:*¹⁶ And verse 7: ⁷ *For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness.*

What is Sanctification? Now this is a technical term, in the same way that we have specialised terms in motor cars for example, a carburettor or fuel injector. Knowing what they are and what they do is helpful in understanding the way a car works. So when we know relevant terms, they are useful in understanding, the Christian Life.

Sanctification is a 'work'! While Justification is an 'act'! That's where God puts us right with Himself, once for all. Also adoption is an act – that's where God makes us His children, once for all. But sanctification is a 'work'. It's something that God does, day after day, hour after hour, minute after minute, in the life of the Christian. It's something which He does in all of you who are true believers. He does it out of His kindness and grace. God is at work in every moment of the Christian Life. He's changing the Christian so that every day he's a little less than he used to be and a little more what he should be. Every day he's able, a little bit more, to die to sin and to live to God. Every day he's a little less like the world (and less like he was) and a little bit more renewed to the image of God.

But God does this 'work' by energising the will of the Christian. It's not something where we just lie on our beds and let God do it to us. It's something that God makes us do! He does it by commands and instructions. Such as we are reading this morning.

Now it is God's will that every Christian, should be sanctified. It's God's will that every Christian should be more like Him! It's God's will that every person bought with God's blood, should begin to resemble the Lord Jesus Christ and then: resemble Him more and more! That is sanctification.

What it means in practice is spelt out very clearly in this chapter. Look at verse 3:
³ *For this is the will of God, your sanctification:* Then he gives a very clear example: *that you abstain from sexual immorality;* Because there are certain temptations which come to the Christian at different parts of their life. But there are other temptations which come to the Christian throughout his life and never let him go. The great Professor Cornelius Van Til, who continued to lecture to age 85 or 86, when he came to a passage like this one. Would talk about the dangers of sexual immorality. One of the young students of 22 or 23 years old said, "Professor van Til, it's alright for you to speak, you're getting on a bit and you're past it."
He stopped and sternly said, "Young man, the temptations that I faced when I was young are the temptations which I face today."

It is a temptation that never lets any Christian go. If it is not physical it will be mental! There is this tremendous temptation, all the time, to be impure. Paul says, "God wills your sanctification. Each one of you (verse 4) should know how to control his own body in sanctification (holiness) and honour. Everyone of you has a body. God wants this body to be set apart for Him. Everything which is done with it, should please God. Everything that happens should be honourable. That's the will of God. Don't be like the Gentiles", he says (verse 5), "They are taken away with the passion of lust. A great appetite gets hold of them. It won't let them go and they follow it. They don't think!" That's why the associated sins are so apparent in our society. "Because people are taken by an appetite, which they won't resist. They follow it where it takes them, without thinking. They blindly go to their ruin. That's the way people behave who don't know God!"

"You're not to be like that", says Paul. "No!" he says, "You're not to take advantage and defraud your brother, in this matter." Because any immorality in this area doesn't only touch you, but it touches somebody else. Therefore it touches somebody else's family, partnerships and relationships. As it also touches you and your family, partnerships and relationships.

"It's not to be that way", says Paul, "You're to be different. Obviously different and continuously different. You're to live according to the standards of the Word of God."

Not according to the pressures of the environment around you. You're not to yield to the pressure of your peer group. Or what the media thrusts in upon you. God has spoken! The context is good, and lovely and pure. One man, one woman – within marriage. That's what sanctification means in a wicked world amongst other things. It means living by the 'word' and not according to the world.

That's the first shoe. He's been urging these Christians to give personal discipline to this point of being pure, holy and righteous. Of cultivating their own spiritual life – practically and really.

The other shoe is in verses 9-12. Here it's brotherly love. A Christian who cultivates his own spiritual life, but doesn't love his brothers in Christ, would be a very strange, limping type of Christian. While the Christian does all he can to sweeten his relationships with other Christians, but is impure in his own life. He'll be a terrible Christian. Won't he?

We have a responsibility to guard our own life – to be pure, and we have a responsibility to seek the welfare of every other Christian. To seek it actively and at great sacrifice. If we ever lose that balance, then we begin to walk badly.

Once more look at the ‘spirit’ of Paul. Verse 10: ... *But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more*, he says at the end of this verse. He’s been very firm in what he has to say. But it’s still brotherly! “I’m commanding you”, he says. That’s often his formula: *Now concerning* ... That’s where you get a straight forward Apostolic teaching. But don’t forget the force of what he is going to say. Look at verse 9. “I’m talking about a subject were God Himself has already taught you.” And then in verse 11, he says, “What I’m telling you is what we commanded you.” So once more we have this great directness, but with a loving spirit as the Apostle speaks to us.

What is this second thing that God wants of us, in our Christian life, now? It’s brotherly love. (verse 9) and what is ‘brotherly love’? Well says Paul, “If you’re a Christian at all, you know instinctively what it is.” ... *concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another,*¹⁰ *for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia.* Anybody who is a true Christian knows instinctively. Although one was close to certain people before, he is now closer to his fellow Christians. Anyone who is a true Christian, if he comes into a Church where Jesus Christ is loved and the Bible is believed, he says, “I’m at home.”

He feels that those people are his family. He knows what brotherly love is. It’s something which the Spirit teaches him, instinctively. Inside him, intuitively. “Well”, says Paul. “continue on this road!” ... *we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more*, “You already love all the Christians in your Province; love them more and more. Don’t stop at saying, ‘I love other Christians.’ Don’t ever be satisfied with that. Make sure that you love them more today than you did yesterday. More on Monday than on Sunday.

But what does that mean in practice, Paul? Well in verse 11 he tells us three things that brotherly love means in practice.

- That you also aspire to lead a quiet life. These days that has come to mean: “Leave me alone and let me get on with my own life. Don’t interfere, let me do my own thing.” Paul doesn’t mean this. Leading a quiet life in the Bible simply means you don’t attempt to draw attention to yourself. By intemperate and outlandish behaviour. Brotherly love cannot attract attention to itself. Can it? Because brotherly love is seeking the good of the other. It’s ‘other’ oriented. Not. “Look at what a good job of loving I’m doing.”
- Mind you own business. We’ve got to be concerned for other people’s welfare, but at the same time we’re to mind our own business.
- Work with your own hands. Because we will find when we come to the second letter. There were a lot of spongers in that Church. Didn’t help out and didn’t want to. While Mr A was away at work, Mr B would come around to his house to eat at his table and entertain his wife, because he couldn’t be bothered to work. It was bringing great criticism on the Christian Church. That’s not brotherly love!

Verse 12. Why Paul? ¹² *so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.*

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To be continued next week,

Pray for God's grace, through the Spirit of Christ to live in us all, that we may live the new life made possible by the Spirit, for all the saints present today.

Amen