

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST THESSALONIANS

MESSAGE ONE

INTRODUCTION TO A HOLY LIFE FOR THE CHURCH LIFE

Scripture Reading: 1 Thes. 1:1-3

The two Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians may be considered the earliest of Paul's writings. Thessalonica was a city of the Roman Empire in the province of Macedonia, north of the province of Achaia. After the Macedonian call, which Paul received on his second journey of ministry, he and his co-worker Silvanus visited first Philippi and then Thessalonica (Acts 16:9-12; 17:1-4). The apostle stayed and worked there for only a short time, probably less than one month (Acts 17:2).

WRITTEN TO NEW BELIEVERS

The two Epistles to the Thessalonians were written in the early days, while Paul was still on his second journey of ministry. In the course of this journey, Paul stayed in Thessalonica for less than a month. According to Acts, Paul worked there for three Sabbaths, for about three weeks, not long after his visit to Philippi. The Epistle to the Philippians, a wonderful book, was written much later, during Paul's imprisonment.

No doubt, when Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, the church in Thessalonica was still very young. I doubt that the believers there had been in the church life for even a full year when these two Epistles were written. Thus, in 1 and 2 Thessalonians we see certain points that are not covered in Paul's other Epistles. Because the church in Thessalonica was so young, Paul's Epistles to the Thessalonians are more or less to those in a childhood stage. Some of what Paul says to the Thessalonians is

different from what he says to other churches that were more experienced. It is worthwhile for us to study 1 and 2 Thessalonians in order to know the situation and condition of a young church. By reading these two books we can know the young Christian life and the young church life. If we keep in mind this aspect of the background, we shall be helped in our reading of these Epistles.

The books of 1 and 2 Thessalonians were not written to experienced Christians. They were written to young believers, to those who had been saved for less than a year. Most of them had been typical Gentiles. Therefore, in writing to them, Paul surely viewed them as young believers. These Epistles are very precious, for they render us particular help concerning the young Christian life and church life.

THE ORGANIC UNION

First Thessalonians 1:1 says, "Paul and Silvanus and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace." This Epistle and the second were both addressed to the local church in Thessalonica, composed of all the believers in Christ in that city. Such a local church is of the believers and is in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. This indicates that such a local church is born of God the Father with His life and nature and is united with the Lord Jesus Christ organically in all He is and has done. Hence, it is of men (such as the Thessalonians), yet in God and in the Lord organically. Such an organic union in the divine life and nature is the vital base for the believers to live a holy life for the church life, which is the theme of the two Epistles.

In his opening word to the Thessalonians Paul speaks in a plain manner. He does not say, as in Romans 1:1, that he is "a slave of Christ Jesus, a called apostle, separated to the gospel of God"; neither does he say, as in Ephesians 1:1, that he is an "apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God." The opening of Romans and Ephesians is more complicated than that of 1 Thessalonians. Because this

Epistle was written to young believers, in 1:1 Paul simply says, "Paul and Silvanus and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians."

It is a particular characteristic of Paul's writing to emphasize the organic union of the believers with the Triune God. In fact, the emphasis on the organic union with Christ is an outstanding feature of Paul's writings. In his Epistles Paul again and again speaks of being in Christ, in the Triune God. Although 1:1 is written in a simple way, it nevertheless includes Paul's characteristic reference to the organic union. In this verse Paul speaks of the church of the Thessalonians *in* God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. The preposition "in" here is very important; it indicates that the church is in the Triune God. The church is composed of human beings, but they, the believers, are in the Triune God. On the one hand, the church in Thessalonica was of the Thessalonians; on the other hand, this church was in God the Father.

A LIFE RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD THE FATHER

Paul does not merely say that the church is in God; he says that the church is in God the Father. Unless God is our Father, we cannot be in Him. We were not created in God; however, we were regenerated, born again, in Him. We were created outside of God. This means that in creation we did not have any organic union with God or any life relationship with Him. Instead, there was only the relationship between the creature and the Creator. As a result of creation, we are God's creatures, and He is our Creator. Hence, there is a relationship of creation, but no relationship in life. God's life was not created into our natural being. As God's creatures, we did not have the life of God. We had only our created life, our natural human life.

When we were regenerated, born of God, our life relationship with God began. This rebirth brought us into the organic union with the Triune God. At the time of our regeneration, our rebirth, we obtained God's life. Now God is not merely our Creator, our God; He is our Father, the

One who has begotten us. God is no longer merely our Creator--He is also our Begetter, for He has begotten us with His life. Therefore, He is God our Father.

Through regeneration the Thessalonian believers had become sons of God. According to the book of Romans, the church is a composition of sons of God. It is impossible for sinners to be components of the church. Sinners can be members of a secular organization, but they cannot be components of the church of the living God. Such a church is composed only of sons of God.

We have been predestinated by the Father to be His sons. As Ephesians 1:5 says, we have been predestinated unto sonship. At a certain time, God called us and moved us inwardly. Then we repented, believed in the Son of God, Jesus Christ, and received Him. By receiving Christ, we were reborn and became sons of God. Now that we are sons of God, we are the components of the church, the Body of Christ. Because we, as sons of God, are the members of Christ, 1:1 says not only that the church is in God the Father, but also that the church is in the Lord Jesus Christ.

CALLING ON THE LORD JESUS

It is very significant that in 1:1 Paul inserts the title Father after God and the title Lord before Jesus Christ. It is not sufficient to speak either of God or of Jesus Christ. Rather, we need to say that God is our Father and that Jesus Christ is our Lord. If Jesus Christ is not our Lord, then we have nothing to do with Him in a practical way. But when Jesus Christ becomes our Lord, this means that we are in Him, organically united to Him.

When we call on the name of the Lord Jesus, we should not just say "Jesus"; we should say, "Lord Jesus." To call on Him only by saying "Jesus" is to call somewhat ignorantly. The Lord, however, is merciful, and He sympathizes with us. He still responds when we call "Jesus" instead of "Lord Jesus," for He realizes that actually we are calling on Him as Lord. Nevertheless, we need the proper knowledge of calling on the Lord. Instead of saying, "Jesus, I love You," it is better to say, "Lord

Jesus, I love You." How sweet it is to call on the Lord in this way!

Some Christians like to say, "Praise God!" But in the New Testament the emphasis is on praising God the Father. We need to realize that for us today God is our Father and Jesus is our Lord. According to 1 Corinthians 12:3, when we say, "Lord Jesus," we are in the Spirit. This indicates that the Spirit honors the proper calling on the Lord Jesus. Many of us can testify that when we call, "Lord Jesus," we sense the anointing of the Spirit within. The same is true of saying, "Abba, Father." If we merely call on God, Elohim, we do not have much anointing. But when we cry, "Abba, Father," we experience the anointing. This is not a matter of terminology; it is a reality in our experience.

THE CHURCH IN GOD THE FATHER AND THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

We need to be impressed with the fact that the church is in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. To say "the Lord Jesus Christ" implies a great deal. First, it implies that Jesus Christ is our Lord. Second, it implies that He is our Savior, for the name Jesus means Jehovah the Savior. Third, it implies that Christ, God's anointed One, is bringing us into the riches of God and is accomplishing everything with us for God. Therefore, to say "the Lord Jesus Christ" is to utter something all-inclusive.

When Paul says that the church is in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, he indicates that we have been born of God and have been brought into the organic union with Christ. What is the church? The church is a group of human beings who have been born of God and who have been brought into the organic union with Christ.

WORK OF FAITH

In verses 2 and 3 Paul goes on to say, "We give thanks to God always concerning you all, making mention of you in our prayers, remembering unceasingly your work of faith, and labor of love, and endurance of hope of our Lord

Jesus Christ, before our God and Father." Here we see that when Paul prays for the church he gives thanks to God for three matters: for the work of faith, the labor of love, and the endurance of hope. Faith here indicates the nature and strength of the work. Our work is our faith. This means that the nature and strength of our Christian work is faith. The strength with which we work and the nature of our work should both be faith. Our Christian work should be of the nature of faith, not of the nature of human knowledge, ability, or power.

LABOR OF LOVE

We need to understand the difference between work and labor. Work may be something which is not very deep and which may not be very difficult. Labor, however, is both deeper and harder than work. When we are doing a work that is difficult to accomplish, that is a labor. This labor should be of love. Love is the motivation and the characteristic of our Christian labor. This means that love is the expression. Our Christian work eventually becomes a labor, something that is deeper and more difficult. For this labor, faith alone is not adequate; we also need love, a love that is lasting.

Raising children is a good illustration of a labor of love. Mothers know that caring for a child is a labor, not merely a work. After giving birth, a new mother will have a tender love for her infant. For a while she will work happily to care for the child. Eventually, however, that work will become a labor that presses and exhausts her. How good it is that the Lord has created within this young mother a mother's love for her child! Without such a love, she would not be able to bear the burden of caring for her child over the years. This love motivates her to care for her child. It is also the characteristic, the expression, of her labor. This illustrates that in the Christian life first we have a work of faith and then this work becomes a labor of love.

ENDURANCE OF HOPE

From the work of faith and the labor of love we go on to

the endurance of hope. Hope is the source of endurance. All mothers know that caring for children requires endurance. It takes endurance for a mother to bear all the troubles that come with raising children.

In the church life as well as in the family life we all need endurance. We must be trained, educated, first to work, then to labor, and eventually to endure. An apostle is one who endures. As long as he has endurance, he is qualified to be an apostle. In 2 Corinthians we can see the endurance of the Apostle Paul. Such endurance is the topstone of our work. Elders, endurance is the topstone of the eldership. Likewise, in the work of shepherding others, endurance is crucial. If we would be successful in shepherding the saints, we must exercise endurance. Endurance involves suffering, not enjoyment. Shepherding always involves an amount of suffering.

In 1:3 Paul speaks of the endurance of hope of our Lord Jesus Christ. This endurance comes from the hope in the Lord's coming, or from the hope in the coming Lord. Hope is the source of endurance.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

The faith, the love, and the hope in 1:3 depict the structure of the genuine Christian life, constructed with these elements. Faith receives the divine things (John 1:12) and realizes the spiritual and unseen things (Heb. 11:1). Hope reaps and partakes of the things realized by faith (Rom. 8:24-25). Love enjoys the things received and realized by faith and partaken of by hope for nourishing ourselves, building up others, and expressing God. Such a life originates not from the ability of the believer's natural being, but from the infusion of what God is, in whom they believe. It is carried out by their sacrificial love toward their loving Lord, who loved them and gave Himself for them, and toward His members, whom He has redeemed through His death in love. This life lasts and stands unchanging by the sustaining power of the hope that looks for their beloved Lord, who promised that He would come to take them to Himself. Such a life is the content of this Epistle.

I hope that from 1 and 2 Thessalonians we shall all see something that is helpful to young believers. We need to help the new ones to grow in faith, in love, and in hope, in particular, in the work of faith, in the labor of love, and in the endurance of hope.

It is marvelous that the Thessalonian believers could live such a life through the apostle's short ministry of less than one month. This encourages us to preach, in full assurance of faith, the complete gospel to typical unbelievers and minister the deeper truths concerning the Christian life to new converts. Do not hold the concept that, as you preach the full gospel, others will not be able to understand what you are saying. First we must believe for others. Then they themselves will believe. If we do not believe what we are preaching, others will never believe it. Thus, we must believe that those who hear us will be able to understand, receive, and accept the full gospel. Likewise, we must go on to minister the deeper truths of the Christian life to new believers. May we all learn to preach something deeper than what we think others are able to understand.

In the two Epistles to the young church in Thessalonica, the genuine Christian life for the proper church life is revealed in a simple and brief way. It is a life of three dimensions in the light of the Lord's coming back: faith as the beginning, the foundation; love as the process, the structure; and hope as the consummation, the topstone. Faith is toward God (1:8); love is toward the saints (3:12; 4:9-10); and hope is in the Lord's coming (2:19). The first Epistle is for encouragement and comfort; the second is for correction and balance. The believers should live, walk, and work by faith and love in the hope of the Lord's coming back. But we should not have the wrong concept that the Lord will come immediately, so that we need not do anything for the long run.

THE CONSUMMATION OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE FOR THE CHURCH LIFE

These two Epistles may be considered the

consummation of the Christian life for the church life. They conclude the section of the Apostle Paul's writings that begins with the book of Romans. Although these two Epistles are for the young Christian life and church life, they may also be regarded as the consummation of the Christian life for the church life.

According to the sequence of the New Testament writings, we have Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and 1 and 2 Thessalonians. These nine Epistles may be considered a group. The consummation and conclusion of this group of nine Epistles are 1 and 2 Thessalonians.

In this message we have covered two basic points: first, that the church is composed of human beings in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ, those who have the life of God and who are in the organic union with Christ; second, that the church life is the Christian life constructed of the work of faith, the labor of love, and the endurance of hope in the coming Lord. May we all be deeply impressed with these two points. We need to see that the church is the composition of human beings who are in God the Father with life and who are organically in the Lord Jesus Christ. We also need to see that the Christian life for the church life is constructed of the work of faith, the labor of love, and the endurance of hope. In forthcoming messages we shall see more concerning this work of faith, labor of love, and endurance of hope.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST THESSALONIANS

MESSAGE TWO

CHARACTERISTICS OF A HOLY LIFE FOR THE CHURCH LIFE

Scripture Reading: 1 Thes. 1:4-10

The more we read the book of 1 Thessalonians, the more we realize that it truly was written to young believers. In this Epistle Paul is speaking to new believers.

SELECTED BY GOD

In 1:4 he says, "Knowing, brothers beloved by God, your selection." Selection refers to God's choosing before the foundation of the world for His eternal purpose (Eph. 1:4). The apostles knew that the brothers beloved by God were chosen in such a manner by God for the fulfillment of His heart's desire. The apostles knew that the Thessalonians were included among God's selected people, His chosen ones. Their selection had been made manifest to such an extent that the apostles had the assurance that the Thessalonian believers had been selected by God.

The fact that the Thessalonians had been selected by God was manifested by their reaction to the gospel. How do we know that we have been selected? We know this by the way we respond to the gospel. If a person rejects the gospel, that is a sign that he has not been selected by God. But if he accepts the gospel willingly in a positive way, that acceptance is a sign, an indicator, that he surely has been selected by God.

God selected us in eternity, before the foundation of the world. But in time He comes to us in the preaching of the gospel. Now it is a matter of our reaction. If our reaction is positive, that is a positive sign, a sign that we have been selected. But if our reaction is negative, that is a negative

sign, a sign that we have not been selected. The apostles knew that the Thessalonians had been selected by God because of their ready and willing acceptance of the gospel in a very positive way.

No doubt, Paul's word in 1:4 concerning selection is directed to young believers. New Christians need to be helped to know that they have been selected by God. The foundation of our salvation was not laid in this age; rather, it was laid in eternity past. Based upon His selection, God saves us. Furthermore, with God's selection as the foundation, the Spirit moves us to believe in Christ. The move of the Spirit in this way is based upon the foundation of selection laid in eternity. We should try to help new believers realize God's selection as the eternal foundation of their salvation. We all need to see that in eternity past we were selected by God and that our being in the church today is a sign of this eternal selection. Therefore, in 1:4 Paul could say, "Knowing, brothers beloved by God, your selection."

PREACHING IN POWER, IN THE HOLY SPIRIT, AND IN MUCH ASSURANCE

In verse 5 Paul continues, "Because our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance, even as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake." The apostles not only preached the gospel; they lived it. Their ministering of the gospel was not only by word, but also by a life which displays the power of God, a life in the Holy Spirit and in the assurance of their faith. They were the model of the glad tidings they spread.

We all should learn that to preach the gospel we must preach in power, in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance. As we preach the gospel, we need to have the assurance that it is a saving gospel. The gospel we preach is able to save others. Before sinners can believe in the gospel, we ourselves must believe it. We must believe that the gospel is able to save sinners. When we preach the gospel, we should look away from those in the audience

who may be opposing our message. Looking at them may cause our faith to diminish. Instead of looking at the faces of opposers, look at the gospel. The expression on the faces of the opposing ones is a lie. We must have the assurance that the gospel we are preaching can save even these opposers.

In verse 5 power, the Holy Spirit, and much assurance are linked to the words "what kind of men we were among you for your sake." It may seem to us that Paul's writing here is not logical, and we may wonder how the two parts of this verse fit together. This verse reveals that if we would preach the gospel in power, in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance, we must have a life to match this kind of gospel preaching. Our manner of life must match the power, the Holy Spirit, and the assurance.

A careless person, one who does not live Christ, cannot preach the gospel in power, in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance. To preach the gospel in this way, we must first live Christ and have a manner of life to match the power, the Holy Spirit, and the assurance. In other words, the power, the Holy Spirit, and the assurance require a certain manner of life. If we do not have the proper living, we shall not have the power, the Holy Spirit, and the assurance in our gospel preaching, for our manner of life will not match these characteristics.

IMITATORS OF THE APOSTLES AND THE LORD

In verse 6 Paul goes on to say, "And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, having accepted the word in much affliction with joy of the Holy Spirit." Since the preachers were the model of the gospel, the believers became their imitators. This then led the believers to follow the Lord, taking Him as their model (Matt. 11:29).

First the Thessalonians as new believers became imitators of the apostles, and then they became imitators of the Lord. This indicates that we need to be a pattern, a model, for others. The believers do not see the Lord first; they see us first. If we are not a proper pattern or model, it will be difficult for others to see the Lord. Because we are

the Lord's representatives, we need to be a proper pattern. Then others can imitate the Lord by imitating us. This means that through us they imitate Him.

In verses 7 and 8 Paul says, "So that you became a pattern to all those who believe in Macedonia and in Achaia. For from you the word of the Lord has sounded out, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place your faith toward God has gone out, so that we have no need to speak anything." Here we see that the imitators of the apostles became a pattern to all other believers. They imitated the pattern and then they became a pattern to the believers in the Roman provinces of Macedonia and Achaia.

THE ORIGATION OF A HOLY LIFE FOR THE CHURCH LIFE

The book of 1 Thessalonians is concerned with a holy life for the church life. In 1:1-3 we have the structure of this life. This structure includes the work of faith, the labor of love, and the endurance of hope. This means that a holy life for the church life is constructed of faith's work, love's labor, and hope's endurance. In 1:4-10 we have the origination of this holy life for the church life. This life originates through the preaching of the word and the acceptance of the word that is preached. Thus, we need to help new believers by presenting them the word of God in power, in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance, matched by our manner of life. Then the new believers will accept this word and follow us to follow the Lord, thereby becoming a pattern for other believers. This is the way a holy life for the church life originates.

THREE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

In verses 9 and 10 we have the details of such a life: "For they themselves report concerning us what manner of entrance we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, and to wait for His Son from the heavens, Whom He raised from among the

dead--Jesus, Who delivers us from the wrath which is coming." In these verses we have three details as the contents of a holy life for the church life: turning to God from idols, serving a living and true God, and waiting for His Son from the heavens. To turn to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for His Son from the heavens are the three basic substances of the Christian life viewed from another angle. To turn to God from idols is not only to turn away from false gods, with the Devil and demons behind them, but also to turn away from all things other than God. This is by faith infused into the new converts through hearing the word of the gospel. To serve a living and true God is to serve the very God who is triune--the Father, the Son, and the Spirit--processed to be the believers' life and life supply for their enjoyment. They should experience Him not only as the object of worship, but also as the all-inclusive Supplier who lives in them. This is done by love produced within them by the sweet taste of the rich supply of the Father through the Son in the Spirit. To wait for the Son of God from the heavens is to look for the One who has passed through incarnation, human living, and crucifixion, has entered into resurrection and ascended to the heavens, and who will come back to receive His believers into glory. This is the hope that strengthens the believers to stand steadfastly in their faith.

Turning to God from Idols

The first characteristic of the Christian life is that we turn to God from idols. Some people claim to be atheists. They say that they do not believe in God or worship Him. Actually, every human being worships something. Everyone has a spirit, a spiritual stomach. In our physical stomach we are hungry for food, and in our spiritual stomach we are hungry for God. We would not have a physical stomach if it were not necessary for us to eat in order to live. Our spirit, our spiritual stomach, is for worshipping God, contacting Him, receiving Him, and containing Him. Both our physical stomach and our

spiritual stomach were created by God. During the day we must eat a number of times to satisfy the hunger of our physical stomach. In the same way, everyone worships something in order to satisfy the hunger in his spiritual stomach, the spirit. For this reason, all people worship something. Whether we worship a false god or the true God is another question. The point we are making here is that everyone, including atheists, worships something. Whether the food we eat is proper or improper food, we all eat some kind of food. In the same principle, everyone worships something, even if it is a false god.

Do you know what atheists worship? They worship themselves, for they are their own god. In Philippians 3:19 Paul speaks of those whose god is their belly. Others worship education, fame, or position, all of which are idols. God alone is the proper object of worship. Any person, matter, or thing that we worship other than God is an idol.

In my youth I had the impression that Americans did not have any idols. There were many idols in China, but my concept was that the United States was a land free of idols. But when I came to this country as an older person, I realized that there are idols everywhere. The idols in China were outward, but the idols in the United States are hidden, concealed. In their intense love of pleasure and entertainment, many in this country are worshipping idols. It is true to say that the United States is a land of entertainment. When many pursue certain forms of worldly amusement, they act without restraint, seeming even to forget their own names. In this way, their pursuit of entertainment becomes the worship of idols. The Lord's Day was ordained by God for His people to worship Him. But what do most people do on this day of the week? In one way or other, they worship idols. How many genuine worshippers are there of the true God? Surely many more people worship idols today than worship the true God.

We usually think that the goal of the gospel is to turn people from sin to God. But Paul's preaching of the gospel turned people also from idols to God. It is not sufficient merely to turn others to God from sin. If our preaching of

the gospel only does this, our preaching is weak and inadequate. The stronger preaching of the gospel turns people both from sin and from idols. It is somewhat easy to turn others to God from sin, but it is much more difficult to turn them to God from idols.

Do you know what is the beginning of the Christian life? The beginning of the Christian life consists in turning to God from idols. When we turn from idols, we also turn from sin, for sin lurks behind idols. In today's entertainments and amusements there is a great deal of sin. Those who do not worship idols may not sin. But whenever someone is worshipping an idol, it is impossible for that person not to sin.

Idols are actually parts of the Devil. They are demons. Behind every idol there is at least one demon. This means that there are demons behind the scene of today's entertainments, amusements, and pleasures. Therefore, the Christian life must be a life that begins with turning to God from idols.

Many of us still need a further turn from certain idols unto God. If you want something other than God Himself, that thing is an idol. Anything other than God that draws our attention or anything that distracts us from God is an idol. Any who are distracted in this way need a further turn to God from their idols. The Christian life must have the turning to God from idols as its first characteristic. The Christian life is a life without idols.

Serving a Living and True God

In verse 9 Paul speaks also of serving a living and true God. Literally the Greek word rendered serve means to serve as a slave. The living and true God is in contrast to the dead and false idols. In this verse the word living is mentioned before the word true. It is rather easy to serve a true God; it is not so easy to serve a living God. Nevertheless, we need to serve a living God. God must be living to us and in us in our daily life. He should be living in our speech, in our behavior, and in every aspect of our daily life.

How can we prove that God is living? We prove it by our daily life. If God were not living, our daily life would be very different from what it is. Our present living is a testimony that the God whom we serve is living. He is living in us, and He controls us, directs us, and deals with us. He will not let us go. Rather, in many matters He corrects us and adjusts us. The fact that God controls us and directs us, even in small things such as our thoughts and motives, is a proof that He is living. Furthermore, it is by our daily walk that we can prove to our relatives, neighbors, and friends that our God is living.

We live under the control, direction, and correction of a living God. An idol, however, does not direct or correct anyone. In the presence of an idol someone can gamble or steal without being corrected at all. But we cannot do such things before a living God. For example, if God is living in us, He would never allow us to tell a lie. If our God is living, we cannot lie in His presence. Serving a living God is the second characteristic of the Christian life. We must live a life which bears the testimony that the God we worship and serve is living in the details of our daily life.

Years ago, when I was in Manila, I learned that certain people could steal and then immediately go into a cathedral to worship. Some repented of their thefts and then immediately went out to steal once again. Some robbed others even in the cathedral. Surely such people do not worship a living God. On the contrary, the god they worship has no life.

What about your God? Is He a living God to you? The proper Christian life should bear a testimony that God is living. The reason we do not do or say certain things should be that God is living in us. The God whom we worship and serve is living not only in the heavens, but also in us. We have turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God. No doubt, when God is living to us in our experience, He is also true.

Waiting for the Son of God

A third characteristic of our Christian life is that we are

waiting for God's Son from the heavens. As Christians, we must live a life that declares to others that our hope is not on this earth or in this age. Instead, our hope is in the coming Lord, and our future is in Him. On this earth we do not have any destiny, destination, or future. Our future, our destiny, and our destination are altogether focused on the Lord who is coming. He will be our hope, our future, and our destination. We are going to the Lord, and our destiny is to meet Him. Worldly people, on the contrary, have the kind of living that gives others the impression that their future is on earth and that their hope, destiny, and destination are all in the present. Although their future is thoroughly related to this age, our future is not. Because we are waiting for the Son of God from the heavens, our future is focused on Him. We have no hope on this earth and no destiny in this age.

Genuine Christians do not have any idols, they live a life that testifies that their God is living, and they declare by their living that they have no hope on this earth, but only in the coming One. We should not have anything other than God, our God should be living in our daily life, and we should declare that we are waiting for the coming of the Son of God from the heavens. I hope that those who are working with new converts and young believers will render them help concerning these things from 1 Thessalonians. Furthermore, even some of us who have been in the recovery for years still need to be helped to make up things lacking in the Christian life. Some of us may still be clinging to certain idols, to things other than God Himself. Moreover, our daily life may not testify that the God whom we serve is living, for we still may do many things without His direction, control, or adjustment. If this is our situation, then we have a negative testimony that our God is not very living to us day by day. If He is living to us, we shall surely be under His control and correction. If our God is living, He will correct us and not allow us to be careless in our living. Many of us may also lack a waiting spirit, a spirit waiting for the Lord's coming back. Our living may not declare or testify that we are waiting for the Lord's

coming. We may lack this kind of atmosphere in our living. May we all see from 1 Thessalonians that a proper Christian life for the church life is a life without idols, a life that testifies that our God is living, and a life waiting for the Lord's coming back.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST THESSALONIANS

MESSAGE THREE

THE LIVING GOD AND THE WORK OF FAITH

Scripture Reading: 1 Thes. 1:1-10

For the most part, Christians understand and interpret the Bible in a natural way. This may be the case in reading 1 and 2 Thessalonians. We have pointed out that these Epistles were written by Paul in an elementary way to new believers, to those who had been in the Lord probably for less than a year. When I was very young, I was told that the books to the Thessalonians are very precious, and I began to pay close attention to them. However, my understanding of these Epistles was natural. As I look back on the past, I realize that I interpreted these books in a very natural way. We all need to see the difference between understanding the Word in a natural way and understanding it in a spiritual way.

THE CHURCH IN THE TRIUNE GOD

Although 1 and 2 Thessalonians were written to new believers, in these books a number of profound terms are used. Both 1 and 2 Thessalonians begin in almost exactly the same way: "Paul and Sylvanus and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Of the many Epistles written by Paul, only these two have this expression, the church in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Instead of taking this expression for granted, we should seek to find out what it means. If we check in this way, we shall learn that it is a very profound matter to say that the church is in God. This thought cannot be found in the Old Testament. God never told His people, the children of Israel, that they were in God. But in the New Testament there are two Epistles that tell us that the church is in God. We need to learn the

real significance of the church being in God. What a great matter that the church is in God!

In 1 Corinthians Paul says that the church is in Corinth. He also speaks of the churches in Macedonia. Both in 1 and 2 Thessalonians the location of the church is not a city--it is God. Furthermore, the church is in the Triune God. This is indicated by the fact that Paul says "in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." The object of the preposition "in" is both God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. The Father and the Son are two and yet are one. For the church to be in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ means that the church is in the Triune God.

The God revealed in the New Testament is not merely God the Creator; He is God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. He has passed through the process of incarnation, human living, crucifixion, and resurrection. The name Jesus indicates incarnation, and the title Christ, resurrection. If God had not become incarnate, how could He be Jesus? If He did not enter into resurrection, how could He be Christ? The God who has passed through incarnation and resurrection is now in our spirit to be our life. The church is an entity in such a God, even the Triune God.

Although the church in Thessalonica was a new church, the Thessalonians nevertheless had to realize that the church is in God. Those in this young church needed to see that the church is in the Triune God, in the very God who is our Father and our Lord. The books of 1 and 2 Thessalonians were written not to individuals, but to the church in the Triune God. This is the reason we speak of a holy life for the church life. These two Epistles are addressed to the church, and the church is in the processed Triune God.

THE STRUCTURE OF A HOLY LIFE

In 1:3 Paul says, "Remembering unceasingly your work of faith, and labor of love, and endurance of hope of our Lord Jesus Christ, before our God and Father." The work of faith, the labor of love, and the endurance of hope are all great and profound terms. However, we may take for

granted that we understand what the work of faith is. Actually, we may not be able to give an adequate definition of faith. What is faith, and what is the work of faith? Some would say, "The Thessalonians believed in God, and because of their faith they did a work for God. This is the work of faith." However, this is a natural understanding of the work of faith. The actual meaning of this expression is different from what is in our natural way of understanding.

During the training on 1 Timothy we sang a chorus based on 1 Timothy 3:15 and 16:

The church is the house of the living God,
The church is the pillar and base of the truth;
And great is the mystery of godliness--
That God was manifested in the flesh.

Even a child can sing these words strongly and clearly. However, a child would not be able to tell you what it means to say that the church is the house of the living God or the pillar and base of the truth. Neither could a child say what is the mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh. A child may sing of such profound things without having any understanding of them. In principle, we may be exactly the same in our reading of the Bible. We may say the words "the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" without having any understanding of what they mean. Likewise, we may have only a natural understanding of the structure of the holy life for the church life, a structure consisting of the three elements of the work of faith, the labor of love, and the endurance of hope. We may know these matters in a natural way, not according to the way Paul used them.

In 1:9 and 10 Paul says, "For they themselves report concerning us what manner of entrance we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, and to wait for His Son from the heavens, Whom He raised from among the dead--Jesus, Who delivers us from the wrath which is coming." We may think that we know what it means to turn from idols, to serve a living and true

God, and to wait for His Son from the heavens. Actually, we may not know the proper meaning of these things.

In 4:7 Paul says that God has called us in sanctification. We also may assume that we understand the term sanctification. Actually, we do not have very much understanding of what sanctification is. Here Paul does not say that God has called us in holiness; he says that He has called us in sanctification. There is an important difference between holiness and sanctification.

First Thessalonians 5:23 says, "And the God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly, and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." We may read this verse without knowing the true significance of the words "sanctify you wholly." In like manner, we may not know what it means for our spirit and soul and body to be preserved complete. We may read this verse again and again thinking that we understand it, when actually we may not understand it at all.

First Thessalonians emphasizes sanctification. God calls us unto sanctification, and the God of peace sanctifies us wholly. This Epistle emphasizes a sanctified life for the church life. This is the reason we adopt the expression "a holy life for the church life."

MORE PROFOUND TERMS

Second Thessalonians also contains some profound terms. In 2:13 Paul says, "But we ought to thank God always concerning you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you from the beginning unto salvation in sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." To say that God has chosen us unto salvation in sanctification of the Spirit is to utter something great and profound. Salvation is in sanctification of the Spirit. Such an expression is used only once in the entire New Testament.

In 2 Thessalonians 2:14 Paul goes on to say, "To which also He called you through our gospel unto the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." The expression "the obtaining of the glory" is also unique, used in the New

Testament only here. Through the gospel God called us unto the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In 2 Thessalonians 2:16 we read another profound expression: "Now our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God our Father, Who has loved us and given us eternal encouragement and good hope in grace." Here Paul speaks of eternal encouragement and good hope in grace. These terms are also used only once in the New Testament.

GOD LIVING IN US

Recently in a meeting a sister gave a testimony concerning the living God. She explained that she was in a strange place late at night and that a teenage girl, who had been riding on a bus with her, was very helpful to her. The sister went on to say that this proves that God is living, for He had prepared someone to help her in that situation. In 1:9 Paul speaks of turning to God from idols to serve a living and true God. Do you think that Paul's concept of the living God here is the same as that of the sister who gave this testimony? What does Paul mean by serving a living God? When Paul speaks of the living God, does he mean that God will send someone to help you when you are in trouble? If this is your concept, this indicates that you have a natural understanding of this matter. In many instances the living God did not keep Paul away from trouble and hardship. This would seem to indicate that in the sense of the testimony given by that sister, God was not very living to Paul in his experience. I mention this testimony in order to point out that we need to learn what Paul means when he speaks of serving a living and true God. We should not understand the Bible in a natural way. Rather, we must understand it according to God's revelation.

If we read only 1 Thessalonians, it may be difficult to find out what is Paul's understanding of the living God. But if we read the other books written by Paul, we shall see that for him the living God is the God who is now living in us. We are not serving a God who is merely in the heavens. The God we serve is the One who lives in us. Therefore, to serve a living God means to serve the God

who is living in you right now. In the Old Testament the children of Israel served a God who was in the heavens.

Solomon prayed to God in heaven. Even in what is called the Lord's prayer, the Lord Jesus says, "Our Father Who is in the heavens," (Matt. 6:9). But now, after the cross and the resurrection, the God whom we serve is no longer merely in the heavens, for He is now living in us. This is revealed clearly in Paul's Epistles (Rom. 8:10; Col. 1:27). We even have a song which says that our God is living and that He is living within us. When Paul says that we serve a living God, he means the God who is living within us and who is one with us.

How do we know that our God is the living God? We know it by the fact that He is living in us. Suppose a brother is about to quarrel with his wife. However, the living God in him does not want to quarrel. Therefore, the brother does not proceed to argue with his wife. In this way he serves a God who is living, a God who not only lives in him, but who also lives with him. By this illustration we see that the living God is living not only objectively but also subjectively.

I am bothered by testimonies which refer to the living God only in an objective way and not in a subjective way. Even those who have been in the Lord for years still testify only that the God they serve is objectively living. It seems that He is not the subjectively living One to these saints. We should be able to testify that the God we are serving today is living within us. What we need is not a testimony about how God sent someone to help us in trouble. We need subjective testimonies concerning the living God in our daily life. For instance, a sister may testify of how she was tempted to look at her husband in a very unpleasant way. But because the living God in her did not agree, she did not show such an unpleasant expression toward her husband. This proves that her God is living and that He is living within her. An idol does not interfere with anyone who is about to lose his temper. But the God whom we serve is living, and He inwardly adjusts us and corrects us.

OBJECTIVE AND SUBJECTIVE FAITH

Let us now go on to consider what faith is and also

what the work of faith is. In 3:2 Paul says, "And we sent Timothy, our brother and God's fellow-worker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and encourage you for the sake of your faith." In 3:5 Paul goes on to say, "Because of this, when I also could bear it no longer, I sent to know your faith, lest somehow the tempter had tempted you, and our labor would be in vain." In both of these verses Paul refers to "your faith." Paul was deeply concerned about the Thessalonians' faith. In these verses faith is not only subjective, referring to the saints' believing, but also objective, referring to what they believe in. Objective faith also refers to what we may call our belief. Belief denotes what we believe in. In 1 and 2 Thessalonians it is difficult to tell whether faith is objective or subjective. For the most part, as used in these two Epistles, faith is both objective and subjective.

Faith is related both to a view and to sight. First there is a view, a scene, before us, and then we have the sight to see this view. Spontaneously, we have faith. This means that when we have the view and the sight, we automatically have faith.

Suppose you are preaching the gospel to a group of unbelievers. What you speak to them is not only in word, but also in power, in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance. You tell them the story of the gospel, relating how God loves them and how He sent His Son to be a man and to die on the cross for them. As you are speaking, you are not merely telling a story--you are presenting a view, a scene. Those to whom you are speaking begin to see this view. They realize something about being a sinner and see that there is a God, Jesus Christ, and the cross. This view portrayed in the preaching of the gospel is God's revelation. As soon as unbelievers see this revelation, spontaneously faith is produced in them, and they believe. They believe in what they see. This is faith. However, not many Christians understand faith in this way.

In order to have more faith, stronger, broader, and greater faith, we need more view. A broader faith depends on a broader view. An increased view gives us increased

sight, and increased sight results in increased faith. Thus, the extent of our faith depends on our sight, and the scope of our sight depends on the measure of our view. This is why we need to know more of the Holy Word and hear more messages. Both the Word and messages help to give us a broader view. Then we shall have greater sight, which produces a greater faith.

BROUGHT INTO THE ORGANIC UNION

This kind of faith on the one hand brings God into us, and on the other hand it brings us into God. In other words, such faith always produces an organic union.

We may use photography as an illustration of how, through faith, God is brought into us, and we are brought into the organic union with Him. When you take a photograph with a camera, you press the shutter. Then light brings a particular scene into the camera to reach the film. In this way the scene, the view, is impressed onto the film. In the same principle, faith brings God into our spirit, which can be compared to the film. Before faith is produced in us, our spirit is blank. But after faith is produced, God is brought into our spirit. Now our spirit is no longer blank. Instead, something of God Himself has been impressed into our spirit. God is brought into our spirit, and we are brought into God. Spontaneously, there is an organic union between us and God.

FAITH WORKING

To be sure, a certain kind of work will issue out of such faith. Genuine faith is never in vain. It is living. It brings God into us, it brings us into God, and it makes God and us one. This living faith works in a particular way. This is what Paul means by the work of faith.

SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING AND DIVINE REVELATION

This word concerning the living God and the work of faith may help you to see the difference between the natural way and the spiritual way of understanding the

Word of God. In reading 1 Thessalonians, a precious book written to new believers, we must be on the alert not to understand any part of this Epistle in a natural way. If we have a natural understanding of this book, we shall be hindered in our reading of it. Therefore, we need to pray, "Lord, I don't want to understand anything in the Bible, especially any terms in 1 Thessalonians, in a natural way. Lord, keep me always in the spirit, and show me the real significance of the profound terms in this book."

It would be helpful if you keep in mind certain important terms used by Paul in 1 Thessalonians. In particular, remember that the church is in God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Also remember the work of faith, the labor of love, the endurance of hope, and the turning to God from idols to serve a living and true God and to wait for His Son from the heavens. If you keep these terms in mind, eventually light will come and, gradually, you will have the proper spiritual understanding. Otherwise, you may understand the entire first chapter of 1 Thessalonians in a natural way, in a way that is absolutely not according to the divine revelation. Only when we have the proper spiritual understanding can we receive the divine revelation. The divine revelation in 1 Thessalonians 1 goes along with the spiritual understanding of Paul's writing.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST THESSALONIANS

MESSAGE FOUR

SOME BASIC MATTERS

Scripture Reading: 1 Thes. 1:1-10

In reading or studying any part of the Bible, it is always necessary to find out what was in the spirit of the writer. Once we know the writer's spirit, we can learn his purpose, intention, goal, and aim. In order to learn what was the burden in Paul's spirit in 1 Thessalonians 1, we need to consider some basic matters in this chapter as indicated by the words Paul uses and by the way this chapter is constructed. This means that Paul's spirit here is related to certain basic words he uses. Any chapter of the Bible is constructed of specific words that refer to basic elements. Let us now consider some basic matters in 1 Thessalonians 1 expressed in the words chosen by the Apostle Paul.

THE TRIUNE GOD

In chapter one of 1 Thessalonians the Triune God is revealed. First, we have the Father. In 1:1 Paul says that the church is in God the Father, and in verse 3 he again refers to "our God and Father." In verse 10 Paul speaks concerning the Son: "And to wait for His Son from the heavens." Furthermore, Paul mentions the Holy Spirit in verse 5, where he says that the gospel came to the Thessalonians in the Holy Spirit, and also in verse 6, where he says that the Thessalonians accepted the word with joy of the Holy Spirit. In this chapter we have the Triune God--the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

At the time of Paul, any typical Jew would have been offended by the expression "His Son." This was offensive to Jews because they believed in the true God, but did not

realize that He has a Son. To a certain extent, the Jews believed that God has a Spirit. However, they did not have the understanding that the Spirit is the same in rank as God Himself. Rather, they believed only that God has a Spirit and that this Spirit is subordinate to Him. According to Jewish belief concerning God, God is unique and yet this unique God has a Spirit. The Jews certainly did not believe that God has a Son; neither did they believe that both the Son of God and the Spirit of God are on the same rank as God. This is altogether contrary to the Jewish concept. Hence, for Paul to speak of the Father, His Son, and the Holy Spirit is to utter something very basic.

In chapter one Paul not only speaks of the Son of God, but also speaks of Jesus Christ. The Son of God is Jesus, and this Jesus is Christ. The name Jesus refers basically to the manhood of the Son of God, to the Son of God as a man. Through incarnation the Son of God became a man named Jesus. This name is an equivalent to the Hebrew word for Joshua, a name which means either Jehovah our Savior or Jehovah our salvation. The name of Jesus, therefore, is rich in its implications.

Like everyone else, Jesus, the Son of God, has a history. We know that He was born in Jewish territory, lived in that region for thirty-three and a half years, and eventually died on the cross. Now when we speak of Jesus, we need to recall His history, His biography.

The Lord Jesus is also the Christ. For the most part, the title Christ denotes that aspect of the Lord's history related to resurrection, whereas the name Jesus denotes that part of His history related to incarnation and human living. Christ, the resurrected One, has been made Lord of all and Head of all. God has made Him Head of the church.

SELECTION, DELIVERANCE, AND TRANSMISSION

If we read 1 Thessalonians 1 carefully, we shall see that even in such a short chapter there are indications of what the Father has done, of what the Son is doing, and of what the Spirit has done and continues to do. In verse 4 Paul speaks concerning selection: "Knowing, brothers beloved

by God, your selection." Who selected us? Surely selection was not accomplished by the Son. The Father is the One who selected us. According to verse 10, the Son delivers us. This verse says that the Son "delivers us from the wrath which is coming." I would call your attention to the fact that in this verse the word "delivers" is in the present tense, whereas wrath is spoken of as something which is coming. The deliverance is taking place right now, but the wrath is coming. The point here is that the Son accomplishes the work of deliverance.

Selection is of the Father, and deliverance is of the Son, but what is the work of the Spirit? According to this chapter, the Spirit is for propagating, for imparting. In verse 5 Paul points out to the Thessalonians that the gospel came to them not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit. In verse 6 he reminds them that they accepted the word with joy of the Holy Spirit. These verses indicate that the Spirit is for transmission.

As Paul was writing 1 Thessalonians 1, deep within he was exercised concerning the Triune God. He was burdened concerning the Father's selection, the Son's deliverance, and the Spirit's transmission. It is very important for us to see this.

THE TRIUNE GOD EMBODIED IN THE WORD

The Triune God is conveyed to us, transmitted to us, through the Word. In verse 6 Paul speaks of accepting the word, and in verse 8, of sounding out the word of the Lord. No doubt in Paul's concept the Triune God today is fully embodied in the Word. The Word may be compared to a battery that contains electricity. As a battery is the embodiment of electricity, so in the spiritual realm the Word of God, a divine battery, is the embodiment of the Triune God. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit are all embodied in the Word. Thus, when we preach the Word, God is conveyed to others. Through the Word the Triune God is transmitted to others.

Paul had spent about three weeks with the Thessalonians. I believe that during those weeks Paul told

the Thessalonians how God had selected them in eternity past. He must also have told them how one day God the Son became incarnate, how He was born in a manger and given the name Jesus. Surely Paul also told the Thessalonian believers how Jesus lived on earth, was crucified, and was resurrected to be the Lord, the Head, and the Christ, how He is now in the heavens, and how He has become the life-giving Spirit. Paul, therefore, preached the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This was his gospel, the word accepted by the Thessalonians.

BORN OF GOD AND PUT INTO CHRIST

When the Thessalonians accepted the word preached by Paul, they accepted the Triune God. The word they received was the gospel preached to them. By accepting this word and thereby accepting the Triune God, they were born of God and put into Christ. On the negative side, this was a turning to God from idols. On the positive side, it was being born of God and also believing into the Son of God. In this way an organic union took place, and the Thessalonians came to be in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The new believers at Thessalonica were all in the Triune God. Because they were in the Father and the Son, they were no longer heathen or Jews. They were saints. They had become saints in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. In 1:1 the phrase "in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" not only qualifies the church, but also qualifies the Thessalonians. This means not only that the church was in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, but also that the Thessalonians, being no longer Greeks or Jews, but believers, were also in the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Dean Alford makes three points concerning this part of 1:1. First he says that the phrase "in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" indicates communion and participation. Alford did not use the expression organic union, but he speaks of communion, which means fellowship and a kind of co-union. He also speaks of the believers participating in God and Christ. Because of this

participation, they have a common union with God. Second, Alford says that the words "in God the Father" mark out the believers as being no longer heathen, for as heathen they were not in God the Father. Third, he says that "in the Lord Jesus Christ" indicates that the believers are no longer Jewish, for the Jews were not willing to accept the Lord Jesus. Hence, the believers at Thessalonica, being in the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, were no longer heathen or Jewish.

SERVING AND WAITING

In chapter one we have the Triune God and the preaching of the Triune God in the word, His embodiment. This word is the gospel that is accepted by the believers. When the Thessalonians accepted the word, they were born of God and united to Christ. Therefore, they became the church in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Then what did they do? They served the living God. The word serve used in verse 9 is all-inclusive. It includes everything we do in our daily living. God is living because He is true, not false. Thus, in 1:9 Paul speaks of serving a living and true God. The church of the Thessalonians was made up of believers serving a living God who is true. This is also what we are doing today. The fact that we are serving a living God proves that we are in God the Father.

Furthermore, in verse 10 Paul points out that we are waiting for the Son of God from the heavens. We are serving the living God, and we are waiting for His Son, the One whom He raised from among the dead. Jesus, the Son of God, delivers us from the wrath which is to come. Although the wrath will come in the future, He is now delivering us, and He will deliver us to the uttermost, until there is no longer any wrath.

To serve a living God indicates that we are in God the Father, and to wait for the Son indicates that we are in our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, our serving and our waiting mark us out as those who are in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ. If we were not in the Father, we would not
be

serving a living God, and if we were not in Jesus Christ our Lord, we would not be waiting for Him.

As we consider verses 1, 9, and 10, we see that the end of this chapter corresponds to the beginning. In the beginning Paul says that the church is in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. At the end of this chapter he speaks of serving the living God and waiting for the Son. This is the holy life for the church life, a life constructed of faith, love, and hope. Faith is working, love is laboring, and hope is enduring.

THE WORD OF THE LORD AND FAITH TOWARD GOD

I would call your attention to verse 8: "For from you the word of the Lord has sounded out, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place your faith toward God has gone out, so that we have no need to speak anything." Notice here Paul says that from the Thessalonians the word of the Lord has sounded out and that in every place their faith toward God has gone out. This indicates that the word of the Lord and faith toward God are synonymous. The Thessalonians heard the word. When they accepted the word, it became their faith in both an objective and subjective way. As we have pointed out, objective faith denotes that in which we believe, and subjective faith denotes the action of believing. In verse 8 faith toward God includes both the subjective and objective aspects.

In your experience, is the word of the Lord simply the word, or is it also faith? If the word is faith to you, this means it has brought you a view, and you have seen this view. This seeing of the view results in your believing. In this way the word becomes your faith. Now when the word of the Lord is sounded out, it is not merely an objective word; it is also your subjective faith. Therefore, when such a word is sounded out, your faith goes out.

Faith is the foundation of the structure of a holy life for the church life. Upon this foundation a building is taking place. This is the labor of love. Then the topstone, the

capstone, of this building will be the enduring hope. In this way we have the complete structure of a holy life for the church life: the work of faith, the labor of love, and the endurance of hope.

If we see the basic matters in chapter one of 1 Thessalonians--the Triune God, the word as the embodiment of the Triune God, the mark of being in the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the work of faith, the labor of love, and the endurance of hope--then we shall know the burden in Paul's spirit when he composed this portion of the Word.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST THESSALONIANS

MESSAGE FIVE

THE TRIUNE GOD EMBODIED IN THE WORD TO PRODUCE A HOLY LIFE FOR THE CHURCH LIFE

(1)

Scripture Reading: 1 Thes. 1:1-10

It is accurate and correct to say that the books of 1 and 2 Thessalonians are on the church life. Although the expression "the church life" cannot be found in these Epistles, the church is mentioned emphatically at the beginning of each book. First Thessalonians opens with these words: "Paul and Silvanus and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Second Thessalonians opens in almost exactly the same way. The only difference is that 1 Thessalonians 1:1 says "the Father" and 2 Thessalonians 1:1 says "our Father." Both 1 and 2 Thessalonians were addressed to the church.

THE CHURCH OF THE THESSALONIANS

Each of the fourteen Epistles written by Paul opens in a particular way. The beginning of every Epistle matches the contents of that particular Epistle. For example, Romans 1:1 says, "Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, a called apostle, separated to the gospel of God." First Corinthians begins in a somewhat different way: "Paul, a called apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God" (1 Cor. 1:1). In contrast, the opening of both 1 and 2 Thessalonians is quite simple. Paul does not use any titles to refer to himself; he does not speak of himself as a slave of Christ or as an apostle. Instead, he simply says, "Paul and Silvanus

and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

The expression, "the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ," is unique. On the one hand, the church is of certain persons; on the other hand, it is in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. This way of referring to the church is very different from that found in 1 Corinthians 1:2. There Paul says, "To the church of God which is in Corinth," describing the church as being in a particular place. But in 1 and 2 Thessalonians Paul speaks of the church not as being in a certain place, but as being of certain persons, the Thessalonians, who are in God. In these Epistles the church is of the Thessalonians and in the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

According to history, Thessalonica was an immoral place. For the most part, the people of that city were not moral. Nevertheless, according to 1:1, the church in that city was "of the Thessalonians." It does not seem possible that a church could be composed of people who lived in a city like Thessalonica.

It is very positive to say that the church is in God the Father, but it is not positive to say that the church is of the Thessalonians. In 1:1 we have the church of the Thessalonians in God. The prepositions "of" and "in" here are very important. The church in Thessalonica was of people from an evil city, but it was in God the Father. This is similar to speaking of the church in San Francisco as being the church of the San Franciscans in God the Father. San Francisco has a world-wide reputation for being an evil, immoral city. Nevertheless, there is a church in San Francisco today, the church of the San Franciscans in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

HOLY PEOPLE LIVING A HOLY LIFE

We have pointed out that the books of 1 and 2 Thessalonians are concerned with the church life. From the content of these books we know that the church life depends on a holy life. Many San Franciscans may be evil,

but those San Franciscans who compose the church in San Francisco are holy. Praise the Lord that among today's San Franciscans there are a number of holy people living a holy life! The same is true of the church in Los Angeles. The Lord can boast to the demons and the evil angels that in such an immoral city as Los Angeles, the home of Hollywood, the Lord has a church composed of holy people living a holy life. In the local churches today, we are living a holy life for the church life.

We all need to see that 1 and 2 Thessalonians are on the church life. Not long ago, while I was working on these two Epistles, I was looking to the Lord that he would show me the main subject of these books. Eventually, I became impressed with the matter of the church life in these Epistles. I believe that impression came from the Lord. Apparently 1 and 2 Thessalonians are not related to the church. However, if you touch the depths of the truth in these books, you will see that they truly are concerned with the practice of the church life through the living of a holy life. Now we must go on to see how it was possible for people from an immoral city such as Thessalonica to become a holy people living a holy life for the church life. If we would understand this, we need to ask a very important question: What is the source of a holy life for the church life?

THE FATHER, THE SON, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

The title of this message is "The Triune God Embodied in the Word to Produce a Holy Life for the Church Life." Those who are thoughtful may wonder why this title uses the term "The Triune God" when this expression is not found in 1 Thessalonians 1. Furthermore, such careful readers may wonder how we can speak, again from 1 Thessalonians 1, of the Triune God embodied in the Word. This chapter clearly mentions the word, but what about the Triune God and the embodiment of the Triune God in the Word? Let us consider this matter carefully.

First Thessalonians 1:1 speaks of God the Father. Moreover, in verse 3 we have the words "before our God

and Father." In verse 10 Paul speaks of the Son: "And to wait for His Son from the heavens, Whom He raised from among the dead--Jesus, Who delivers us from the wrath which is coming." Twice in this chapter Paul refers to the Holy Spirit. Verse 5 says, "Because our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance." In verse 6 Paul points out that the Thessalonians "accepted the word in much affliction with joy of the Holy Spirit." Therefore, in this chapter we have the Triune God, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Therefore, 1 Thessalonians 1 is a chapter on the Triune God.

Actually, the entire New Testament is related to the Triune God. The Triune God is the element for the construction of the New Testament. In preparing meals, sisters use various groceries as the elements of their cooking. Likewise, certain elements are the "ingredients" used in the composition of the New Testament. What are the elements found in 1 Thessalonians 1? The most basic element is the Triune God. Just as meat is an important element in the diet of many Americans, so the Triune God is the most important element in Paul's spiritual cooking. Hence, it is not surprising that in 1 Thessalonians 1 we can clearly see the Triune God. In this chapter Paul explicitly speaks of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.

Both 1 Thessalonians 1:1 and 2 Thessalonians 1:1 speak of the church of the Thessalonians. This indicates that the church is composed of saved and regenerated sinners. From history we know that the cities of ancient Macedonia, where Thessalonica was located, and Achaia, where Corinth was situated, were evil and immoral. Those cities may have been worse than today's San Francisco. The Thessalonians in particular did not have a good name; instead, they had a reputation for sinfulness, uncleanness, and immorality. But some of these Thessalonians were saved and regenerated, born of God, through believing in Christ. As a result, in that evil city there came to be a church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

In reading the New Testament, it is easy for us to take terms such as in Christ, in the Lord, and in God for granted and not pay much attention to them. We need to be deeply impressed by the expression "in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." The utterance is marvelous. It is a tremendous matter for people to be in God! Suppose some very sinful people hear the gospel, receive the Lord Jesus, and are saved. They become Christians and are now in God the Father. We need to realize that this is a matter of great significance. Do you know where we are as believers? We are in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ!

According to 1:1, the church is not only in God the Father, but also in the Lord Jesus Christ. The church has such a marvelous location in the Father and in our Lord. Actually, God the Father and Jesus Christ are one. They are the Father and our Lord. The Father is the first of the Trinity, and the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son, is the second. However, we should not regard the Father and the Son as separate persons. God is triune, that is, He is three-one. Yes, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three; yet they are one. This is beyond the ability of the human mind to comprehend. Oh, our God, the Triune God, is wonderful! This Triune God is revealed in 1 Thessalonians 1. Furthermore, the church of the saved ones is in this wonderful God who is the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

THE CHURCH PEOPLE IN GOD THE FATHER AND THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

Recently, as I was studying 1:1, I realized that to speak of the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ is to utter something very weighty and deep. I consulted the writings of Dean Alford on this verse, and I was helped by what he had to say. First, Alford points out that the preposition "in" here denotes communion and participation in. What Alford means by participation is equal to the expression "organic union." Communion denotes a common union. The church is a

group of people who have a common union with God and who are participating in Him.

Furthermore, Alford goes on to say that the expression "in God the Father" is a mark, an indication, that those in the church are no longer heathen, no longer of the Gentiles. Gentiles do not have God, but the church is composed of a group of people who are in God the Father. Those in the church, therefore, are no longer heathen.

Alford also says that "in the Lord Jesus Christ" indicates that those in the church are no longer Jewish. Jews do not believe in Jesus Christ, just as the heathen do not believe in the true God. Who are those who believe in God and in the Lord Jesus Christ? The church people are such believers. Today we are neither heathen, nor Jewish; we are the church people in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Those in the church life with a background in Judaism must realize that they are no longer Jewish. The church is composed of those who are no longer Gentiles or Jews, for we all now are in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Elsewhere in his Epistles, Paul speaks of the churches of Christ and of the church of God. Certain Christian groups have adopted these expressions as denominational titles. For example, today we have the Church of Christ, the Assembly of God, and the Church of God. But do you know of any Christian group with the title "The Church in God"? Surely there is no such group. Nevertheless, according to 1:1, it is a fact that the church is in God.

Which matter would you say is deeper, for the church to be of God, or for the church to be in God? For the church to be in God is deeper, more profound, than for the church to be merely of God. Hallelujah, the church is in God! The church is not only of God and of Christ; the church is also in God and in Christ. It is important for us to see that the church in our locality is of God and in God, of Christ and in Christ.

A RELATIONSHIP IN LIFE

I can testify that seeing the significance of the

preposition "in" in 1:1 has caused the book of 1 Thessalonians to become very dear and lovable to me. In this book we have the revelation that the church is not only of God and of Christ, but also in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The church is not merely in God, but is in the Father. The word Father here indicates a relationship of life. God is no longer only our Creator; He is our Father. God is the Father of the church people, for we have all been born of Him. It is a wonderful fact that we have been born of God and that He is now our Father!

Suppose your father were the President of the United States. If such were the case, you could refer to him as "my father, the President." This would be very different from merely speaking of the President. To refer to our President may indicate that you are a citizen. But if you could say, "my father, the President," that would indicate that the President is your father and that you have a life relationship with him. In the same principle, we can speak of God as being our Father. No longer is God only our Creator. He has become our Father, for we have been born of Him. Furthermore, Jesus Christ is our Lord. Hallelujah, we have a Father and a Lord!

THE CHURCH IN THE TRIUNE GOD

To say that the church is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ is not the same as saying that the church is in two separate persons. No, the church is in the wonderful One who is the Father and the Son. Do you think that the church today on the one hand is in the Father and on the other hand in the Lord Jesus? In other words, do you think that the church, the unique church in a locality, is in two separate persons? We should not think of the church in this way. God is the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the church is in this One. Do not ask me to explain how the church can be in the One who is both the Father and the Son. It is beyond my ability to explain such a mystery. All the centuries of Christian history prove that no one can explain the Triune God adequately.

But in 1:1 we have the revelation of the tremendous fact that the church is in the unique God and that this God is our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Hallelujah, we have such a wonderful God, and we are in Him!

When Paul speaks of the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, he actually means that the church of the Thessalonians is in the Triune God. Paul's word concerning the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ indicates or implies that God is triune. If God were not triune, how could He be the Father and the Son? It would be impossible. Furthermore, Paul's reference to the Father and Christ also implies the Holy Spirit. As we have pointed out, elsewhere in this chapter Paul explicitly speaks of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, 1 Thessalonians 1 clearly shows the Triune God--the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Both 1 Thessalonians 1:1 and 2 Thessalonians 1:1 reveal that the church is composed of a group of sinners who have been saved and regenerated and who are now in the Triune God. How wonderful!

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST THESSALONIANS

MESSAGE SIX

THE TRIUNE GOD EMBODIED IN THE WORD TO PRODUCE A HOLY LIFE FOR THE CHURCH LIFE

(2)

Scripture Reading: 1 Thes. 1:1-10

In the foregoing message we saw that the Triune God is revealed in chapter one of 1 Thessalonians. In verses 1 and 3 Paul speaks of God the Father; in verse 10, of the Son; and in verses 5 and 6, of the Holy Spirit. According to 1:1, the church of the Thessalonians was in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. This indicates that the church is in the Triune God. In this message we shall go on to consider, also from 1 Thessalonians 1, how this Triune God is ministered to us.

THE WORD OF THE LORD AND FAITH TOWARD GOD

In verses 5 and 6 Paul says, "Because our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance, even as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, having accepted the word in much affliction with joy of the Holy Spirit." According to these verses, to preach the gospel is to preach the word. The gospel preached by the apostles was the word accepted by the Thessalonians. In verse 8 Paul goes on to say, "For from you the word of the Lord has sounded out, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place your faith toward God has gone out, so that we have no need to speak anything." First the Thessalonians accepted the word, and then they sounded it out.

In verse 8 the word of the Lord and faith toward God are synonymous. This verse says that from the

Thessalonians the word of the Lord sounded out and that their faith toward God went out. Thus, the word that is sounded out is the faith that goes out.

What is faith? Hardly anyone can give a satisfactory definition. It is very difficult to say what faith is. However, by considering these verses carefully, we can have a proper understanding of faith.

First, faith is a matter of having the word preached to us. Next, faith includes our accepting of the word and our sounding it out. This kind of word is faith. The word of the gospel is preached, accepted, and declared. In this way the word becomes faith within us. In the speaking of the preacher, the word is the gospel. But when we accept the word, and especially when we sound out the word, it becomes faith within us.

Suppose a preacher of the gospel speaks to an unbeliever concerning man's fall and God's salvation. The one who preaches the gospel tells the unbeliever that in Christ God was incarnate, that He was crucified for our sins, that He was resurrected from among the dead, and that He has become the life-giving Spirit in order to dwell in us. When this unbeliever receives the word of the gospel and declares it, it becomes faith.

THE CONTENT OF THE WORD PREACHED BY PAUL

Now we need to study the content of the word, the gospel, preached by Paul. No doubt, Paul preached the Triune God. In verse 4 he says, "Knowing, brothers beloved by God, your selection." Selection refers to the Father's work in eternity past. That was when God selected us. In verse 10 Paul speaks about the Son as the One who delivers us. The Son is the Savior, the Deliverer. In verse 5 Paul says that the gospel they preached came in power and in the Holy Spirit; and in verse 6 we see that the Thessalonians accepted the word with joy of the Holy Spirit. The fact that the gospel was preached in the Holy

Spirit indicates that the Spirit is the One who transmits the things of God into us. Thus, God the Father selected us, God the Son accomplished redemption to deliver us, and God the Spirit transmits all the divine things to us. This is the content of the word preached by Paul as the gospel. This is the reason I say that the Triune God is embodied in the word.

A brother may give a short gospel message in which he says that God created man, that man has become fallen, that Christ has come to die on the cross for our sins, and that now the Spirit is seeking to regenerate us. Even in such a short message, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit are all included. This is the content of the proper gospel, a gospel that is the divine word embodying the Triune God and telling us what the Father has done, what the Son has done, and what the Spirit is doing. When someone believes this word and accepts it, it becomes faith within him.

Do you realize what happens when the Triune God is ministered to a person through the word, and that person receives the word so that it becomes faith within him? At that moment such a person experiences a new birth. He is born of God. We all were sinners, but through faith we have become sons of God. Through faith we experience a new birth.

Faith is not a matter of trying to believe something that we are not able to believe. Whenever you preach the gospel, do not force anyone to believe. Instead, present the Triune God as the One most dear, precious, and valuable. When others hear the presentation of such an attractive One, they will appreciate what you are saying and receive your word. The word they accept will then become their faith. This is what it means to believe.

TWO ASPECTS OF FAITH

Faith has two aspects: the objective aspect and the subjective aspect. When we accept the word of God, it becomes both our objective faith and our subjective faith. Objective faith denotes the things we believe, and

subjective faith refers to our action of believing. Through such a faith we are regenerated, born of God, and a relationship of life begins between us and God. Furthermore, through this kind of faith we are put into Christ. Formerly, we were outside of Christ. But now through faith we are in Christ. This means that there is an organic union between us and Christ. This is the beginning of the Christian life, and this life is a holy life that consummates in the church life. In this way the Triune God is transmitted into our being so that we may have a new life, the divine life. With this new life we have a relationship of life with God and an organic union with Christ. By means of this relationship and union we begin our Christian life, a life of holiness, a holy life for the church life.

THE WORK OF FAITH

Now that we have considered verse 1 in a rather full way, let us go on to verse 3. Here Paul says, "Remembering unceasingly your work of faith, and labor of love, and endurance of hope of our Lord Jesus Christ, before our God and Father." In this verse Paul speaks of three matters: the work of faith, the labor of love, and the endurance of hope. The work of faith comes first. Faith comes through our acceptance of the word that is the embodiment of the Triune God. When we accepted this word, faith was produced within us. We have seen that this faith is both objective and subjective.

In Greek there is a definite article in verse 3, the faith. This indicates that this verse speaks of the work of the faith. This faith is God's word accepted by us. The word preached to us and received by us becomes faith. Because this faith is living and active, it results in the work of the faith.

The Greek word for work in verse 3 is *ergon*, a word usually rendered as work. Paul uses this word in Romans 3:20: "Because by the works of law no flesh shall be justified before Him." In Romans 3:20 work mainly denotes our conduct, our behavior. Paul is saying that no fallen person can be justified before God by his conduct.

Thus, in that verse work does not refer to an activity or a task that we do; it refers to particular deeds in our behavior. What, then, is the meaning of work in verse 3? Does it refer to deeds, or to some kind of task? Actually, in Greek this word denotes acts, actions, activities. It includes everything of our actions. Our actions involve deeds, conduct, and many other things as well. Therefore, the work of faith refers to all the acts, actions, of faith.

Suppose an evangelist preaches the gospel to an unbeliever. The unbeliever accepts the word, faith is produced in him, and through this faith he is born of God and put into Christ. Now that he has faith, certain actions are sure to follow. For example, he may spontaneously declare, "O Lord Jesus, You are so precious!" Then he may go home and speak to his wife and children about believing in the Lord Jesus. Both the declaration concerning the Lord and the preaching of the Lord are works of faith. Faith implies God, grace, power, light, and many other items. For this reason, when a new believer preaches Christ to his wife, the faith within him may enlighten him concerning his attitude toward her. Then he will confess his shortcomings to the Lord and apologize to his wife concerning certain matters. This also is a work of faith.

First Thessalonians 1:9 says, "For they themselves report concerning us what manner of entrance we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God." Here Paul speaks of turning to God from idols. This is the first action of faith. Anyone who has faith will turn to God from idols.

The work of faith includes all the actions that issue out of our living faith. This includes our relationship with others and all our behavior. Before a certain person was saved, he may have been unkind to others and harsh in many aspects of his behavior. But once he has faith in the Lord, this faith will not allow him to treat others in such an unkind way. Furthermore, it will be difficult for him to behave in a harsh way. I can testify of this from my experience. From my youth, I hated dogs and sometimes mistreated them. But after I was saved, the faith within

me no longer allowed me to behave in that way. Such a change in behavior is an action that comes out of faith.

Those who have faith are very different from those who do not have faith. Before they had faith, some indulged in sinful things. Now that they have faith, they can no longer indulge in these things. Spontaneously, as an action, a work, of faith, they refrain from those things. Others before they were saved were not good neighbors. But after they were saved and came to have faith, they became very kind, gentle, loving, and considerate. No one taught them to be different. The change was produced by the faith within them. The faith caused them to be helpful to others, especially to other believers. This is another illustration of the work of the faith.

The work of faith denotes the proper actions of a genuine believer. It is not the performing of a certain task or the doing of certain good deeds to help others. No, it is our daily action as believers, the action that is a product of faith. This is Paul's understanding of the work of faith. As he was praying for the Thessalonians, he remembered their action of faith.

THE LABOR OF LOVE

According to verse 3, the labor of love comes after the work of faith. This labor of love is truly a labor; it is not merely an action or some kind of conduct. It involves endeavoring, striving, working.

We have pointed out that the work of faith begins with turning to God from idols. The work of faith surely implies this kind of turning. Thus, the turning to God from idols is related to the work of faith. Now we must see that serving the living God is related to the labor of love. We are laboring to serve our God, who is living. We serve this living One because we love Him. Galatians 5:6 says that faith operates through love. This love is related first to serving our living God.

The faith within us produces many different kinds of actions. Moreover, this faith operates in love. In love, we as believers should endeavor to serve our living God. Our

God is living. As the living One, He speaks all the time, and we serve Him.

It is not easy to serve God; rather, it is a labor. Paul even says that it is a struggle. Therefore, if we would serve the living God, we must struggle. Whatever God speaks in us and whatever He indicates to us, we need to follow Him. This is to serve Him as the living God. This service requires love toward Him. We should first love God, and this love will cause us to labor in serving Him.

THE ENDURANCE OF HOPE

Finally, in verse 3 Paul speaks of the endurance of hope. No doubt, the endurance of hope in verse 3 corresponds to the waiting for the Son of God in verse 10. If we have the endurance of hope, we shall wait for God's Son from the heavens.

Now we can see what is the Christian life as a holy life for the church life. This life originates with the Triune God. Through the preaching of the word and our acceptance of the word, we enter into a life relationship with God the Father and have an organic union with Christ. This comes through faith. Then this faith works, acts, and issues in many things. In particular, it causes us to turn to God from everything else. Furthermore, in love we labor, struggle, and strive to serve the living God. At the same time, with the endurance of hope we wait for the coming back of the Son of God. This surely is a holy life, a life that is sanctified and separated. According to chapter four, verse 7, God has called us in such a life, and according to chapter five, verse 23, God is now sanctifying us wholly for this kind of life so that we may have the proper church life.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST THESSALONIANS

MESSAGE SEVEN

THE CHURCH IN THE TRIUNE GOD

(1)

Scripture Reading: 1 Thes. 1:1; 2 Thes. 1:1; Matt. 28:19;
Acts 19:5; Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27; Rev. 1:11-12

Both 1 Thessalonians 1:1 and 2 Thessalonians 1:1 tell us that the church is in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I would ask you to carefully consider the expression "the church in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Suppose Paul had written in a brief way and had simply said "the church in God and Christ." It may seem to us that it is adequate to speak of the church in God and Christ instead of the church in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. The longer description of the church contains three names not found in the shorter: the Father, the Lord, and Jesus.

THE FATHER, THE LORD, AND JESUS

By reading the New Testament we realize that the first basic matter concerning the divine titles is the revelation of the name of the Father. When the Lord Jesus came and lived on earth in the flesh, what He mainly did was reveal the name of the Father to His disciples. For example, in His prayer to the Father recorded in John 17, the Lord Jesus said, "I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world" (v. 6). The Lord also said to the Father, "And I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known" (John 17:26). It is a matter of great significance to know the Father. It is a great thing to know God, but it is an even greater thing to know the Father.

It is also important that we pay adequate attention to

the title Lord. In the Old Testament this was used as a divine title. It was not a simple matter for the man Jesus to become the Lord. According to Acts 2, after His resurrection and ascension, Christ was made Lord of all. This means that a man, even a Nazarene, has become Lord of all. As applied to the Lord Jesus, the title Lord implies incarnation, human living, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. It was through such a process that the man Jesus was made Lord of all.

Before the incarnation, Christ as God was already the Lord. However, He was the Lord, the Creator. But today, after a process going from incarnation to ascension, the man Jesus has been made Lord. As applied to Christ in the New Testament, this title is rich in meaning. Christ is not only the Creator, but the One who was incarnate, who lived on earth for thirty-three and a half years, who was crucified, who was resurrected, and who has ascended to the heavens. By His crucifixion Christ accomplished redemption, terminated the old creation, destroyed Satan and death, and abolished every separation between God and man and also all the separations between men. Hallelujah for what the crucifixion of Christ has accomplished! Like the crucifixion, Christ's resurrection is profound. In the words of the song entitled, "God Is Processed," crucifixion terminates, and resurrection germinates. After His crucifixion terminated the old creation, Christ's resurrection germinated the new creation. Now, as the incarnated, crucified, resurrected, and ascended One, Jesus Christ has been made the Lord of all. All this process and everything related to it is implied in the title Lord.

The name Jesus also is significant and meaningful. Jesus means Jehovah the Savior, or Jehovah our salvation. In order for Jehovah to become our Savior and our salvation, it was necessary for Him to pass through a long process.

Christ means the anointed One. As the Christ, the anointed One, the Lord Jesus is the One appointed by God to accomplish His eternal purpose. Christ has been anointed, commissioned, and appointed to fulfill God's

purpose. Through the steps of His process, He, as the Christ, has fulfilled this commission and has accomplished God's purpose. Now in resurrection and ascension He is our Lord Jesus Christ.

God is not only our Creator; He is also our Father. For God to be our Father involves much more than His merely being our Creator. How was it possible for God the Creator to become our Father? In other words, how could we, creatures of God, become children of God the Father? God has no intention to become our Father by adoption, our stepfather, or our father-in-law. On the contrary, He is our Father-in-life. This means that we have received God's life. This took place when we were born of God.

It should be more than mere doctrine for us to declare that we have been born of God. Hallelujah, we are sons of God in life! Having been born of God, we are now God's sons in life, and He is truly our Father. What a great matter this is!

We need to be very careful in reading the Bible. If we read carefully, we shall realize that 1 Thessalonians 1:1 and 2 Thessalonians 1:1 are very similar, but are not exactly the same. First Thessalonians 1:1 says, "Paul and Silvanus and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace." Second Thessalonians 1:1 says, "Paul and Silvanus and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." The former speaks of "the Father"; the latter, of "our Father." Furthermore, in 2 Thessalonians the blessing, "Grace to you and peace," is found in verse 2 instead of verse 1. This indicates that Paul's opening word in 2 Thessalonians is a little stronger than the one in 1 Thessalonians. Certainly Paul was not careless in writing his Epistles. Everything he wrote was with a definite purpose.

THE SPIRIT IMPLIED

Both Epistles tell us that the church is composed of human beings, in this case, of Thessalonians. Thessalonica was an evil city, and for the most part those in that city

were immoral people. Nevertheless, some who were once immoral were saved and regenerated and composed the church in their locality in the Triune God. For this reason, Paul speaks of the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. By this expression Paul denotes the Triune God.

When some read concerning the church of the Thessalonians in the Triune God, they may say, "You claim that 1:1 indicates that the church is in the Triune God. Yes, this verse mentions the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son, but nothing is said concerning the Spirit. If this verse speaks of the Triune God, where is the Spirit?" Here we have one of the many instances where what the Bible does not say is just as important as what it does say, if not more so. Often in our contact with the saints, we may refrain from saying something to them. This may be more important than what we do say to them. Why did Paul not say "the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit"? Eventually we shall see that there is a good reason for Paul to mention the Father and Christ the Son, but not the Spirit.

Be assured that the very God spoken of in 1:1 is the Triune God. We know this by the fact that Paul first mentions the Father, the first of the Trinity. Whenever we have the first, we also have the second, the Son, and also the third, the Spirit. The very fact that Paul speaks of the Father is a strong indication that he is thinking of the Triune God. Moreover, the expression "the Lord Jesus Christ" implies the Spirit. The expressions "God the Father" and "the Lord Jesus Christ" both imply the Spirit. Therefore, in 1:1 the Spirit is implied and understood.

We must believe that the God referred to in 1:1 is the Triune God. To be in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ implies that we are also in the Spirit. Hence, in 1:1 we have the Triune God implied. This verse indicates that the church is in the Triune God.

IN THE TRIUNE GOD ORGANICALLY AND IN LIFE

It is a rather simple matter to say that the church is of

God or of Christ. But it is deeper and more profound to declare that the church is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ. For example, it is one thing to say that we are of a particular person. However, it is altogether another matter to claim to be in that person. Humanly speaking, it is possible to be of someone, but it is not possible to be literally in that one. Only in a way that is organic and of life can the church be in the Triune God. We do not adequately understand the way of life, but God does understand it in full. Furthermore, only God can do something in the way of life. In a way that is organic and of life, God has made it possible for the church to be in the Triune God.

For the church to be merely of God, it is sufficient that God be merely our Creator. But for the church to be in God, God must become our Father, and we need to have a life relationship with Him. Likewise, for the church to be in the Lord Jesus Christ, Christ must be the Lord and Jesus to us.

VEILED BY TRADITIONAL CONCEPTS

Perhaps you have read 1:1 many times without realizing that the church is in the Triune God. Nevertheless, this fact is revealed in the Bible. Why is it, then, that not many Christians have seen it? The reason they do not see that the church is in the Triune God is that they are veiled by traditional concepts concerning the church. Believers may be familiar with expressions such as the church of God, the church of Christ, and the assembly of God, especially in the way they are employed today as denominational titles. But not many have realized that the church is in the Triune God.

It is important to realize that the New Testament does not say that the church is in God. First Thessalonians 1:1 tells us that the church is in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. This is different from speaking of the church as merely in God, for it reveals that the church is in the Triune God. According to the Bible, there is no such thing as the church merely in God, but there is the church in the Triune God.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GOD AND THE TRIUNE GOD

Now we need to consider carefully the difference between God and the Triune God. To speak only of God is to regard Him as if He had not been processed. However, the Triune God denotes God in His process. Genesis 1:1 says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (lit.). In this verse we cannot see the processed God; that is, we cannot see the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. But in the New Testament we have a full revelation of the Triune God.

In the New Testament the first main step regarding the revelation of the Triune God is the revelation of the name of the Father. In the four Gospels we have the revelation not mainly of God, but mainly of God the Father. The Lord Jesus spent much time with the disciples to reveal to them the name of the Father.

In the New Testament, of course, we also have the revelation that Jesus is the Son of God. One day, according to Matthew 16, the Lord Jesus led His disciples away from Jerusalem, with its religious atmosphere, to Caesarea Philippi, close to the northern border of the Holy Land, at the foot of Mount Hermon, on which He was soon to be transfigured (Matt. 17:1-2). Caesarea Philippi was far from the holy city with the holy temple, where the atmosphere of the old Jewish religion filled everyone's thought. The Lord purposely brought His disciples to a place with a clear atmosphere so that their thought could be released from the effects of the religious surroundings in the holy city and holy temple, and that He might reveal to them something new concerning Himself. It was there that the vision concerning Him as the Christ, the Son of the living God, was given to Peter.

Matthew 16:13 says, "Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, Who do men say that the Son of Man is?" Because the disciples were not clear, they began to answer in a nonsensical way. According to verse 14, they said, "Some, John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others,

Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." Then the Lord Jesus said to them, "But you, who do you say that I am?" (v. 15). As we know, Peter, receiving the revelation from the Father, answered and said to the Lord Jesus, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (v. 16). Thus, in the New Testament we first have the revelation of the name of the Father and then the revelation of the Son of God. The first title revealed in the New Testament, therefore, is the Father; the second is that of the Son.

Going on from Matthew 16 to John 14, we have the revelation of the Spirit. When Philip said to the Lord Jesus, "Lord, show us the Father and it suffices us" (John 14:8), the Lord replied, "Am I so long a time with you, and you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father....Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me?" (vv. 9-10). Here the Lord Jesus indicates that He is in the Father and that the Father is in Him. This means that He cannot be separated from the Father nor the Father from Him. After speaking in this way concerning Himself and the Father, the Lord went on to speak of the Spirit of reality, another Comforter, "And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Comforter, that He may be with you forever; even the Spirit of reality" (vv. 16-17). Thus, the Spirit, another Comforter, is the third divine title revealed in the New Testament. Therefore, we have the revelation of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. This is the Triune God.

The revelation of the Triune God requires the incarnation of Christ, the Lord's human living, and His crucifixion and resurrection. After the resurrection of Christ, we have the coming of the Spirit. Now we know that the Triune God is the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.

This Triune God is the processed God. He has passed through the process of incarnation, human living, crucifixion, and resurrection. In crucifixion, He accomplished redemption, the termination of the old creation, and the destruction of Satan and death. In resurrection, He germinated the new creation. Now He is the life-giving Spirit as the ultimate consummation of the

Triune God. The church is in such a Triune God. The church is in the processed Triune God, the One who has become the life-giving Spirit with the Father and the Son.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST THESSALONIANS

MESSAGE EIGHT

THE CHURCH IN THE TRIUNE GOD

(2)

Scripture Reading: 1 Thes. 1:1; 2 Thes. 1:1; Matt. 28:19;
Acts 19:5; Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27; Rev. 1:11-12

We have seen that 1:1 indicates that the church is in the Triune God. Paul speaks of the Triune God in 2 Corinthians 13:14: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." Here we have the threefold blessing of the Triune God, the blessing of love, grace, and fellowship. The Triune God revealed in this verse is the processed God. The very God in whom the church is today is the processed Triune God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

THE FATHER'S DESIRE AND PLAN

What is it that God the Father desires? According to the New Testament, the Father wants many sons. The Father's concern is with sonship. In order to produce these sons, He has been begetting children. With Him, there need be no limit to the number of children. The more children He has, the better. The Father wants sons, and He is begetting them.

God the Father has a definite purpose in producing many sons. He is not a foolish father, one without a purpose. Rather, He has a purpose and a plan. God's selection and predestination are according to His purpose. First He selected us and then predestinated us. This indicates that God is the unique initiator and originator. Thus, for the church to be in God the Father implies that the church is in God's purpose, plan, selection, and predestination. No doubt, the church is also in God's

calling. The church in God the Father is the church in the One who is the initiator and originator.

This understanding of the church in the Father is not merely a matter of doctrine; rather, it has much to do with us in our practical experience. A problem among Christians today is that they have many different purposes and plans. There are different initiators and originators. This is not right. We Christians all should have the unique purpose, the purpose of our Father. We should also have the unique plan of the Father. This means that only one--the Father--should be the initiator and originator. We should not originate anything or initiate anything. Imagine what would happen if all Christians gave up their own purposes and plans and had only one initiator and originator. What oneness there would be among us all! There would be no division whatever.

THE TERMINATION OF EVERYTHING NEGATIVE, NATURAL, AND OLD

We have seen a little of what it means for the church to be in the Father. Now let us go on to consider what it means for the church to be in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a great matter to be in Christ. To be in Christ means that there is no sin, flesh, self, natural life, old creation, death, or Satan. If we are in Christ, everything negative has been terminated. Sin, death, the self, the flesh, Satan, and the old creation have all been terminated. For those who are in Christ everything other than God has been terminated.

If we realize what has been terminated in Christ, we shall know that it is shameful for so-called churches to designate themselves by certain names. For example, in China there was a group called the American Presbyterian Church. Recently in southern California I saw a sign which read "The Orange County Chinese Taiwanese Church." A brother recently told me about a group called the San Francisco Chinese Mennonite Church. There is no room for any such names or designations in the church. Those who take a name such as these indicate by doing so that they are not the church in the Lord Jesus Christ. The

fact that they have a name indicates that many things among them have not been terminated.

The church is in the Lord Jesus Christ. This implies that with respect to the church everything natural, everything negative, everything of the old creation, has been terminated. This means that in the church there are no Chinese or Americans, no Japanese or Koreans, no French or Germans. In the church there is room only for Jesus Christ the Lord. This is the significance of the church being in the Lord Jesus Christ.

We in the Lord's recovery claim to be practicing the church life. Whenever we make such a claim, however, we need to check to see whether we are still holding to our culture or disposition. Regarding this matter, sometimes we expect others to sympathize with us. On occasion sisters have said to me, "Brother Lee, don't forget that we are sisters. According to the Bible, we sisters are weaker vessels." But in the Lord Jesus Christ there are no weak vessels. Therefore, we should not expect anyone to sympathize with our natural disposition. As long as you want others to sympathize with you, that is an indication that in your experience you are not buried with Christ. For the church to be in the Lord Jesus Christ in a practical way, we all need to be terminated and buried. We need to die and then be placed in the tomb. This is to be in the Lord Jesus Christ.

When I say this, does it seem that I am comparing the Lord Jesus Christ to a tomb? Listen to what Paul says in Romans 6:3: "Are you ignorant that as many as have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?" This verse clearly says that to be baptized into Christ is to be baptized into Christ's death. How, then, can we be in Christ without also being in His death? To be in Christ is to be buried, terminated. Do you like to hear such a word? Whether we like to hear it or not, it is the truth that to be in Christ is to be terminated.

During special times of conference or training, saints come together from different cities and regions. Outwardly, no one says anything in favor of his locality. But deep

within we may be proud of coming from a certain place. In our heart we may say, "You have to realize that we are from such-and-such place. Our place is the best." To think in this way is to exalt ourselves. When we claim to be of a certain place, we are excluding ourselves from the Lord Jesus Christ. The church must be only in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

A NEW BEGINNING

There is an important reason why Paul opened the Epistle of 1 Thessalonians the way he did. In Paul's time, the Greeks for the most part were proud and evil. They had a complex mythology, and they proudly worshipped false gods. They were extremely superstitious. Thus, they were ruined and corrupted by their mythology, superstition, and philosophy. Like Egyptian, Babylonian, and Persian philosophy, Greek philosophy was not pure. On the contrary, it contained defiling elements. In a sense their philosophy promoted immorality and fornication.

When Paul speaks of the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ, he was saying, "Dear saints in Thessalonica, you are still Thessalonians. But you must realize that now that you have believed in Jesus Christ, you are different. No longer are you in mythology or philosophy. Instead, you are in God the Father, for you have been regenerated, born of God, and have had a new beginning. You are also in the Lord Jesus Christ, since in Him you have been terminated on the cross. Therefore, you are no longer Greeks, and you are no longer immoral people. You should not be in philosophy or mythology any longer, but should be absolutely in God the Father. Do you know how it is possible for you to be in the Father? You can be in Him because you have been born of Him. Thus, now you are in the begetting God, the One who has become your Father. Furthermore, instead of being in your philosophy, you are in the Lord Jesus Christ. Being in the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, you are now a holy people, a separated people. From now on, you should live a life that is

absolutely separated from Thessalonica, from Greece, from immorality, and from Greek mythology and philosophy. This holy life, this separated life, is for the church life, because the church is in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

It is important for us all to see that the church is in the Triune God. Because I have been naturalized to be an American citizen, in a good sense I have been somewhat Americanized. Actually, however, I do not regard myself as an American or a Chinese, but as someone in the Lord Jesus Christ. Whatever our status is in regard to earthly citizenship, we all need to realize that our real position is that we are in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Being in the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ implies that we have had a new birth, a new beginning. We have a new source--God the Father. All the old things, the negative things--sin, the flesh, the self, the old man, the natural life, Satan, death--have been terminated. Our being in the Lord Jesus Christ involves a termination of all these things. This means that in the Lord Jesus Christ there is no sin, death, or Satan. In Him there is no world, flesh, self, or old creation. In God the Father we have been born again, regenerated. In Him we have a new source and a new beginning. In the Lord Jesus Christ we have the termination of everything of the old creation. This is the implication of being in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Here in the Triune God is where the church is today.

A CONTROLLING VISION

It is basic to living a holy life for the church life to see that the church is in the Triune God. If we see this, we shall not care for teachings about improving our behavior or becoming more ethical. As long as we see that the church is an entity in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall realize that we have been absolutely separated by God Himself and are now encompassed by the Lord Jesus Christ. This makes us a holy people living a holy, separated life. This life is for the church. When we see this, we can understand what is written in the book of 1 Thessalonians

I have the full assurance that if you see what is covered in these messages on the church in the Triune God, you will be different both in your concept and in your activity. These messages convey a vision, a vision that will control our thinking, our activities, and our entire life. If we see the revelation that the church is in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall spontaneously realize that we should not hold to certain concepts or do certain things, for they are worldly, profane, unholy, not separated unto God. We shall realize that such things are not for the church which is in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I can testify that I love Paul's expression in 1:1--"the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." How marvelous that the church is of certain people in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!

Both in 1 Thessalonians 1:1 and in 2 Thessalonians 1:1 and 2, Paul mentions grace and peace after speaking of the church in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace is the Triune God to be our enjoyment. When we are in the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, we are in the place to enjoy all the things of God.

CONTACTING THE SPIRIT

We have pointed out that the Father is the One who plans and originates. He is the initiator and the originator. God the Son accomplishes everything that God the Father has purposed, planned, initiated, and originated. But what is the function of God the Spirit? The Spirit is neither the originator nor the accomplisher--He is the executor. The Spirit does not do anything for Himself or by Himself. Rather, He executes, carries out, what the Father has planned and originated and what the Son has accomplished. We all must see that everything the Father has planned and everything the Son has accomplished is now in the Spirit and with the Spirit. In our experience the One we contact is the Spirit. This Spirit is the Son, and in the Son we have the Father. For this reason we may say that the Father is in the Son and that the Son is now the

life-giving Spirit dwelling in us. What we need to do is stay in the Spirit and walk according to the Spirit. When we walk according to the Spirit, we are actually walking according to the Triune God.

The Spirit is the ultimate consummation of the processed Triune God. The Spirit is the application, the reaching to us, of the Triune God. How does the processed Triune God reach us and contact us? He does this as the Spirit. How can the processed Triune God be applied to us in our experience? He is applied as the life-giving Spirit. The Spirit is not only the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ; He is the Spirit as God and as Christ. In our experience today, the Triune God is the very life-giving Spirit. Therefore, when we are in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, we are in the Spirit. Because the Spirit is implied and understood in 1:1, we speak of the church being in the Triune God.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST THESSALONIANS

MESSAGE NINE

THE CHURCH BECOMING THE EMBODIMENT OF THE TRIUNE GOD

(1)

Scripture Reading: 1 Thes. 1:1; 2:12; 3:12; 4:7; 5:23-24; 2 Thes. 1:3, 5, 10; 2:13-14, 16; Col. 3:10-11; Rev. 1:11-12

We have emphasized the fact that in 1:1 Paul says that the church is in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We have considered what it means for the church to be in God the Father and also the significance of the church being in the Lord Jesus Christ. However, although we have emphasized the Father, the Lord, and Jesus, we have not explained fully what it means for the church to be in Christ.

When the name Jesus is used in the New Testament, it primarily refers to the Lord in His experiences on earth from His incarnation to His resurrection. Jesus is the name of the Lord with respect to His humanity. Hence, this name denotes His life experiences and the things He passed through before His resurrection. Christ is a divine title that mainly denotes the Lord's experience, position, life, and actions after His resurrection. This title refers to what the Lord is after His resurrection.

The life of the Lord Jesus Christ may be divided into two sections: the section before His resurrection, and the section after His resurrection. Resurrection, therefore, is a dividing line, a boundary line, of the Lord's life and experience.

The four Gospels may be regarded as biographies of the Lord Jesus. These biographies tell His life story between His incarnation and resurrection. This period of time is, for the most part, represented by the name Jesus. If we

speak of Jesus according to the biblical use of this name, we mainly refer to His experience between incarnation and resurrection. After resurrection the life of the Lord Jesus is altogether in another sphere.

Today, however, many Christians are not clear in their understanding concerning Jesus and Christ. Some believers, especially those in Pentecostalism, say "Praise Jesus!" According to the Bible, it is better to say "Praise the Lord." It is much more common for Christians today to say "Praise the Lord" than it was twenty years ago, when the Lord's recovery came to this country. This may be due to the influence of the recovery. In any case, it is more fitting to say "Praise the Lord" than to say "Praise Jesus."

According to the New Testament, the title Lord applies to the entire life and ministry of Jesus Christ. This means that the title Lord is an all-inclusive title. But the name Jesus refers to the Lord in His humanity and to His human life prior to resurrection. Christ, as we have seen, refers to the resurrected Christ in ascension.

CHRIST ON THE THRONE AND IN US

The Christ in whom many of today's Christians believe is a Christ far away in the third heaven. But our Christ is not only the resurrected and ascended Christ in heaven; He is also the One who has descended and entered into our spirit. Hallelujah, Christ is now in our spirit!

In John 14 the Lord Jesus spoke to His disciples regarding His going and His coming. In John 14:1 He said, "Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me." In the next verse the Lord spoke about the many abodes in the Father's house and about going to prepare a place for them. In verse 3 He said, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I am coming again and will receive you to Myself, that where I am you also may be." Here the Lord Jesus seemed to be saying, "Do not be troubled by the fact that I am going. Apparently I am leaving you. But actually My going is for My coming. After I go, I shall come back

again." The Lord Jesus was not saying that He was going to heaven. Rather, He was going to the cross and then to the tomb and to Hades. Then in resurrection He would come back to the disciples.

Nearly all Christians take the Lord's word in John 14 to refer to His second coming. This understanding is not accurate. In John 14:18 the Lord Jesus said to the disciples, "I will not leave you orphans; I am coming to you." If the Lord's coming in John 14 were His second coming, the disciples certainly would have been orphans. If the Lord Jesus were only in the heavens today, we all would be orphans. When the Lord said, "I am coming to you," He was speaking of His coming in another form. This coming was fulfilled on the day of His resurrection in John 20:19-22. After His resurrection, the Lord Jesus came back to His disciples to be with them forever, so that they were not left orphans.

The Lord's coming in John 14 refers to His coming in another form. The Lord first came in the form of the flesh. When He spoke to the disciples in John 14, He was still in that form. But in this chapter He seems to be saying, "I am now in the flesh. But I am going to the cross, where I shall be slain. Afterward, I shall be buried in a tomb. Then I shall rise up from among the dead and come again in another form. When I am in that form, I shall come back to you." And the Lord did come back in this form on the day of His resurrection.

Chapter twenty of John describes how the Lord came to His disciples on the day of His resurrection. John 20:19 says, "When therefore it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst and said to them, Peace be to you." The Lord Jesus appeared in a splendid, excellent way, in a way beyond human ability to understand. The Jews were opposing the disciples and trying their best to destroy them. Therefore, the disciples were afraid and met behind closed doors. Perhaps they were groaning and wondering what to do. Suddenly the Lord Jesus appeared and said,

"Peace be to you." This One who appeared to them was not Jesus in the flesh--He was Christ the Lord.

According to verse 21, the Lord said to them, "Peace be to you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you." Then, as we see in verse 22, the Lord breathed into the disciples the holy *pneuma*, the Holy Spirit: "And when He had said this, He breathed into them and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit." The Lord Jesus in His resurrection is now the *pneuma*, the Spirit. He appeared to the disciples in the form of *pneuma*, and He told them to receive the holy *pneuma*, the holy breath. In the Greek language the word *pneuma* means both Spirit and breath. Hallelujah, Christ in resurrection is the breath, the *pneuma*, the Spirit! After the disciples received Him as the holy *pneuma*, He began to live in them.

We also have received the Lord Jesus Christ as the holy breath, the holy *pneuma*, the life-giving Spirit, and now He is actually in us. I believe that if we have a proper realization of Christ in us, we shall be very excited, even beside ourselves with joy. The fact that we may not be at all excited about this may indicate that we do not realize that Christ is in us.

Where is Christ today? The answer is that Christ is on the throne in heaven and also living in us. Oh, we should be able to declare with a strong release of the spirit that Christ is in us. Our Christ today is the One who lives in us! In a very real sense, our Christ is different from the Christ in whom many Christians believe, for they have a Christ merely in heaven, but we have both the Christ in heaven and the Christ who dwells in our spirit.

I have been condemned and falsely accused of preaching another Christ. I do not preach a Christ different from the One revealed in the Bible. But, in a certain sense, I preach a Christ who is somewhat different from the One in whom many Christians believe, for the Christ I preach is both in the heavens and in me, whereas many Christians have a Christ only in heaven. Rather than enjoy the indwelling Christ today, they are waiting to die and to meet Christ in heaven. The Christ I preach is the Christ revealed in the

Scriptures. He is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Lord in an all-inclusive sense. For Him to be the Lord means that He is both Jesus and Christ.

TERMINATION AND RESURRECTION

In the foregoing message we pointed out that to be in Christ is to be in His death, the death which terminates all negative things: sin, the world, the old creation, the old man, the flesh, the self, and Satan. When the Lord Jesus was crucified, He terminated all these negative things. This all-inclusive termination brings in resurrection. In the Bible there is a strong principle that death ushers us into resurrection. If there is no death, there can be no resurrection.

In resurrection Jesus is the Christ. Hallelujah, His crucifixion is still effective! Praise Him that He has been resurrected and that in resurrection He has become the Christ. Now as believers we are in Christ; we have entered into an organic union with Him.

Some Christian teachers speak of being in Jesus. This expression is not accurate. We can be in Christ, but we cannot be in Jesus. When the Lord was Jesus in the flesh, no one could be in Him. But after He was crucified and resurrected and had become the Spirit, we could be in Him. By the Spirit, with the Spirit, through the Spirit, and in the Spirit, we can be in Christ. Christ is the heavenly, spiritual air, and we are now in Him.

THE ANOINTED ONE AND THE ANOINTING ONE

The word Christ is an anglicized form of the Greek word *christos*. This Greek word is an equivalent to the Hebrew word for Messiah, meaning the anointed One. For the Lord Jesus to be the Messiah, the Christ, the anointed One, means that God's Spirit was poured upon Him. Today our Christ is not only the anointed One, but is also the anointing One. He Himself has become the life-giving Spirit. In resurrection Christ is both the anointed One and, as the anointing Spirit, the anointing One.

In experience we can know that Christ today is the

anointing One. Suppose someone is suffering and is deeply sorrowful and depressed. According to his feeling, life is not worth living. Then he hears the gospel and learns of God's love for him. He hears how the Lord Jesus died for him, has been resurrected, and is waiting for him to receive Him by calling, "O Lord Jesus." Then he says, "Lord Jesus, I thank You." He finds that his sorrow has gone away. Within he has the sense of being watered. This watering is the Lord's anointing that results in peace, in rest, and in the sense of being loved by the Lord and being cared for by Him. This is the experience of Christ as the anointing One.

When we call on the Lord's name, the Person of the Lord comes to us. Just as a person responds when we call his name, so the Lord Jesus Himself responds when we call His name. The Lord's name is Jesus Christ, and His Person is the Spirit. For this reason, when we call on the name of the Lord Jesus, it is the Spirit who comes.

Our concept may be that the Lord is only in the third heaven. Therefore, when we call on Him, we may be surprised that He comes so quickly. Actually, as the Spirit He is already within us. Our intention may be to say, "Lord Jesus Christ, You are in heaven." But before we have finished saying the Lord's name, He has already responded. The Lord can respond so quickly to our calling on Him because in resurrection He is now the life-giving Spirit.

In Genesis 1 we have God, and in the four Gospels we have a record of the life of Jesus on earth. But today for our experience we have the Lord Jesus Christ as the Spirit. The moment we begin to call on His name, He comes to us from within us. This is Christ in resurrection.

THE RICHES OF RESURRECTION

The church is in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. The title Christ in 1 Thessalonians 1:1 denotes all the riches of resurrection. If the Lord were only Jesus and not Christ, we could not be in Him. But because He is the Lord Jesus Christ, we can be in Him and we are in Him

right now. Where are we? We are in the Lord Jesus Christ. The name Jesus implies that everything we are in the old creation and in the fall has been terminated, and the title Christ implies that we are no longer in ourselves, in the old creation, in sin and death, in the world, and in Satan. Instead, we are in resurrection, in the Spirit, and in righteousness, holiness, power, strength, and might. Because we are in Christ, we are even on the throne with Him. Oh, how marvelous it is to be in Christ.

To be in the Lord Jesus Christ means on the one hand that we are terminated and are no longer in the old creation. On the other hand, it means that by being in Christ we are in resurrection. To be in Christ is to be in resurrection, in the Spirit, in power, in strength, and in authority. However, because of the influence of traditional Christianity, we may not realize the significance of being in Christ. As a result, there may be a shortage of the experience of resurrection, strength, and authority.

Do you realize that because you are in Christ you are on the throne? Not only are you in power, might, strength, and authority, but you are also on the throne. After His resurrection Christ went to the heavens to be enthroned, and in Him we also are on the throne. Sometimes we need to say to Satan, "Satan, don't you see where I am? I am in Christ on the throne!"

Religion has deprived us, even robbed us, of the enjoyment of what we have in Christ. It has caused us in experience to be poor, pitiful. Therefore, we need to be impressed with the fact that to be in Christ is to be in resurrection, in the Spirit, in power, and on the throne. The church in Christ is the church in resurrection, in authority, and on the throne.

GROWING IN RESURRECTION LIFE

Before we go on to see that to be in Christ is also to be in the kingdom and glory, we need to emphasize the crucial matter of life. To be in Christ is to be in life, even in resurrection life. If we neglect life, we shall miss everything. Apart from life, there is no way to enter into

the kingdom or the glory. The church today is in resurrection life, and this resurrection life is accomplishing many things for us.

I have learned much about life by observing how things grow in my garden at home. I am amazed how a tiny plant grows in life. This is a picture, an illustration, of how we are growing in resurrection life. Because we are in resurrection life, something within us is growing. The word growing implies a great deal. It includes transformation, blossoming, fruitfulness, and maturity. Some of the plants in my garden were rather uncomely before they had adequate growth. But by growing they have been transformed and have become beautiful. They have blossomed, they have borne fruit, and they have become mature. This matter of growth with all it implies is also included in the thought of the church being in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is indeed a tragedy that, under the influence of religion, so many Christians have been distracted from growing in resurrection life. Instead of paying attention to life and the growth of life, they pursue knowledge and try to improve themselves. There is no need for us to endeavor to improve ourselves, for we are in resurrection life. This resurrection life is the resurrected Christ, and this Christ in resurrection is the life-giving Spirit. The church today is in Christ, the One who in His resurrection has become the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST THESSALONIANS

MESSAGE TEN

THE CHURCH BECOMING THE EMBODIMENT OF THE TRIUNE GOD

(2)

Scripture Reading: 1 Thes. 1:1; 2:12; 3:12; 4:7; 5:23-24;
2 Thes. 1:3, 5, 10; 2:13-14, 16; Col. 3:10-11; Rev 1:11-12

According to both 1 Thessalonians 1:1 and 2 Thessalonians 1:1, the church is in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. In the foregoing message we pointed out that for the church to be in Christ is to be in resurrection life. This resurrection life is Christ Himself in resurrection as the life-giving Spirit. What we need is not self-improvement but the growth of this resurrection life within us.

BROUGHT INTO THE FATHER

In John 14 we have a further indication that we the believers are in God the Father. According to the traditional religious understanding, this chapter speaks of heavenly mansions. However, what John 14 speaks about is not heavenly mansions; rather, it speaks of abodes, abiding places, in a divine Person, in God the Father. In verses 2 and 3 the Lord Jesus says, "In My Father's house are many abodes; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I am coming again and will receive you to Myself, that where I am you also may be." The Lord Jesus was telling His disciples that through His death and resurrection He would prepare the way to bring them into the Father.

The Lord Jesus is in the Father (John 14:10-11). He wanted His disciples also to be in the Father, as revealed in John 17:21. Through His death and resurrection, He

brought His disciples into Himself. Since He is in the Father, they are also in the Father by being in Him. Hence, where the Lord Jesus is, there the disciples are also. Where is the Lord Jesus? He is in the Father. Therefore, for us to be where He is means that we also are in the Father.

It is actually superstitious to believe that John 14:2 and 3 mean that the Lord is building a heavenly mansion and that He will come back only after this work of building is complete. Some Christian teachers claim that the fact the Lord Jesus has not come back indicates that the building of the heavenly mansion is not yet finished. I was told this by a Christian teacher when I was very young. In their talk about the heavenly mansion, some have said, "How marvelous the heavenly mansion will be! The Lord Jesus has been there for more than nineteen hundred years, and still He hasn't finished the building of this mansion. The Lord said that after He prepares a place for us, He will come back and receive us to Himself. We know from the fact that He has not yet come back that He is still building the heavenly mansion."

While I was in England in 1958, I was enlightened to see from the Bible that John 14 has nothing to do with a heavenly mansion. The use of the word mansion in the King James translation of John 14:2 is not accurate. This verse speaks of abodes, not of mansions. The word used in Greek is a noun form of the verb abide. Here the Lord Jesus seems to be saying, "I am your abode, and you shall abide in Me. You are My abode, and I shall abide in you. I am going to prepare an abode in God the Father. The Father wants to receive you all. However, because you are sinful and unrighteous and He is holy and righteous, you cannot enter into Him unless I die on the cross to take away your sins. My death will open up the way for you to come into the Father. After I have prepared a place for you in the Father through My death and resurrection, I shall come again." Praise the Lord that in this sense the Lord Jesus has already returned! He has already come back, and He has brought us into the Father. Now as members of the church we can declare that we are in God the

Father.

The church, including all of us, is where the Lord Jesus is, that is, in God the Father. Hallelujah, where the Lord Jesus Christ is, there we are also! We are in the same abode as the Lord Jesus is. How wonderful!

When I began to teach that John 14 speaks not of heavenly mansions but of abodes in God the Father, I was criticized and condemned. Some accused me of taking away their heavenly mansion and complained that at a funeral they could no longer tell people that there is a heavenly mansion for the dead believers.

THE RESURRECTED CHRIST IDENTICAL TO THE SPIRIT

I have also been accused of teaching heresy for saying, according to the Bible, that Christ today is the life-giving Spirit. We should not regard the life-giving Spirit as a Person separate from the Lord Jesus Christ. When the Lord was in the flesh, He was Jesus. But in resurrection He has become the life-giving Spirit. We are not the only ones who have seen this fact and teach it. A number of other Christian writers have said that, in Christian experience, Christ is identical to the Spirit. In doctrine or in theology it is very difficult to explain how the second of the Trinity, the Son, can be identical to the third, the Spirit. Nevertheless, in Christian experience the resurrected Christ is identical to the Spirit. Second Corinthians 3:17 says explicitly, "The Lord is the Spirit." First Corinthians 15:45, a confirming verse, says, "The last Adam became a life-giving Spirit." Although it is according to the Bible to say that Christ is the Spirit, I have been condemned as heretical for teaching this.

The Bible reveals that the resurrected Christ, the very Christ in resurrection, is the life-giving Spirit. This can be confirmed by our experience. We have Christ within us, and we also have the Spirit within us. But in your experience do you have two in you, Christ and the Spirit, or do you have one? Although both Christ and the Spirit are in us, in experience we have one in us, not two, for Christ today in resurrection is identical to the Spirit.

In resurrection the Christ who dwells within us is a wonderful Spirit. This Spirit is life, power, holiness, love,

righteousness, might, strength, wisdom, grace, kindness, mercy. Oh, this Spirit is everything! This is why we say that this Spirit, who is God and Christ, is all-inclusive.

In particular I wish to point out that this Spirit contains the effectiveness of Christ's death. The Spirit certainly does not contain death, but it does include the effectiveness of the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus.

WALKING ACCORDING TO THE SPIRIT

In the New Testament we are commanded to walk according to the Spirit. For example, Galatians 5:16 says, "Walk by the Spirit and you shall by no means fulfill the lust of the flesh." In Galatians 5:25 Paul says, "If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit." Referring to the mingled spirit, the Spirit mingled with our regenerated human spirit, Romans 8:4 says, "That the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to flesh, but according to spirit." Therefore, we should simply walk according to the Spirit. There is no need for us to do anything else.

Married brothers and sisters may be concerned about how to have a good marriage or how to be a proper husband or wife. If a brother were to ask me how to be a proper husband or how to have a good married life, I would give just one answer: Walk according to the Spirit. This word applies to brothers and sisters, to husbands and wives. Today many books have been written by Christians on how to have a good family life or how to avoid divorce. There is no need for us to read those books. Do you want to be a good husband or wife? Walk according to Spirit. Do you want to have a good marriage? The answer is the same--walk according to Spirit. Because the Spirit is all-inclusive, it is sufficient for us to walk according to Spirit.

Our problem is that we are not faithful always to walk according to Spirit. Of the approximately sixteen waking hours of each day, how much do you walk according to Spirit? If daily we walk according to Spirit for even one

hour and a half, we would be an outstanding saint. Even in the church meetings we may fail to be in the Spirit. For example, you may not sing according to Spirit. Instead, you may sing according to your emotion. If you are excited, you sing in a certain way according to your emotion. But perhaps at the next meeting, you may be very cold in your emotion. Nothing can stir you up because you care for your emotion, not for the Spirit. Your coldness in the meeting may be due to the fact that someone has offended you. Because you have been offended, you will not allow anything to stir you in the meeting. You may be low for several days, until something happens to stir you up again or to cause you to be excited. Then in the meeting you may praise the Lord in a loud way. However, in that kind of situation your praise is according to emotion, not according to Spirit.

We all must see that the church is in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We have pointed out that to be in Jesus Christ means that everything negative and everything of the old creation has been terminated. This means that our natural emotion and our self should be terminated. If this is your situation, you will not be offended by others. How can a dead person be offended by anything or anyone? It is impossible. No matter what you may say or do to a dead person, he will not be offended. To be in Jesus Christ is to be terminated and buried, for to be in Christ is to be in His death. If we truly are the church in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall not function in the meeting according to our emotion, but we shall function according to the Spirit.

We have seen that to be in Christ is to be in the spiritual air, in the life-giving Spirit. If in our experience we are in this spiritual air, we shall not be offended by others. The more others give us a difficult time, the more we shall be able to praise the Lord. This is the church in Christ as the life-giving Spirit.

The reality of the resurrected Christ as the life-giving Spirit is far beyond our ability to describe. Power, strength, might, authority, the throne, holiness, righteousness--all

the divine virtues are involved with this resurrected Christ. Thus, when we are in Him, we have all these virtues. We have patience, endurance, and all that Christ is. Christ is the reality of the divine attributes and the human virtues. If in our practical living we are in Him, we shall be humble, kind, and enduring. We shall be those in resurrection, in the resurrected Christ.

WALKING WORTHILY OF GOD

We have placed a strong emphasis on the fact that, according to 1:1, the church is an entity in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Now let us go on to consider 2:12: "That you should walk worthily of God, Who calls you into His own kingdom and glory." What does it mean to walk worthily of God? To walk worthily of God is to have a life in the Lord Jesus Christ. First Thessalonians 2:12 is an explanation of 1:1. What does it mean for the church to be in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ? For the church to be in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ in a practical way is for there to be a company of human beings who walk worthily of God.

What can compare with God? What can match Him? The answer to these questions is that only God Himself can compare with God or match Him. This indicates that to walk worthily of God actually means to live God. Our daily life must actually be God Himself, since only God can be worthy of God, match God, or compare with God. Therefore, in our living we must express God.

Because we have God's life, we can live God. A dog obviously has a dog's life and therefore lives a dog. In the same principle, we have God's life and therefore we can live God. Hallelujah, God is our Father, and we are His children! As God's children with His life, it is possible for us to live Him.

Whereas 1:1 speaks of the church in God the Father, many Christians instead speak of the church in God the Almighty. In Christian services often that hymn is sung which begins, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty." To you, is God only the Almighty, or is He also your Father?

Because we have been born of Him, God is now our Father. As the Almighty, God does not have any life relationship with you, and you may not have anything to do with Him. You may be apart from Him and outside of Him. But if God has become your Father, you now have a life relationship with Him, and you are in Him.

Whom do you love more, the President of the United States, or your own father? The President may be wealthy, and your father may be poor, but certainly you love your father more than you love the President. In a far deeper way, we love God more as our Father than as merely the Almighty. Hallelujah, because we are children of God we can live God! We all should declare boldly, "Because I have God's life, I can live Him."

Now we see what it means to walk worthily of God. Only God can be worthy of Himself, and only God can match Himself or be compared with Himself. Therefore, to walk worthily of God is to live God. Praise the Lord that we have God's life and that we can walk worthily of Him by living Him!

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST THESSALONIANS

MESSAGE ELEVEN

THE CHURCH BECOMING THE EMBODIMENT OF THE TRIUNE GOD

(3)

Scripture Reading: 1 Thes. 1:1; 2:12; 3:12; 4:7; 5:23-24; 2 Thes. 1:3, 5, 10; 2:13-14, 16; Col. 3:10-11; Rev. 1:11-12

CALLED INTO GOD'S KINGDOM AND GLORY

First Thessalonians 2:12 says, "That you should walk worthily of God, Who calls you into His own kingdom and glory." In the foregoing message we considered what it means to walk worthily of God. Let us go on to see what it means in a practical way to be called by God into His kingdom and glory.

Many Christians, including us, take things in the Bible for granted. For example, we may read 2:12 and take for granted that we understand it. However, we may not have a proper understanding of God's kingdom and glory. Of course, I do not claim to understand 2:12 in full. However, I do have some understanding from study and experience. What I wish to say concerning the kingdom and glory in 2:12 is mainly according to my spiritual experience.

In this verse Paul says that God has called us into His own kingdom and glory. No doubt, God's kingdom and glory are the goal of His calling. It is unfortunate that Christians think that God has called us into a heavenly mansion. God's calling is not to a heavenly mansion; it is to His kingdom and glory.

According to the understanding of many Christians, at present the earth is not God's kingdom, but one day the Lord Jesus will come back, take over the earth, and establish His rule upon it. That rule will be God's kingdom. Many of us have probably held such a concept

concerning

the kingdom of God. I do not say that this understanding is not accurate at all. However, I must say that it is not entirely accurate, and it is certainly much too superficial.

What is God's kingdom? The kingdom of God is God being manifested through us. Whenever we express God in our daily walk, that is the kingdom. The expression of God Himself from within us is the kingdom. Suppose a brother works in an office. Certain of his colleagues may oppose him because he is a believer. They may not be happy to have him there. But if he expresses God daily in the office, his fellow workers will realize that there is something unusual about him. They will know that with this brother there is something special. This is God's kingdom, God expressed from within that brother. On the one hand, others may oppose us, criticize us, and be unhappy with us. On the other hand, they sense something indescribable about us. This is God's kingdom as His manifestation through us. How marvelous it would be if all Christians expressed God! This expression truly would be the kingdom of God on earth.

When I was a young Christian, I understood 2:12 in the traditional way. I thought that God had called me merely to enter into His kingdom and glory in the future. My concept of the kingdom of God and the glory of God was very shallow and altogether too objective. Paul did not have such a view of God's kingdom and glory. From the context of 2:12 we can see that being called into God's kingdom and glory is related to walking worthily of God. When we walk worthily of God, there is with us a particular kind of atmosphere, and this atmosphere is God's kingdom. Furthermore, where the kingdom of God is, there the glory of God is also.

It is possible for the kingdom of God and the glory of God to be manifested in our married life. If a brother and his wife live God, they will walk worthily of God. Then in their married life there will be a certain kind of atmosphere. When others come into this atmosphere, they will spontaneously have a sense of respect. This is the kingdom of God with God's glory. If today's Christians

would walk worthily of God, would walk in a way that expresses Him, the kingdom would come. God's kingdom would then be seen on earth.

As we have pointed out a number of times, glory is God Himself expressed. Whenever the Lord is expressed from within us, we are in a situation that can be described as glorious. If someone would walk into a brother's home when he is arguing with his wife, there would not be any glory. However, if you visit a brother's house and find him and his wife glowing, shining, and flowing, you would see the expression of God, God's glory.

Many of us can testify that when we live God and walk worthily of God, matching Him, there is an atmosphere around us that is nothing less than God's kingdom. Spontaneously the Lord is expressed. This expression is God's glory. Concerning the kingdom and the glory in 2:12, we have a further explanation of 1:1, where we are told that the church is in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

INCREASING AND ABOUNDING IN LOVE

In 3:12 Paul says, "And the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love to one another and to all, even as we also to you." The church in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ should be composed of those who are increasing and abounding in love to one another and to all men. No matter how many believers there may be in the church--fifty, five hundred, or five thousand--all the saints should love one another. Furthermore, they should increase in this love and abound in it. This kind of love is surely not of our human nature. As fallen human beings, we are not capable of such love. But the church in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ is characterized by this increasing and abounding love. If we truly are a church in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, the love we have for one another will increase and abound.

BOXED IN TO GOD

In 4:7 Paul goes on to say, "God has not called us for

uncleanness but in sanctification." To be in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ is to be in sanctification. The Greek word sanctification means separation. Only when we are in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ are we truly separated unto God from everything other than God. If we are not in the Triune God, we are still common. Instead of being separated from the world, we are still involved, mixed up, with worldly people and worldly matters.

I wish to say a word especially to the young ones. Even though you are still young, you need to realize that as those who belong to the Lord Jesus, you are part of the church, and the church is in the Triune God. If we compare God to a box, we may say that God is boxing you in to Himself. You all need to be boxed in to Him more and more. God has placed you into Himself as a spiritual, divine, and heavenly box. Being in this box separates you to God. In other words, this being boxed in to God, this separation, is sanctification.

God has called you in sanctification. In 4:7 the phrase "in sanctification" modifies God's calling. God has called us in the "box" of sanctification. Now we all need to see that we are those separated unto God, boxed in to Him. We have no right to leap out of this box.

In 5:23 and 24 Paul says, "And the God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly, and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He Who calls you, Who also will do it." For the God of peace to sanctify us wholly means that He will completely box us in. No part of our being will be left out of God as the spiritual box. God as the divine box is not small. On the contrary, He is infinitely large and deep.

If a young person is tempted to indulge in a certain kind of worldly entertainment, this means that he is planning to come out of this heavenly box. However, many have testified that when they tried to get out of this box, they found that they were not able to do so. It seems that their arms were powerless to climb out.

According to these verses, God intends to box us in to Himself wholly, that is, entirely. Have you been completely boxed in by God? Verse 23 says that God will preserve our spirit and soul and body without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Verse 24 says that God, the One who calls us and who does the sanctifying, separating, work, is faithful. He will do the boxing-in work until we are completely separated from the world. Wherever we may be--at school, at work, at home, or with our neighbors--we shall eventually be fully boxed in to God. Young people, if you are invited to do something worldly, you may need to say, "I cannot participate in that, for I have been boxed in to God. Because I am in a heavenly box, I am not free to go to that place."

In 1 Thessalonians we have seen certain qualifications of the church in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. If we would be such a church in reality and in a practical way, we need to walk worthily of God and fulfill His calling into His own kingdom and glory. As we have pointed out, we should not regard the kingdom and the glory as only something for the future and not for our experience today. We need to be in the kingdom of God and the glory of God today. Furthermore, we need to increase and abound in love, and we need to be fully sanctified, entirely boxed in, by the Triune God.

FURTHER CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CHURCH IN THE TRIUNE GOD

In 2 Thessalonians 1:3 Paul says, "We ought to thank God always concerning you, brothers, even as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of each one of you all to one another is increasing." In this verse Paul speaks of two matters: faith growing and love increasing. The growth of faith and the increase of love are also conditions, requirements, of being the church in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

In 2 Thessalonians 2:13 Paul continues, "But we ought to thank God always concerning you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you from the beginning unto

salvation in sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." The matter of salvation in sanctification of the Spirit is profound. God has chosen us from the beginning unto this salvation in sanctification. This is related to a life in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is also a qualification of being a church in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse 14 says, "To which also He called you through our gospel unto the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." Here we see that God has called us unto the obtaining of His glory. Once again, this is an aspect of the life of the church in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Second Thessalonians 2:16 says, "Now our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God our Father, Who has loved us and given us eternal encouragement and good hope in grace." How profound! God has given us eternal encouragement and good hope in grace. Although we may not understand these matters adequately, we have nonetheless received them. We have an encouragement that is eternal and a hope that is good. God has given us both this encouragement and this hope in grace. This is marvelous! It is an incentive to have the church life in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are not without incentive, and we are not lacking in hope. Never say that you are hopeless. Instead, you should declare, "I am full of hope. I have a good hope, the hope God has given me in grace. Furthermore, with this good hope there is eternal encouragement."

THE NEW MAN

In Colossians 3:10 and 11 Paul speaks of the church as the new man: "And having put on the new man, which is being renewed unto full knowledge according to the image of Him Who created him; where there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, freeman, but Christ is all and in all." The word image in verse 10 refers to Christ, God's Beloved, as the very expression of God (Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3). The

relative pronoun "who" in this verse refers to God the Creator, the One who created the new man in Christ (Eph. 2:15). As the embodiment of the Triune God, the church eventually will bear the image of God.

THE GOLDEN LAMPSTAND

In the Bible there are many different symbols of the church: the house of God, the kingdom of God, the habitation of God, the fullness of God, the warrior, the bride. In the book of Revelation the church is symbolized by a golden lampstand. In Revelation 1:12 the Apostle John says, "And I turned to see the voice that spoke with me; and having turned I saw seven golden lampstands." Verse 20 of Revelation 1 says clearly, "The seven lampstands are seven churches."

In Exodus 25 there is a description of a golden lampstand. That lampstand is a type of Christ. Christ is the embodiment of God, and the lampstand is a type of Christ as this embodiment. Elsewhere we have pointed out that the lampstand signifies the Triune God. The lampstand is gold in substance, in element. In typology gold signifies the divine nature, the nature of God the Father. Second, the gold of the lampstand is in a definite form. This form signifies God the Son. God the Father is the element, and God the Son is the form. Finally, the seven lamps of the lampstand signify the seven Spirits of God as God's expression. As we consider the lampstand, therefore, we see the element signifying God the Father, we see the form signifying God the Son, and we see the seven lamps signifying the Spirit of God as the expression. Hence, the lampstand portrays the Triune God embodied in a single entity.

In Exodus 25 the lampstand is a type of Christ, but in Revelation 1 the lampstand signifies the church. Every church is a golden lampstand. This means that the church is the embodiment of the Triune God, for the church is an entity in the Triune God. Do you realize what the Lord is doing today? He is seeking to mold us, transform us, and conform us, the entire church, into the image of the Triune

God. In this way all the churches become golden lampstands as the embodiment of the Triune God.

How blessed we are to see that the church is the embodiment of the Triune God! Our ears are blessed to hear this word. Many believers in the past never heard or saw anything concerning this. Hallelujah, we are in the church which is in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ! Now we are being transformed into the image of the Triune God and conformed to this image to be in reality and practicality the embodiment of the Triune God, having the Father as our element, the Son as our form, and the Spirit as our expression, shining the glory of the Triune God to the universe. This is the church filled with the Triune God.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST THESSALONIANS

MESSAGE TWELVE

THE CARE OF A NURSING MOTHER AND AN EXHORTING FATHER

Scripture Reading: 1 Thes. 2:1-12

In the book of 1 Thessalonians Paul does not speak of miracles. He does not say that the gospel came to the Thessalonians in miracles, wonders, and healings. If we study this book carefully, we shall see that Paul's emphasis is on daily living. In 1:5 he says, "You know what kind of men we were among you for your sake." Instead of emphasizing the supernatural and the miraculous, Paul takes his living as a factor for the preaching of the gospel. Furthermore, with respect to Christian living, he stresses three matters: turning to God from idols, serving the living God, and waiting for the coming back of the Lord Jesus.

A NORMAL LIFE

Throughout the centuries the human mind has been interested in things that are fantastic, miraculous, and supernatural. However, miraculous things do not last. But a work that is carried out by a proper living will last.

God's salvation enables us to live a normal life. This is a strong testimony of the gospel. Christians should live a normal life, not a miraculous, supernatural life. Therefore, a proper life for the church life must be common, regular, and normal. Such a life is characterized by turning to God from idols, serving the living God, and waiting for the coming back of the Lord Jesus. To have this kind of life means that nothing on earth occupies us. We are free from all idols, from all things other than God, and we are occupied by the living God Himself. This living God is testified in our daily life. We have a life which testifies

that the God whom we serve is living. Furthermore, our goal, hope, and expectation are not related to things on earth, but are focused on the coming back of the Lord Jesus. A life with these three characteristics is a proper Christian life as a testimony to our God. These aspects of a proper Christian life are all covered in chapter one.

THE FOSTERING OF A HOLY LIFE FOR THE CHURCH LIFE

The first chapter of 1 Thessalonians covers two main points: the structure of a holy life for the church life and the origin of a holy life for the church life. The structure is composed of the work of faith, the labor of love, and the endurance of hope. The origin of such a life is the preaching of the gospel and the acceptance of the word preached, an acceptance resulting in turning to God from idols, serving a living and true God, and waiting for the Son. Now in chapter two we come to the third aspect of a holy life for the church life, the aspect of fostering.

Although the word fostering cannot be found in 1 Thessalonians 2, the fact of fostering can be seen in this chapter. Here Paul likens the apostles both to a nursing mother and to an exhorting father. This means that the apostles were mothers and fathers to the new believers. They regarded the believers as children under their fostering care. Just as parents care for their children, fostering their growth, so the apostles cared for the new believers. Thus, in 1 Thessalonians 2 we see the fostering of a holy life for the church life. In verses 1 through 12 we have the care of a nursing mother and an exhorting father, and in verses 13 through 20 we see the reward given to those who foster believers in this way. Because the apostles rendered such a care to the new believers, the apostles will eventually receive a reward from the Lord.

First Thessalonians 2:1-12 surely is a word to new believers. In these verses we do not have much that is weighty or deep. Here we do not have profound doctrines. Instead, we have a word that can be compared to the way parents speak to young children. Let us consider this

portion verse by verse so that we may be impressed how to help new believers.

THE APOSTLES' ENTRANCE

Verse 1 says, "For you yourselves know, brothers, our entrance to you, that it has not been in vain." The apostle stresses repeatedly their entrance to the believers (1:5, 9). This shows that their manner of life played a great role in infusing the gospel into the new converts. It was not only what the apostles said, but also what they were.

The apostles came to the Thessalonians with the gospel in such a way that the Thessalonians were convinced. The apostles' entrance was not in vain. They were a pattern of how to believe in the Lord and follow Him. Because many came to believe in the Lord Jesus through the apostles, a church was raised up in less than a month. This happened not mainly as a result of preaching and teaching, but through the kind of entrance the apostles had among the Thessalonians.

SPEAKING THE GOSPEL IN MUCH STRUGGLE

Verse 2 continues, "But having suffered before and having been outrageously treated, even as you know, in Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much struggle." In the preaching of the gospel, the apostles experienced God. They enjoyed Him as their boldness in the struggle for the gospel. They were bold not in themselves, but in God, even after they had been outrageously treated by the Philippians. Suffering and persecution could not defeat them because they were in the organic union with the Triune God. According to verse 2, they spoke the gospel of God in much struggle. This indicates that while they were preaching, they were fighting, because persecution was still going on. Hence, they were struggling and speaking the gospel to the Thessalonians in the boldness of God.

HONEST AND FAITHFUL

In verse 3 Paul says, "For our entreaty was not of

deception, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile." Deception refers to the goal, uncleanness to the motive, and guile to the means. All three are of and by the subtle and deceiving Devil. The word entreaty includes speaking, preaching, teaching, instructing, and exhorting. Paul's exhorting was free from deception, uncleanness, and guile. The apostles were not greedy, and they had no intention of making a gain of anyone. Their coming to the Thessalonians with the gospel was altogether honest and faithful.

APPROVED BY GOD

Verse 4 says, "But even as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God, Who proves our hearts." God's entrusting depends on His approval by His testing. The apostles were first tested and approved by God and then were entrusted by Him with the gospel. Hence, their speaking, the preaching of the gospel, was not of themselves to please men, but was of God to please Him. He proves, examines, and tests their hearts all the time (Psa. 26:2; 139:23-24).

The word "approved" in verse 4 implies being tested. God tested the apostles before He approved them. Based upon this approvedness, God entrusted them with the gospel. God did this in a careful way, for He knows our hearts.

According to our opinion, since God already knows everything, it is not necessary for Him to test us. Yes, before we were born, He already knew what kind of person we would be. Why, then, does God test us? God's testing is not mainly for Himself; it is primarily for us. God knows us, but we do not know ourselves. Because we do not know ourselves adequately, we may think that we are upright, honest, and faithful. However, when we are put to the test, we shall see what we really are and discover that in ourselves we are not honest, faithful, or trustworthy. God's testing, therefore, proves us to ourselves. Only after God proves us in this way shall we have approvedness.

I would encourage the young people not to have

confidence in themselves, for they have not yet been tested. I have the assurance that God will use the young people. But God's using of them will come after His testing of them. God cannot entrust anything to us until we have the approvedness that comes from His testing. God's entrusting is based on our approvedness. But we cannot approve ourselves. Only after God has tested us will He grant us approvedness. Then He will entrust something to us and begin to use us.

It was in this way that God entrusted the apostles with the gospel. Because the apostles had been entrusted with the gospel, they spoke not as pleasing men, but as pleasing God, who proves our hearts. Their speaking was based on God's entrusting. Because He had entrusted them with the gospel, they spoke as pleasing God.

In verse 4 we see that we must be approved and then have something entrusted to us. Then we need to speak as pleasing God, the One who proves us. This indicates that we need to pass through testing, approving, and entrusting. Then we shall have something to preach and teach.

NO FLATTERY OR PRETEXT

Verse 5 says, "For neither at any time were we found with a word of flattery, even as you know, nor with a pretext for covetousness--God is witness." The Greek word rendered pretext also means pretense, cloak. To have any pretext for covetousness is to peddle or adulterate the word of God (2 Cor. 2:17; 4:2). It is also to pretend to be godly for gain (1 Tim. 6:5; Titus 1:11; 2 Pet. 2:3).

According to verse 5, the apostles were never found with a word of flattery. We all must avoid flattery, never speaking in a way to flatter others. In this verse Paul also says that the apostles did not have a pretext, a cloak, for covetousness. They did not have an evil motive that was covered in some way. Because they did not have any pretext or pretense, they did not peddle the word of God or adulterate it. To adulterate something is to mix it with an inferior material, for example, to mix gold with copper or wine with water, and then to sell it as if it were pure.

Throughout the centuries, many preachers and teachers have adulterated the word of God in this way. They preached under a pretext in order to make gain for themselves.

From verse 5 we learn to avoid flattery and a pretext for covetousness. In our Christian work we must give no place to such unclean things. No servant of the Lord should use flattery or have some kind of pretext for covetousness. May the Lord have mercy on us and purify us from all these things. May we be able to say that God is our witness that we do not speak words of flattery or have any pretext for covetousness.

NOT SEEKING GLORY FROM MEN

In verse 6 Paul goes on to say, "Nor seeking glory of men, neither from you, nor from others, when we might have stood on our dignity as apostles of Christ." To seek glory of men is a real temptation to every Christian worker. Many have been devoured and spoiled by this matter.

The Greek words rendered "stood on our dignity" also mean "asserted authority." A literal translation would be "been able to be in weight," that is, been burdensome (see v. 9; 1 Cor. 9:4-12). To assert authority, dignity, or right in Christian work also damages it. The Lord Jesus, while on earth, gave up His dignity (John 13:4-5), and the apostle would rather not use his right (1 Cor. 9:12).

Apparently seeking glory from men is not as evil as covetousness. However, it is more subtle. The fall of the archangel was due to the seeking of glory. He became God's adversary because of his glory-seeking. Even though he was a leading angel with a very high position, he was still seeking glory. That was the cause of his fall. According to the New Testament, anyone who seeks glory of men is a follower of Satan. The seeking of glory is a trap spread by Satan to snare Christian workers. Therefore, it is very important that all Christian workers learn to avoid the snare of glory-seeking. However, not many have escaped this trap.

How much we shall be used by the Lord and how long our usefulness will last depends on whether we seek glory of men. If we seek glory, our usefulness in the hand of the Lord is finished. The seeking of glory for the self always kills one's usefulness. Therefore, may we all, especially the young, be warned never to seek glory in the Lord's work.

NOT STANDING ON THEIR DIGNITY

Verse 6 indicates clearly that the apostles did not stand on their dignity as apostles of Christ. They did not assume any standing or dignity. They had to forget that they were apostles and serve God's people as slaves. They were not to remind others of the fact that they were apostles of Christ. Instead, they were to keep in mind that they were brothers serving believers. They were not to assume any standing or dignity.

Those who are believers and also those who are not believers may consider the leading ones, the elders, or the apostles as dignitaries. However, in the local churches there are no dignitaries. Instead of being dignitaries, we are slaves serving one another. Nevertheless, I know of certain ones who did not assume anything when they did not have a position or title. But as soon as they were given a position, perhaps in a service group, they began to assume dignity. This is shameful. We should learn of Paul never to stand on our dignity or assert authority.

A sister whose husband is an elder should not assume dignity because she is the wife of an elder. An elder's wife is not the "First Lady." She is simply a little sister serving the church. Furthermore, her husband is not a dignitary; he is a slave. As an elder, he has been appointed to serve the church as a slave. We all should have this attitude.

Paul's statement, "We might have stood on our dignity as apostles of Christ," indicates that even in the early days there was the temptation of assuming dignity. People were the same in Paul's time as they are today. Then as well as now, there was the temptation to assume some kind of dignity or standing. Paul, however, did not stand on his dignity as an apostle in order to claim something for

himself. By refusing to stand on his dignity or assert authority Paul is a good pattern for us all. If we follow this pattern, we shall kill a deadly disease germ in the Body of Christ, the germ of assuming a position.

CHERISHING THE BELIEVERS

In verse 7 Paul says, "But we were gentle in your midst, as a nurse would cherish her own children." The Greek word rendered nurse, *trophos*, sometimes means a mother; hence, it may denote a nursing mother (see Gal. 4:19). Cherishing includes nourishing. Therefore, this word not only includes nourishing but also includes tender care.

Even though Paul was a brother, he considered himself a nursing mother. Surely, he had no thought of position, dignity, or authority. The thought of being a nursing mother is very different from the thought of dignity or position. What position does a nursing mother have? What rank, dignity, or authority belongs to her? Her dignity consists in nourishing and cherishing her children, in taking care of them in a tender way.

The word cherish is lovely, a word of utmost tenderness. Paul regarded himself as a cherishing one, not merely as one who serves. He certainly did not control the believers. Neither did he merely serve them. Rather, he cherished them. His care for them was full of tenderness.

IMPARTING THEIR OWN SOULS

In verse 8 Paul continues, "Thus, yearning over you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own souls, because you became beloved to us." The word yearning indicates being affectionately fond of, affectionately desirous of, like a nursing mother affectionately interested in her child whom she nourishes and cherishes. This was what the apostles did with the new believers.

The apostles not only imparted the gospel of God to the Thessalonians; they also imparted their own souls. To live a clean and upright life as portrayed in verses 3 through 6 and 10, and to love the new converts, even by giving our

own souls to them, as described in verses 7 through 9 and 11, are the prerequisites for infusing others with the salvation conveyed in the gospel we preach.

Paul's word in verse 8 about imparting their own souls to the Thessalonians can be compared to his word in 2 Corinthians 12 about being spent for the sake of the believers. Paul was willing to spend not only what he had, but was willing to spend himself, his very being. The apostles were willing to impart what they were into the believers. This can be compared to a nursing mother giving herself to her child.

THE APOSTLES' CONDUCT

Verse 9 says, "For you remember, brothers, our labor and hardship: working night and day so as not to be burdensome to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God." The apostles did not want to be a burden on the Thessalonians. Therefore, they labored night and day in order to proclaim to them the gospel of God.

In verse 10 Paul continues, "You are witnesses, and God, how holily and righteously and blamelessly we conducted ourselves with you who believe." Holily refers to conduct toward God, righteously to conduct toward men, and blamelessly to all--God, men, and Satan. In order to conduct himself in this way, Paul had to exercise strict control over himself. Verse 10 reveals that the apostles were those who practiced self-control.

A FATHER EXHORTING HIS CHILDREN

Verse 11 says, "Even as you know how we were to each one of you, as a father his own children, entreating you and consoling and testifying." The apostle was strong in stressing what or how they were (1:5), for what they were opened the way to bring the new converts into God's full salvation.

In verse 11 Paul likens himself to a father exhorting his children. In cherishing the believers as their own children, the apostles considered themselves as nourishing mothers. In exhorting them, they considered themselves fathers.

WALKING WORTHILY OF GOD

Verse 12 says, "That you should walk worthily of God, Who calls you into His own kingdom and glory." God's calling is according to His selection, and it follows His selection (1:4). As worshippers of idols (1:9), the believers were in the kingdom of Satan (Matt. 12:26). Now, through the salvation in Christ, they are called and have believed into the kingdom of God, which is the sphere for them to worship and enjoy God under the divine ruling with a view of entering into God's glory. God's glory goes with His kingdom.

In verse 12 Paul exhorts the believers to walk worthily of God. If he himself had not walked worthily of God, how could he have exhorted others to do so? In this matter also, he set an example for the believers to follow.

Verse 12 indicates that walking worthily of God is related to entering into His kingdom and being ushered into His glory. The thought here, in contrast to that in verses 1 through 11, is quite deep. Here we have a matter often neglected by Christians. Not many believers are taught to have a Christian walk that will enable them to enter into the kingdom of God, a walk that will usher them into God's glory. Many Christians have never heard such a word. Nevertheless, this is included as part of Paul's teaching to young believers.

A GOOD PATTERN

First Thessalonians 2:1-12 shows us how we should conduct ourselves as a pattern for new believers. In order to be a proper pattern, we need to be pure in our motives, especially concerning money. Much of what is written in these verses is related to money, greed, and covetousness. If we are not pure concerning money, if we are not sincere, honest, and faithful regarding it, we may be among those who adulterate the word of God and peddle it. Furthermore, this motive may cause us to use flattery and to have a pretext for covetousness. All these are serious matters. Therefore, if we would be a proper pattern for young saints, our greed must be dealt with, and money

matters must be under our feet. We should never speak words of flattery, we should never have any pretext, and we should never seek glory for ourselves. Moreover, instead of trying to please man, we should do our best to please God. Then other believers will have a good pattern to follow.

If you consider the situation among believers today, you will realize that many Christians have no sense of direction. The reason for this lack of direction is that they do not have a proper pattern. We need to be a pattern to others and foster them, cherishing them as mothers and exhorting them as fathers to walk worthily of God. As we have pointed out in a foregoing message, to walk worthily of God is actually to live God. Only a life that lives God is worthy of God. When we live God, we walk worthily of Him. Such a walk will lead us into the kingdom and usher us into the glory of God. This is the goal of God's calling. God has called us to enter His kingdom and glory.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST THESSALONIANS

MESSAGE THIRTEEN

THE REWARD OF FOSTERING

Scripture Reading: 1 Thes. 2:13-20

In chapter one we have the structure and origin of a holy life for the church life. In chapter two we have the fostering of this life. When reading chapter two, we may have the feeling that Paul places too much emphasis on the apostles' entrance among the Thessalonians and the way they lived among them. We may think that Paul should have given the new believers more doctrine, teaching, and instructions. Instead, Paul emphasizes the apostles' coming, their preaching and teaching of the Word, and how the new believers accepted this word. Paul's emphasis is on the apostles' conduct, on their living and manner of life. The reason for this emphasis is that Paul wanted to nourish the believers, to cherish and foster them. It was not Paul's intention to give them a lot of knowledge. He did not have the burden to teach them so many things. In the twenty verses of chapter two there is actually very little teaching. In verse 12 he does say that God has called the believers into His kingdom and glory; however, he does not develop these matters or explain them. Rather, in verse after verse, Paul mentions his manner of life, his way of preaching, and his being a pattern to the believers.

THE WORK OF FOSTERING

What we have in chapter two of 1 Thessalonians is the fostering of the young Christian life. In this chapter Paul is nourishing and cherishing the believers. According to his writing, he behaves himself as a nursing mother and an exhorting father. On the one hand, he is a mother cherishing; on the other hand, he is a father exhorting. His

main concern is not teaching, but the carrying out of a fostering work to help the young saints to grow.

Most Christian workers lack the concept that their work should not mainly be a work of teaching, but should be a work of fostering. Paul's concept concerning his work was one of helping believers to grow. For this reason, in 1 Corinthians 3 he says that he planted and Apollos watered, and then God gave the growth. This indicates that Paul's concept of Christian work is that it is a work of life. It is not work in a school; on the contrary, it is work on a farm, in an orchard, in a garden. Hence, it is not mainly a work of teaching others or educating them. But today the work of most Christians is mainly for education and somewhat for edification. This edification, however, is not directly related to life. Instead, it is related to ethics, morality, or the improvement of character. But with Paul the concept of Christian work was altogether different.

According to what he says in chapter two, Paul regards the believers as members of a large family. Of course in a family there is the need for some amount of teaching. Both a mother and a father teach their children. However, in a family the focus is not on teaching the children, but is on raising them by cherishing, nourishing, and fostering them so that they may grow. Their growth is not mainly in knowledge; it is primarily a growth in life. As children grow in life, they spontaneously receive more education. The knowledge they acquire always goes along with their growth in life. They should not be given knowledge prematurely. This means that their knowledge should not exceed their growth of life. This is the proper concept of Christian work.

Concerning this matter, we in the Lord's recovery must have a change in our concept. Do not think that in the recovery we regard work higher than life. No, we need to concentrate on life. The church is a family. The church may also be compared to a farm or a garden. A family is a place where children grow up, and an orchard is a place where trees grow and produce fruit. Paul's concern in chapter two is with the growth of his children. He is fostering the young

believers so that they may grow. We may also say that he is watering, nourishing and cherishing the tender young plants so that they may grow in life. This is the reason that instead of giving the believers a great deal of teaching, he presents them a pattern of life. This pattern of a proper living is actually Paul himself.

GROWING BY IMITATING

Some Christian teachers say that a believer should not give a testimony concerning himself. According to these teachers, to testify of our experience is to preach ourselves. Therefore, they advise others not to speak of how they have repented, believed in the Lord, received grace, and have been saved. These teachers insist strongly that we should preach only the Lord Jesus and teach the Bible, but should never say anything about ourselves. In 1 Thessalonians 2, however, Paul certainly speaks about himself. He gives a strong testimony of his living among the Thessalonians. He reminds them of the apostles coming and of their manner of life among them. Why did Paul emphasize this? He emphasized it because he was presenting a pattern of a proper living to the young saints. I hope that all the elders and leading ones will see from Paul's example that we must be a pattern to the saints. In every local church there must be some patterns, some models, for others to follow.

In 1:6 Paul says to the Thessalonians "You became imitators of us and of the Lord." Imitating is related to growing. In fact, in many ways to imitate is to grow. In a family children imitate their parents and older brothers and sisters. The little ones do not invent anything; instead, they imitate others. A very good illustration of this is in the use of language. A child learns the language spoken by his parents. He speaks the same language with the same accent. A child learns the language and the accent by imitation. This illustrates the fact that children grow by imitating their parents. Therefore, in a family to imitate actually means to grow. The children imitate their parents in many things--in gestures, in speech, and even in

character. Parents are patterns, models, for their children. Whatever the parents are, the children will be also.

PRESENTING A PATTERN

To give the new believers and young ones a lot of teaching is not the proper way to take care of them. The proper way to foster them is to show them a pattern. By showing them a pattern you water them, supply them, nourish them, and cherish them. This is fostering. If you find that your experience is somewhat lacking, point the new believers to different people in the Bible, for example, to ones such as Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and David in the Old Testament and Peter, John, Paul, and Timothy in the New Testament. We can present the lives of Bible characters in such a way as to foster the growth of the young ones.

If we give too much teaching to new ones and young ones, we shall damage them. Every mother knows that one of the most important matters in the raising of children is proper feeding. Caring for children is ninety percent a matter of feeding and ten percent a matter of teaching. This also should be our practice in caring for new believers in the church. We must learn to have ninety percent feeding and ten percent teaching. Feeding involves the presenting of patterns either from the Bible or from church history. By reading the biographies of saints throughout the ages, we nourish ourselves and experience a kind of fostering. The point here is that the best way to feed others and foster them is to give them a proper pattern. If there is no pattern, there can be no fostering. Only by having a pattern can we feed others.

In the book of 1 Thessalonians Paul was not preaching himself. Rather, he was feeding his spiritual children with his own living of Christ. This means that Paul's way of living was used to feed his spiritual children. This was the reason he emphasized his coming to the Thessalonians, his preaching, his way of handling the word of God, and his manner of living.

THE OPERATING WORD OF GOD

In 2:13 Paul says, "And therefore we also give thanks to God unceasingly that, having received the word of the report from us of God, you accepted it not as the word of men, but even as it truly is, the word of God, which also operates in you who believe." This verse indicates that the source, the origin, of the apostles' preaching was God and not themselves. The Thessalonians received their word not as the word of men, but as the word of God. Here we see a governing principle: whenever we preach or teach, we must impress others with the fact that what we are saying is not the word of man, but is truly the word of God.

In verse 13 Paul says that the word of God operates in those who believe. Because the word of God is living and operative (Heb. 4:12), it operates in the believing ones. Once we receive and accept the word, it operates within us.

IMITATORS OF THE CHURCHES

In verse 14 Paul continues, "For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus; for you also suffered the same things of your own countrymen, even as they also of the Jews." The apostle taught the same thing in all the churches (1 Cor. 4:17; 7:17; 11:16). This indicates that all the churches should bear the same testimony of Jesus. Hence, they all are lampstands of the same kind (Rev. 1:9, 20).

The church in Thessalonica imitated the churches in Judea. Certainly reports concerning the churches in Judea reached the believers in Thessalonica. How could the Thessalonians have imitated the churches in Judea if they had not heard anything concerning them? They must have heard about the churches and the saints. These reports fostered the growth of the Thessalonian believers. Once again we see that nothing can foster a church or a saint as much as a true story about other saints or churches.

In verse 14 Paul points out that the Thessalonians suffered the same things of their own countrymen as the churches in Judea suffered of the Jews. This is a

comforting, strengthening, and fostering word. When Paul wrote, the church in Thessalonica was suffering and was being persecuted. In the midst of their persecution, they heard about the sufferings of those in Judea. This report strengthened, comforted, and established them. It helped to foster them in their growth.

INOCULATION

Verse 15 continues, "Who have both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and are not pleasing to God, and are contrary to all men." Paul was wise in writing this verse. Here he is inoculating the believers against the eventual coming of the Judaizers. Paul injected a healthy warning concerning the Judaizers into the Thessalonian saints. Here Paul seems to be saying, "Brothers, don't regard Jewish things as marvelous. The Jews are not for God, and they are not one with God. They killed the Lord Jesus, and they also drove us out. Be prepared, Thessalonians, for one day the Judaizers will come to you to undermine what we have done. Don't take their word, for they are against us. They are contrary to all men, and they are not pleasing to God." This surely was an excellent inoculation.

This inoculating word was also part of Paul's fostering of the saints. Even inoculation is included in fostering. In caring for their children, parents seek to protect them from disease. Even in caring for a garden we try to protect the plants from disease or insects. Otherwise, disease may ruin the plants, and the insects may devour them, especially the tender parts. Therefore, in order to protect a garden, we may spray the plants with insecticide. We may say that in this verse Paul was giving the believers at Thessalonica a divine germ-repellent. He warned them not to have any confidence in the Jews or to give them any credit. On the contrary, the Thessalonians were to reject them.

Paul continues this warning in verse 16, where he says of the Jews, "Forbidding us to speak to the nations that they may be saved, that they may fill up their sins always. But wrath has come upon them to the end." Paul points

that the Jews did not want the Thessalonians to hear the word of the apostles in order to be saved. This word is part of Paul's inoculation.

BEREAVED OF THE SAINTS

In verse 17 Paul goes on to say, "But we, brothers, being bereaved of you for a little while in presence, not in heart were more abundantly eager with much desire to see your face." This word implies that the apostles considered the new converts precious and dear to them. Paul likened their departure from them to a bereavement, a loss they suffered from being separated from them and that caused them to miss them. In this verse we also see the apostles' yearning over the new converts.

In verse 17 Paul seems to be saying, "Brothers, we have been bereaved of you. We wanted to stay with you, and we miss you very much. But although we are bereaved of you in presence, we are not bereaved of you in heart. In our heart we are still with you. We are very eager with much desire to see your face."

Paul's word in verses 15 through 17 is emotional. Because he was emotional, he could touch the emotion of others. When Paul spoke about the Jews negatively, he was emotional. Likewise, when he spoke about the apostles positively, he was also very emotional. Paul's expression of deep emotion caused the believers to love the apostles and to shut out the Judaizers. This too is related to fostering children, to protecting them, to raising them without their being damaged by negative things.

Paul certainly knew how to foster the saints. He spoke about himself in such a way as to foster them and also to inoculate them. In fostering the Thessalonians, Paul pointed out to them that the Jews who opposed and persecuted needed to be shut out, but the Jews who came to them as apostles were lovable.

HINDERED BY SATAN

In verse 18 Paul says, "Wherefore we wanted to come to you, indeed, I Paul, both once and again and Satan

hindered us." Because the apostles were carrying out the will of God, Satan frustrated them. Paul put the blame on Satan. In so doing he was telling the Thessalonians to shut out the Judaizers and to hate Satan. The apostles were eager to see the believers at Thessalonica, but they were hindered by Satan.

HOPE, JOY, AND CROWN

In verses 19 and 20 Paul concludes, "For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting? Are not even you, before our Lord Jesus at His coming? For you are our glory and joy." The Greek word rendered coming in verse 19 is *parousia*, a word that means presence. The Lord's coming is His presence with us. In this light these two earlier Epistles were written. Every chapter of the first Epistle ends with the Lord's coming back.

Verse 20 indicates that since the apostles were the believers' nursing mother and exhorting father (vv. 7, 11), the believers, as their children, were their glory and joy. Apart from them, the apostles had no hope, glory, or crown of boasting.

Here Paul seems to be saying, "You are our hope, our joy, and our crown of boasting. Brothers, we are here only for you; we are not here for anything else. If we do not have you, we do not have anything. You are our hope, even as your hope is the Lord's coming back. Without you, at the Lord's coming back we shall be short of joy and glory. We need you! You are our hope, our joy, our crown, and our glory before the Lord Jesus at His coming." Once again Paul expressed deep emotion in caring for his children. He certainly was a father exhorting his children. As such an exhorting father, it seems as if Paul was saying, "Children, we are here only for you. Without you, life is meaningless. If it were not for you, we would not want even to live." Such a word from parents is deeply touching; it touches the heart of the children.

Would you not be touched deeply if your parents wrote such a word to you? Would you not be touched if they said that without you life is meaningless, that they are living

on earth only for you? No doubt, when you heard or read such a word, your tears would flow. This kind of speaking fosters children and helps them to grow.

As a good father, Paul knew how to touch the heart of his children. If you are able to touch the heart of others, you will be successful in fostering their growth. The best way to foster others is to touch their heart deeply.

THE GOAL OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Let us look once again at verse 12. Here Paul says, "That you should walk worthily of God, Who calls you into His own kingdom and glory." This verse indicates that our Christian life is a life with the kingdom as its goal. We need to walk worthily of God, the One who calls us into His kingdom and glory. This verse tells us clearly that the Christian life has a goal and that this goal is the kingdom of God. We are moving toward this goal, this destination. Our destination, and also our destiny, is to enter God's kingdom. The kingdom, a major subject in the New Testament, is the unique goal of our Christian walk.

Our goal is not heaven. According to the New Testament, the kingdom is our goal. First Thessalonians 2:12 does not say that God has called us to heaven, but says that He has called us with the goal of entering into His kingdom. This kingdom involves God's glory. When we enter into the kingdom, we shall certainly be in glory. The kingdom of God with the glory of God is far more excellent than a so-called heavenly mansion.

Paul's work with the new believers nourished them, cherished them, and fostered them to walk worthily of God so that they might enter into His kingdom and participate in His glory. This is the goal of the Christian life.

RECEIVING A REWARD

In verses 19 and 20 Paul indicates that those who work with the Lord in fostering the believers to walk worthily of God will receive a reward. This reward will be the believers we have fostered becoming our crown, glory, and joy. What a glory it would be to any Christian worker for the
ones
he

has fostered to be matured at the Lord's coming back! What a crown and joy this would be to him! But on the contrary what a shame it would be if none of the believers had grown and matured.

Many of us are working with young saints. The result of our work should be the maturing of these believers. If they mature properly, they will be in the kingdom participating in God's glory. This maturity will then become our crown, joy, and boast before the Lord Jesus at His coming. Suppose, however, that we work continually with new believers, but to no avail. If this is the situation at the Lord's coming back there will be no result of our work. What a shame that would be! When the Lord Jesus comes, the result of our work will be manifested. That result will also be our reward, our crown, our joy.

We see the same principle in 1 Peter 5:4. Here Peter says that the elders will be rewarded with a crown of glory. However, this reward will depend on the result of their eldership. If as a result of their eldership the saints mature that maturity will become a crown of glory to the elders. That will then be their reward.

Chapter two of 1 Thessalonians is a healthy word for us all. From this chapter we learn how to work with the young ones and the new ones so that they may be fostered to grow into maturity and that there may be a positive result of our work before the Lord at His coming. This result will then be our crown and glory as the reward of our work today.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST THESSALONIANS

MESSAGE FOURTEEN

ENCOURAGEMENT FOR FAITH, LOVE, AND HOPE

Scripture Reading: 1 Thes. 3:1-13

ESTABLISHING AND ENCOURAGING

In chapter one of 1 Thessalonians we have the structure and origin of a holy life for the church life, and in chapter two we have the fostering of this life. Now in chapter three we have the establishing of a holy life for the church life. We have seen that this holy life is constructed of faith, love, and hope. Along with fostering, this life needs to be established. Its establishment involves the three main aspects of its structure; that is, it involves faith, love, and hope. In chapter three Paul is establishing the believers' faith, love, and hope.

We should keep in mind that 1 Thessalonians is a book written to new believers. Therefore, everything in this Epistle is presented in a brief way, not in a profound way. This principle applies in particular to chapter three. In writing this chapter, Paul sought to avoid profound terms. His word here can be compared to that of a father given to young children. But although Paul speaks in a brief way, he covers a number of crucial points.

In 3:1 Paul says, "Wherefore, when we could bear it no longer, it seemed good for us to be left in Athens alone." Athens was the chief city of the province of Achaia of the Roman Empire. In this city the Apostle Paul preached the gospel to philosophical Greeks (Acts 17:15-34).

The word "wherefore" at the beginning of this verse refers us to the previous chapter, especially to verses 17 and 18. These verses say, "But we, brothers, being bereaved of you for a little while in presence, not in heart, were more abundantly eager with much desire to see your

face. Wherefore we wanted to come to you, indeed, I Paul, both once and again, and Satan hindered us." The apostles had been bereaved of the Thessalonian believers in presence and were intensely eager to see them again. This was the reason Paul says in 3:1 that he could bear the situation no longer. The word "wherefore" in verse 1 indicates that chapter three is a continuation of 2:17 and 18. Paul was willing to remain in Athens alone and, as he says in verse 2, to send Timothy to Thessalonica.

Verse 2 continues, "And we sent Timothy, our brother and God's fellow-worker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and encourage you for the sake of your faith." Instead of fellow-worker, some manuscripts read "minister of God." The minister of God is God's fellow-worker (1 Cor. 3:9; 2 Cor. 6:1). What a privilege! What a blessing!

Timothy was sent to the Thessalonians to encourage them for the sake of their faith. This indicates that what is covered in chapter three is related to establishing and encouraging. In speaking of the Thessalonians' faith, Paul returns to the matter of the structure of a holy life for the church life covered in chapter one. His concern in chapter three is with the establishing of such a life.

If we are established in our faith, we shall not be shaken by affliction. Concerning this, Paul says in verse 3, "That no one be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed for this." If we are established in the faith, afflictions will do good to us (Rom. 8:28) according to God's purpose in His appointment. Otherwise, we may be shaken by the tempter (1 Thes. 3:5) through the afflictions. The Greek word rendered "appointed" also means destined, set, located. God has destined, appointed, us to pass through afflictions. Hence, afflictions are God's allotted portion to us, and He has set us, located us, in the situation of afflictions.

TWO ASPECTS OF FAITH

We need to consider carefully the meaning of faith in 1 Thessalonians 3. In verse 2 faith is not only subjective,

referring to the saints' believing, as in verses 5, 6, and 10, but also objective, referring to what they believe in, as in 1 Timothy 3:9; 4:1; and 2 Timothy 4:7. These two aspects of faith involve each other. Our believing (subjective faith) is out of the things we believe and in the things we believe (objective faith).

The word faith in 1 Thessalonians is somewhat difficult to understand. The reason for this difficulty is that in the New Testament there are two aspects of faith, the objective aspect and the subjective aspect. Doctrinally speaking, the objective aspect comes first and produces the subjective aspect. The objective faith denotes those things in which we believe for our salvation. It includes the content of the new covenant. Thus, the content of the new covenant is equal to the objective faith. This aspect of faith is emphasized strongly in a book like 1 Timothy. For example, 1 Timothy 1:19 speaks of the faith. The faith in that verse is objective and refers to the things we believe in. However, the same verse also mentions subjective faith when it speaks of "holding faith and a good conscience." This subjective faith refers to our act of believing.

Christians often speak of the faith in an objective sense. Someone may ask what your faith is, meaning what you believe. This aspect of faith, the objective aspect, is not a matter of our action of believing, but a matter of what we believe. This objective faith includes the contents of God's New Testament economy.

When we receive a word concerning the objective faith, the contents of God's New Testament economy, spontaneously subjective faith is produced in us. We respond to the objective faith by believing. This means that we hear of the objective faith, and then subjective faith rises up in us. This subjective faith is our act of believing.

Subjective faith does not happen once for all. On the contrary, from the time we began to believe, the action of believing has been going within us, for the Christian life is a life of faith, a life of believing. Day by day we are living a believing life. We do not live according to what we see; we live according to what we believe. As Paul says, "We

walk by faith, not by appearance" (2 Cor. 5:7). Our walk is by faith, not by sight.

All the matters we are talking about in these messages are matters of faith. For example, Colossians 1:27 says that Christ is in us to be our hope of glory. We receive this word in faith. By faith we believe in His coming back, and by faith we await a crown. Our speaking concerning these things is altogether by faith. Therefore, those who do not have faith do not have any idea of what we are saying. To them, our word is either superstitious or nonsensical. They can neither believe it nor accept it. Worldly people, unbelievers, do not have faith. As a result, they cannot understand what we are saying or the way we are living. Our living is absolutely a life of believing.

The objective aspect of faith is profound. We cannot say that we are perfect or altogether complete with respect to the objective faith. God's economy is profound. The content of His economy is Christ as the all-inclusive and all-extensive One. It is because God's economy is so profound and rich in its content that we dare not say that the objective faith has been perfected among us. We need to see that our objective faith includes the all-inclusive and all-extensive Christ as the content of God's economy. We do not yet know this content adequately or realize it fully. Thus, we still need to lay hold of more of the all-inclusive Christ, more of Christ as the content of our objective faith.

Praise the Lord that this objective faith produces subjective believing! When we receive a revelation concerning Christ, we cannot keep ourselves from believing in Him. Faith is spontaneously infused into our being, and we automatically believe in Christ. Unbelievers find it impossible to believe that Christ is in us. We, however, cannot help but believe that Christ lives in us. He is in us to be our life, our life supply, and our everything. We have seen a vision of the indwelling Christ, and we have no choice except to believe that He is actually in us. Because we have seen a revelation regarding the content of God's economy, we cannot help believing in what we have seen.

We have been infused with the ability to believe, and now we have subjective faith, the inward action of believing.

PAUL'S CONCERN

When Paul says that Timothy was sent to establish and encourage the believers for the sake of their faith, did he mean objective faith or subjective faith? It is not easy to determine whether the faith in verse 2 is objective or subjective. Actually, faith in this verse denotes both the objective and subjective aspects of faith. It includes both what we believe and our action of believing. The brothers sent Timothy to see how the believers in Thessalonica were doing in these two aspects of faith. Were they still holding the objective faith, and how strongly did they believe in it? How well were they keeping the objective faith, and to what extent were they believing in it? Paul's concern was to know this. In verses 2 and 3 he seems to be saying, "Brothers, I am concerned that you may have been shaken through the afflictions. To be shaken is to lose faith. It is to lose the view of the objective faith and also to lose the subjective ability to believe! I am concerned about both aspects of your faith."

Those who are burdened to work with new believers must learn to watch over their faith and to care for how they are doing in both the subjective and objective aspects of faith. Is their faith increasing or decreasing? Are they growing in their ability to believe? We must ask questions such as these in caring for young believers. This is to have the concern Paul had for the faith of the Thessalonians in sending Timothy to establish and encourage them.

In verse 4 Paul says, "For even when we were with you, we told you beforehand that we are about to be afflicted, even as it also came to pass, and you know." The Greek word rendered "told" is in the imperfect tense, a tense indicating repeated action. Paul was continually telling the believers beforehand that the apostles would be afflicted. This affliction came according to Paul's prediction.

In verse 5 Paul goes on to say, "Because of this, when I also could bear it no longer, I sent to know your faith, lest

somehow the tempter had tempted you, and our labor would be in vain." The tempter here is the subtle Devil, the old serpent, who tempted Eve (Gen. 3:1-6; 1 Tim. 2:14). The aim of this subtle tempter is to destroy the gospel work accomplished through God's fellow-workers. Paul was concerned that the afflictions, sufferings, and persecutions would be used by the tempter to shake the Thessalonians from their faith and to cause a loss of faith among them. Because he could no longer bear not knowing about their faith, Paul sent Timothy to them to know what was the situation with them regarding their faith.

Once again, the faith in verse 5 includes both objective faith and the subjective faith. Paul was eager to know both aspects of the Thessalonians' faith.

Faith is the first item in the basic structure of the Christian life, a holy life for the church life. Those who backslide, including many who leave the church life, experience some loss of faith. They may not lose their faith absolutely, but they may lose it at least in part. They may no longer have a view of the objective faith, of the contents of God's New Testament economy. While such ones were in the church life, they did have a view. They saw Christ, they saw the church, and they saw God's economy. They saw God's recovery and how the Triune God is dispensing Himself into us. However, they have gradually come to lose sight of these matters. Whenever someone loses sight of the contents of God's economy, the subjective faith, the believing action within him, also diminishes. The ability within us to believe is always a product, a result, an issue, of having a proper view of God's economy. Therefore, it is a dreadful matter to lose sight of God's economy.

In the meetings of the church and of the ministry, it is as if we are all watching a heavenly television to see more of God's economy. The more we see this heavenly television, the more we believe. We spontaneously believe in what we see. Therefore, we come away from meetings full of the ability to believe. The meetings of the church and the ministry enlarge our capacity to believe.

A good Christian worker is a person who continually

infuses others with the divine view, helping them to see the marvelous scenes on the heavenly television and to be impressed by them. When the heavenly view is conveyed into us, transmitted into us, we have the ability to believe. By believing we are connected to a divine transmission. This transmission is the flowing of heavenly electricity. By believing we "switch on" to this flow.

We know from verse 5 that Paul was concerned that the tempter had tempted the Thessalonians and that the apostles' labor among them had been in vain. Paul knew that once we lose sight of the contents of God's economy, we shall be shaken and removed from the line of faith. Then whatever we have heard concerning God's economy will be in vain. This fact is illustrated in the lives of many who have left the church life. Their situation confirms that when we lose sight of God's economy, all that we heard becomes vain.

ENCOURAGED THROUGH THE BELIEVERS' FAITH

Timothy returned to Paul with good news, telling him that their labor among the Thessalonians was not in vain. Paul refers to this report in verse 6: "But Timothy, having just come to us from you, and bringing good news to us of your faith and love, and that you have good remembrance of us always, longing to see us, even as we also you." This good news concerning the Thessalonians' faith assured Paul that their labor among them had not been in vain.

The apostle was in Corinth after leaving Athens (Acts 17:15-16; 18:1, 5). It was here that he wrote this loving letter to the dear saints in Thessalonica for their encouragement.

In verse 6 Paul speaks of both faith and love. Love is the outflow, the issue, of faith. We have seen that faith is the foundation, love is the building, and hope is the topstone. In writing an establishing word to the Thessalonians, Paul first covers faith and gradually brings in love. Therefore, in verse 6 he speaks of the believers' faith and love.

Verse 7 says, "Because of this we were encouraged over you, brothers, in all our necessity and affliction, through

your faith." The sound condition of the believers is always an encouragement to God's fellow-workers, who work with them and bear them as a burden. The Greek word rendered "necessity" can also be translated distress. It denotes an urgent need resulting from calamity. A calamity puts people into a position of having an urgent need for necessary supplies such as food, water, clothing, and housing. Even though the apostles were in necessity, in distress, they were encouraged over the Thessalonians through their faith. Once again Paul speaks concerning faith.

In verse 8 Paul goes on to say, "Because now we live if you stand firm in the Lord." The believers' firm standing in the Lord ministers life to the apostles. To stand firm in the Lord is in contrast to being shaken from the faith (v. 3). If the young believers you are working with stand firm in the Lord, that standing will certainly minister the life supply to you.

PERFECTING WHAT IS LACKING

Verses 9 and 10 say, "For what thanks can we return to God concerning you, for all the joy with which we rejoice because of you before our God, night and day beseeching exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith?" The Greek word translated "perfect" in verse 10 also means complete. The same Greek word is used in 2 Corinthians 13:9. The believers at Thessalonica, being young in the Lord, were still lacking in their new faith. The apostle realized this with much loving concern for them. This is the reason he wrote this Epistle.

When Paul wrote the book of 1 Thessalonians, the believers at Thessalonica probably had been Christians for less than a year. To be sure, they needed to see much more concerning the contents of God's economy. Likewise, even many of us who have been in the recovery for years may still be lacking in our view of the all-inclusive and all-extensive Christ as the content of God's economy. This means that we still have a lack in the objective faith.

Having such a lack in the objective faith, we also have a shortage in subjective faith. Because our seeing is limited, our believing ability is also limited. Our ability to believe depends on our seeing, on our view. During the time we have been in the recovery, our view concerning Christ and God's economy has been broadened. Since our view has been broadened, our objective faith has increased. This results in an increased ability to believe.

Night and day, exceedingly, Paul prayed that the apostles might see the Thessalonians face to face in order to perfect what was lacking in their faith. In these verses Paul seems to be saying, "You Thessalonians have been in the Lord only a short time. Surely there is a lack both in your objective faith and subjective believing. Many things have not yet been opened to you or shown to you. We would like to visit you again in order to show you more of Christ. Then, having a greater view of Christ, your objective faith will be broadened and, spontaneously, your subjective faith will be increased. This is your need, and this is our burden in praying to see you again."

AN EMPHASIS ON LOVE

In 3:1-10 Paul has mainly dealt with faith as the first item of the structure of a holy life for the church life. Beginning in verse 11 he emphasizes love: "Now our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you; and the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love to one another and to all, even as we also to you." Verses 11 and 12 are mainly on love. The apostle's concern for the young believers is first their faith. Following faith is love, which issues from faith and works together with faith (Gal. 5:6; 1 Tim. 1:14) as an indication of growth in life (1 Thes. 1:3). It was necessary for the Thessalonians' love to increase, to grow. Therefore, Paul first wanted to perfect their faith and then encourage them to increase and abound in love. He knew that love would flow out of their faith. Then they would have a living in love, a love to the saints in their locality and to all believers everywhere.

In verse 11 the word "direct" in Greek is in the singular.

This indicates that the apostle considers God the Father and the Lord Jesus as one. How good it is to have our way in the ministry directed by such a One! And how beautiful are the footsteps of the apostles in their carrying out of this One's ministry for the fulfilling of His purpose!

HEARTS ESTABLISHED BLAMELESS IN HOLINESS

In verse 13 Paul concludes, "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." The establishing of the believers' hearts blameless issues from faith and love, as mentioned in the preceding verses. This spontaneously produces the hope of the coming back of our dear Lord, in whom we believe and whom we love. Hence, faith, love, and hope are again the implied factors in the construction of this Epistle.

If our faith is perfected and our love grows, increases, and abounds, the result will be a hope of having our hearts established blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of the Lord Jesus with all His saints. These saints are the believers in Christ, including the Old Testament saints (Dan. 7:18, 21-22, 25, 27; Zech. 14:5). Although verse 13 does not use the word hope, hope is nonetheless implied or indicated. The establishing of a holy life for the church life is thus related to its structure composed of faith, love, and hope.

WORKING WITH NEW BELIEVERS

Paul's way to take care of new believers is very different from that followed by many Christians today. His way is to show the new believers that they have been regenerated of God the Father and brought into an organic union with the Lord Jesus Christ and thereby have the structure of a holy life. All genuine Christians, whether old or young, have such a structure of a holy life for the church life. This life is the proper Christian life.

Many Christians do not have a proper Christian life. Furthermore, they do not have any idea concerning the church life. Many do not even know what it means to live a

holy life. A holy life is a life entirely separated unto God, sanctified. To live a holy life is to have a life absolutely for God, by God, with God, and in God. This holy life is for the church life. The holy life for the church life is what Paul is covering in this Epistle addressed to new believers.

As real Christians, we all have this kind of life within us. Now we need to live it. This life has a structure composed of faith, love, and hope. Our work with new believers should foster this life; it should nourish and cherish it so that it may grow. Moreover, we must learn how to establish, strengthen, and encourage this life in its structure of faith, love, and hope.

Faith is a matter of seeing a view of the contents of God's New Testament economy. Once we have the view, we shall believe in what we see. This faith is the foundation of our Christian life. Out of our faith love will flow forth. In the church life we are living a life of love. We should love everyone: those believers who meet with us and those who do not and also the unbelievers. This love is the issue of our faith. Furthermore, we shall then have a life that is full of hope. We are living for Christ, we are expressing Him, and we are even His Body. As we wait for His coming back, we are filled with hope. Our hope, destiny, and destination are not on this earth. They are altogether focused on the coming back of the Lord Jesus.

If we see the structure, origin, fostering, and establishment of a holy life for the church life, we shall have a direction in our work with new believers. We shall help them to realize that, as genuine Christians, they already have the structure of a holy life for the church life. Then we shall foster this life and establish its faith, love, and hope.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST THESSALONIANS

MESSAGE FIFTEEN

AN EXHORTATION CONCERNING A HOLY LIFE FOR THE CHURCH LIFE

Scripture Reading: 1 Thes. 4:1-12

The Epistle of 1 Thessalonians was written to new believers, to those who had been in the Lord less than a year. For this reason, in the first three chapters of this book, we cannot find anything to compare with what is revealed in Romans, Ephesians, or Galatians. Paul stayed with the Thessalonians for approximately a month. In that short period of time he did not have the opportunity to cover many deeper truths. For this reason, in 3:10 he expressed his desire to come to the Thessalonians and perfect what was lacking in their faith. To be sure, these new believers were lacking in many aspects of the faith revealed in Romans, Ephesians, and Galatians. Therefore, Paul wanted to visit them again so that he could minister to them the contents of the faith so that their faith would increase and be perfected.

We all need to have a broad view of God's economy. Once we see such a view, we shall spontaneously believe in what we see. We cannot help but believe after seeing a view. Believing comes from this kind of spiritual seeing. Paul's writings take us on a tour to show us heavenly, spiritual things concerning Christ, His achievements and attainments, and what He has obtained. The more we see concerning this, the more we shall be impressed, and the more faith we shall have. We shall find that it is simply impossible not to believe.

We have emphasized the fact that in 1 Thessalonians we have a word to beginners, to new believers. Those who are working with young people or with new believers can

receive from this book both a direction and an outline to follow. If they follow this outline and direction, they will lay a good foundation in their work with new believers.

A WORD OF WARNING

In this message we come to chapter four of 1 Thessalonians. In chapter one we have the structure and origin of a holy life for the church life; in chapter two, the fostering of such a life; and in chapter three the establishing of the three items of the basic structure of this life. After covering these matters, in chapter four Paul injects an inoculation into the believers concerning the most serious germ that damages the church life, the germ of fornication.

Fornication has its source in lust. People would never have a chance to indulge themselves in this lust if they did not have some form of social life. Social life is a hotbed of fornication. A person who does not have a social life is not in danger of falling into fornication. If you live alone and have little contact with others, it is very unlikely that you will commit fornication. But the church life is a meeting life, a communal life. In other words, the church life is a social life. In order to have the church life, we cannot avoid having a communal life, a social life, in which we have considerable contact with one another.

According to history, the problem of fornication has come up over and over again in one church after another. The facts prove that Christian workers in particular are often snared by fornication because they have so much contact with others. Furthermore, fornication has been the factor in damage caused to those in the Pentecostal movement. In certain places this movement has been limited because of the sin of fornication.

In 4:3 Paul says, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that you abstain from fornication." God's will is that His redeemed people, the believers in Christ, should live a life of holiness according to His holy nature, a life wholly separated unto Him from anything other than Him. For this He is sanctifying us thoroughly (5:23).

At Paul's time, both in Corinth and Thessalonica

sensuality and immorality were rife in the pagan religions and even fostered by their pagan worship. Man was made for expressing God (Gen. 1:26). Nothing ruins man for this purpose more than fornication. This prevents man from being holy, separated unto God, and contaminates man to the uttermost in the fulfilling of God's holy purpose. Hence, the apostle strongly charges the newly converted Gentile believers, by sanctification unto God, to abstain from the damage and contamination of fornication, the most gross sin in the eyes of God.

Here in 1 Thessalonians 4 Paul gives us a warning concerning fornication. He also spoke strongly about fornication in 1 Corinthians. Because there was so much immorality in Corinth and Thessalonica, Paul realized that along with fostering and establishing the saints in Thessalonica, it was necessary for him to warn them about the sin of fornication. Now we can understand why in a book to new believers Paul thought it necessary to speak about fornication. He wanted the saints in that evil city to be aware of the danger. As the church in such a place, they needed a warning about fornication.

In 1 Corinthians 16:20 Paul says, "Greet one another with a holy kiss." Paul did not forbid the Corinthians to have contact with one another, for that would have been inhuman. However, Paul charged them to greet one another with a holy kiss. Such a word was written against the background of the situation in Corinth. In the same principle, fornication is dealt with in 1 Thessalonians 4 because of the environment of Thessalonica. A young church had been raised up in the midst of an evil, immoral environment. Knowing that it would be difficult for the church in that city to avoid problems with fornication, Paul issued a warning regarding it.

We also need this warning today. In the United States and Europe males and females have social contact with hardly any limitation. Because of this situation, it is easy for people to fall into fornication. In order for churches to exist in these regions, there is a need of a warning concerning fornication.

As we read 4:1-12, we see that Paul's tone here is one of warning. The tone is different from that found in the first three chapters. After Paul has completed his task of fostering and establishing a holy life for the church life, he changes his tone. The first warning he gives us concerns fornication. As we shall see, in his warning about fornication, Paul brings in the wonderful matter of sanctification.

SANCTIFICATION VERSUS FORNICATION

In 4:1 Paul says, "For the rest therefore, brothers, we ask and entreat you in the Lord Jesus, that even as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, even as indeed you do walk, that you abound more." In verse 3 Paul says that the will of God is our sanctification. This sanctification is versus fornication. In order to have a walk that pleases God, we need to be sanctified.

Nothing damages a believer as much as fornication. According to Paul's word in 1 Corinthians 6, fornication ruins a person's body. Other sins may not damage us subjectively, but fornication damages our body, contaminates our entire being, and makes us utterly unholy. Moreover, fornication is used by God's enemy to spoil the man God created for the fulfillment of His purpose. Therefore, fornication must be altogether abandoned. This is the reason Paul says in 4:3, "Abstain from fornication." The word "abstain" is strong, and it indicates that we should run away from fornication. God's will is to have us fully separated unto Himself, wholly sanctified for the fulfillment of His purpose. This requires that we abstain from fornication.

In verses 4 and 5 Paul continues, "That each one of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in the passion of lust, even as also the nations who do not know God." To possess one's vessel is to keep it, to preserve it. There are two schools of interpretation of the word vessel here; one refers the vessel to man's body, as in 2 Corinthians 4:7; the other to his wife, as in 1 Peter 3:7. The context in this verse and the following one, with

phrases "each one of you," "in sanctification and honor," and especially "not in the passion of lust," does not justify the interpretation of the second school, but that of the first. The apostle considers man's body here as his vessel, just as David did in 1 Samuel 21:5. In the same matter concerning the use of the body, both Paul and David consider man's body as his vessel. To keep or preserve man's vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, is the safeguard against committing fornication.

Sanctification refers more to a holy condition before God; honor, more to a respectable standing before man. Man was created for God's purpose with a high standing, and marriage was ordained by God for the propagation of man to fulfill God's purpose. Hence, marriage should be held in honor (Heb. 13:4). To abstain from fornication is not only to remain in a sanctified condition before God, but also to hold and keep a standing of honor before man. Whenever someone becomes involved in fornication, he is contaminated, and his sanctification is annulled. Moreover, he loses honor before man. Not even unbelievers honor those who commit fornication. Therefore, we must know how to possess, keep, preserve, our own body in sanctification toward God and in honor before man. We must be those who are sanctified unto God and those who have honor before man. In order to be such persons, we must absolutely abstain from fornication and not give ground for suspicion in this matter.

According to verse 5, we should not possess our body in the passion of lust as the nations who do not know God. Not knowing God is the basic reason for indulgence in the passion of lust.

In verse 6 Paul goes on to say, "That no one overstep and take advantage of his brother in the matter, because the Lord is the avenger concerning all these things, even as we also said before to you and solemnly charged." Literally, the Greek word rendered "overstep" means to overpass limits, that is, overreach, transgress, go beyond. "Overstep...his brother" refers to adultery with the brother's wife. In Greek "take advantage of" also means

make a gain of; hence, defraud. By "the matter" Paul means the matter of fornication, mentioned in verse 3. In verse 6 Paul also says that the Lord is the avenger concerning these things, things such as overstepping and taking advantage of others. The Lord judges the fornicators and adulterers as an avenger, as a punisher, meting out justice.

Fornication always involves overstepping the regulation of the marriage relationship. The relationship between male and female was ordained by God. Marriage is a holy matter that was ordained by God and is under His strict regulation. Therefore, the contact between male and female must be according to God's ordination and regulation. Otherwise there may be some kind of transgression, overstepping, breaking of God's regulation.

In verse 7 Paul says, "For God has not called us for uncleanness but in sanctification." The Greek preposition translated "for" in this verse, *epi*, means upon, on condition of. Uncleanness in this verse denotes uncleanness in things like fornication and adultery. Some teachers say that verse 6 speaks of taking advantage of a brother in doing business. To refer uncleanness here to unfair gain in business is not acceptable according to the context of this section, which begins in verse 3 with the charge to abstain from fornication. Actually, verse 7 is the concluding word of this charge.

The apostle's charge to abstain from fornication is based upon sanctification (v. 3), strengthened by sanctification (v. 4), and concluded here with sanctification, because fornication, as the most unclean thing, destroys the holy standing and character of God's called saints.

God has not called us on condition of uncleanness, but He has called us in sanctification. This indicates that we must always remain in sanctification. God's calling has nothing to do with uncleanness. His calling is in sanctification, and this sanctification is versus fornication.

Verse 8 says, "Consequently, he who rejects, rejects not man but God, Who also gives His Holy Spirit to you." This verse is the conclusion of the section which begins in verse

3. The word "rejects" here refers to the charge given in the preceding verses. Here Paul seems to be saying, "I have given you a warning. If you reject it, you are not rejecting me, but you are rejecting God, the One who gave His Holy Spirit to you." Here the Holy Spirit is referred to as the Holy One who sanctifies us, making us holy before God (Rom. 15:16; 1 Pet. 1:2; 1 Cor. 6:11).

The will (v. 3), the call (v. 7), and the Spirit of God are all for our sanctification. God had His will first, then His call, and then the giving of His Holy Spirit. By His Spirit we may be sanctified to answer His call and fulfill His will.

God has given His Holy Spirit to us to sanctify us, to make us holy, to separate us unto God for His purpose. Thus, this Holy Spirit is moving, working, and acting within us constantly for a purpose. If we fall into fornication, we reject this indwelling Spirit who is working within us to sanctify us unto God. This is Paul's meaning here, in the verse that concludes a section on sanctification versus fornication.

May we all, especially the young people, be impressed with Paul's word of warning. The age in which we live certainly is no better than the age in which Paul lived. Furthermore, the cities where we live today are not better than Corinth or Thessalonica. On the contrary, both the age and the cities may be worse. Therefore, we need this warning concerning sanctification versus fornication.

BROTHERLY LOVE

In verses 9 and 10 Paul goes on to exhort the believers regarding brotherly love: "Now concerning brotherly love, you have no need for me to write to you, for you yourselves are taught of God to love one another; For indeed you do it unto all the brothers in the whole of Macedonia. But we entreat you, brothers, to abound more." The words "brotherly love" are a translation of the Greek word *philadelphia*, composed of *phileo*, to love, and *adelphos*, brother. Here Paul reiterates his word in 3:12 concerning love: "And the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love to one another and to all, even as we also to you." This

emphasis on love indicates that love is a vital factor in the Christian life. According to Galatians 5:14 and Romans 13:10, love is the fulfillment of the law. If we love others, certainly we shall not commit fornication, steal, or lie.

A BECOMING WALK

In 4:11 and 12 Paul speaks concerning a becoming walk: "And to be ambitious to be quiet, and to attend to your own affairs, and to work with your hands, even as we charged you; that you may walk becomingly toward those outside, and you may have need of nothing." In verse 11 Paul gives us a good word: "Be ambitious to be quiet." It is extremely difficult for a talkative person to be quiet. If such a person can be quiet for half an hour, that would be a victory.

The church life is damaged the most by fornication, then by jealousy, and after that by busybodies. A busybody wants to be everybody when actually he is nobody. Therefore, Paul charges the busybodies to be ambitious to be quiet. This means that they should have the ambition of calming themselves down. Certainly I would encourage the saints to have more fellowship. But those who are busybodies should be encouraged to be somewhat less active and to be more quiet. They should not seek to be the church information desk or be interested in knowing about others' affairs. Instead, as Paul says, they should attend to their own affairs. Perhaps they should spend more time cleaning house or arranging their things. They should avoid the kind of busyness that damages the church life.

Those who are too interested in others' affairs should be ambitious to be quiet and attend to their own affairs. But those who do not care for others and who spend too much time on their own affairs should be encouraged to spend more time caring for others in a proper way. In this matter, because we were born with different dispositions, we all need to be balanced.

In verse 12 Paul charges us to walk becomingly. We should not walk in a way that is strange or peculiar. In the eyes of others, our walk should be very becoming.

Today young people like to be peculiar. Some think that the more peculiar they are, the better it is. By being peculiar they attract the attention of others. We, however, should conduct ourselves in a way that is normal, becoming, and ordinary. However, in so doing we are not following any code or regulations. I believe that if we desire to love the Lord, to live Him, to walk according to His heart, deep within we shall sense something requiring us to be normal and becoming in all we do. In the way we drive, in the way we wear our hair, in the clothes we wear, and in all other things, we shall want to be becoming.

Anything that attracts the attention of others in a peculiar way is not becoming. We need to behave and walk becomingly. In particular, we must walk becomingly toward those outside, toward the outsiders.

CARING FOR NEW BELIEVERS

The more we read 1 Thessalonians and consider its contents, the more we realize that this Epistle was written to new believers. First Thessalonians is absolutely different from Ephesians. The book of Ephesians contains many profound terms: the mystery of Christ, the Body of Christ, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. By contrast, 1 Thessalonians does not use profound terms. Instead, there are a number of simple warnings. For example, we are told that it is God's will for us to be sanctified. This is an elementary way of speaking. Another example concerns Paul's exhortation to brotherly love. He tells us that we have been taught of God to love one another, and then he encourages us to abound in this love. Furthermore, Paul exhorts us to be ambitious to be quiet, not to be busybodies, to work with our hands, and to attend to our own affairs. Such words are elementary; however, they are very practical, and we need them.

Why in his exhortation in chapter four does Paul mention only three things? Why does he speak only of sanctification versus fornication, of brotherly love, and of a becoming walk? The answer to these questions is that if we take care of sanctification, brotherly love, and walking

becomingly, we shall be perfect. Therefore, we all need to take care of our sanctification, of our love for others, and of having a proper and becoming walk.

First Thessalonians certainly is a book for new believers. In this Epistle Paul takes care of the beginners in a very practical way. This does not mean, however, that new believers do not need books such as Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Hebrews. They certainly have a need for these books. But because they are young, they first need something simple and practical. This is the reason Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians in the way he did. He knew that the believers had been in the Lord less than a year, and therefore he wrote them in a very practical way. May we all follow Paul's example and adopt his way to work with young saints and new believers.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST THESSALONIANS

MESSAGE SIXTEEN

THE HOPE OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Scripture Reading: 1 Thes. 4:13-18

In 4:13-18 Paul gives an elementary word concerning the Lord's coming and the rapture of the believers. Here, as a word of comfort, the rapture of believers at the Lord's coming is mentioned in a general way. Concerning this matter, details are revealed in other books of the New Testament, such as Matthew and Revelation.

What Paul describes in 4:13-18 is the general hope of all believers. This is the hope of a holy life for the church life. This kind of life is neither sinful nor worldly. On the contrary, it is pure and holy. Furthermore, this holy life for the church life has a hope.

Because of man's fall there is no hope for the fallen human race. The only expectation unbelievers have is death. Death is their destination. Day by day, they are living with a view toward their death, and they are on the way to death. Thus, death is their future.

In Ephesians 2:12 Paul describes the hopeless situation of unbelievers: "You were at that time apart from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of the promise, having no hope and without God in the world." Unbelievers have no hope because they do not have God. Because they are apart from Christ and their living is without God, they do not have any hope. The only thing that awaits them is death. Everyone realizes this and takes it for granted. For this reason, unbelievers do not like to think about their future. Actually, they do not have a positive future. In their future looms the darkness of death.

As those who believe in Christ, we have a life full of hope. Our hope is the Lord's coming back. Furthermore,

our hope includes resurrection and rapture. Resurrection is not only a matter of life, but a matter of life overcoming death. When life overcomes death, that is resurrection. Rapture is something that goes even beyond resurrection. A person may be resurrected and yet not be raptured.

RESURRECTION AND RAPTURE

The holy life for the church life is a life with a future, a life with hope. This hope is not merely the Lord's coming; it is the Lord's coming with resurrection and rapture. The coming back of the Lord Jesus will cause the resurrection and the rapture to occur. As we have just pointed out, resurrection and rapture are both in addition to life. Today life is our possession. We have life, we are in life, and we are enjoying life. However, we are awaiting the Lord's coming, and His coming will bring resurrection and rapture.

Resurrection, of course, is for those who have died. Today we are living a holy life for the church. If the Lord delays His coming back, we all shall eventually "sleep," that is, die physically. All the believers who have died are waiting for resurrection. If we live until the coming back of the Lord Jesus, we shall not need resurrection. However, we shall still need rapture. Furthermore, those who have died will need to be resurrected and raptured as well. All believers, the dead as well as the living, need rapture. Rapture, therefore, is actually the end of our life on earth. This means that the conclusion of our life is neither death nor resurrection--it is rapture.

In the Scriptures there is not such a word as rapture, but the thought of rapture is there. As used by Christian teachers, the word rapture means to be taken away, as what happened to Enoch and Elijah (Gen. 5:24; 2 Kings 2:1, 11). Matthew 24:40-41; Luke 17:34-36; 21:36; 1 Thessalonians 4:17; Revelation 3:10; 7:9; 11:12; 12:5; 14:1, 16; 15:2 all refer to rapture, to the taking up of the believers to the heavens.

In the New Testament the rapture is an important subject. In 4:13-18 Paul speaks of it only in a general, elementary way. He tells us that the living, together with

those believers who have died and have been resurrected, will be caught up to a meeting of the Lord in the air. In these verses Paul does not go further to explain the details. What he says here can be compared to an elementary school teacher giving his students some basic principles of mathematics. Actually, the rapture is not a simple matter. For this reason, there has been much debate among Bible teachers concerning it.

Paul's intention is to give the new believers a basic concept of the hope of our Christian life. He wants to impress them with the fact that the Christian life, which is a holy life for the church life, has a hope. Therefore, this life is absolutely different from the hopeless life of fallen mankind. The hope of the Christian life is the Lord's coming back, and this hope includes resurrection and rapture.

In verse 13 Paul says, "But we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, concerning those who are sleeping, that you may not sorrow even as also the rest who have no hope." The words "those who are sleeping" refer to the dead (v. 16; John 11:11-14; 1 Cor. 11:30). The death of believers is considered by both the Lord and the apostle as sleep. Perhaps by the time Paul wrote this Epistle some of the believers in Thessalonica had died. Otherwise, there would have been no reason for Paul to write about this matter.

In verse 14 Paul continues, "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose, so also those who are asleep will God, through Jesus, bring together with Him." To believe in the hope described here includes believing in the Lord's resurrection. Anyone who does not believe in Christ's resurrection will not believe in this hope. But if we believe in this hope, this indicates that we have already believed in Christ's resurrection.

Some may refer to verse 14 and say, "When the saints die, they go to heaven, and when the Lord Jesus comes back, He will bring them from heaven with Him." To interpret the verse in this way is to neglect the first half of the verse, where we are told that Jesus died and rose. This,

of course, refers to His resurrection. If the dead saints are already in heaven, and if the Lord will bring them with Him from heaven when He comes, then the dead saints do not need resurrection.

Verses 15 and 16 will help you to understand what I mean: "For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are living, who remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall by no means precede those who have slept; because the Lord Himself, with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with a trumpet of God, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ shall rise first." Please pay careful attention to the word "rise" in verse 16. If the dead are already in heaven, what need is there for them to rise? If they are truly in heaven, they do not need to rise. Furthermore, they do not need to be raptured or to be caught up to the Lord. Their only need would be to descend from heaven with the Lord Jesus. The fact that verse 16 says that the dead in Christ shall rise indicates that they must be in some place other than heaven.

In verse 15 the Greek word translated "coming" is *parousia*, presence. In verse 16 the Greek words rendered "cry of command" may also be translated shout of command, as a signal for assembling. The trumpet of God is the last trumpet (1 Cor. 15:52), a trumpet for assembling God's redeemed people (see Num. 10:2).

In verse 17 Paul goes on to say, "Then we who are living, who remain, shall be caught up at the same time together with them in clouds into a meeting of the Lord in the air; and so we shall be always together with the Lord." According to this verse, both the dead and the living believers will be caught up to the Lord. First the dead will be raised, and then together we shall be caught up to a meeting of the Lord in the air.

The manchild in Revelation 12, the overcomers, will be caught up, raptured, to the throne of God in the third heaven before the last three and a half years of the great tribulation (Rev. 12:5-6, 14). Here, the majority of believers will be raptured to the air at the time of the Lord's coming.

THE DEAD SAINTS IN PARADISE

Some among us may still hold the concept that saints who have died have gone to heaven and are now there with the Lord Jesus. If Paul had not gone beyond what he says in verse 14, there might be ground for this concept. But in verse 16 Paul says that when the Lord Jesus comes, the dead saints will rise up. Where will they rise up from? From heaven? If they are already in heaven, what need will they have to rise up? And to what place would they rise if they are already in the third heaven with the Lord?

Many Christians have been cheated by sugar-coated religious teachings. One of these teachings says, "Oh, you don't need to weep about your mother who has died. Because she believed in the Lord Jesus, she is now in heaven with Him. She is in a heavenly mansion, a home that is much better than yours. Why, then, should you weep? One day you will join her in heaven." This kind of teaching is full of leaven and is very deceitful. I have studied the Bible for more than fifty years, and I have not found even one verse that teaches such a thing. This is a superstition that has its source in paganism, or in Buddhism, and was adopted by Catholicism.

According to the Bible, the dead believers are in Paradise (Luke 23:43), the comfortable section of Hades (Luke 16:22, 25-26). In Hades, there are two sections: a section of comfort and a section of torment. The section of suffering is different from the lake of fire. The unpleasant part of Hades may be compared to a jail in contrast to a prison. A jail is a place where criminals are held temporarily. But after a criminal has been tried and judged, he is taken from jail and put into prison. The sinners now in the section of torment in Hades are awaiting the final judgment, which will take place at the white throne of God. After that, the sinners will be cast into the lake of fire, the eternal prison.

The dead saints are in Paradise, and when the Lord Jesus comes, they will rise up. They will not rise up to heaven; rather, they will rise up and then be caught up together with the living saints. This is the reason verse 16 says that the dead in Christ will rise first. Then, according

to verse 17, those who are living will be caught up at the same time with them to a meeting of the Lord. This means that all believers, the dead as well as the living, will be raptured to the air. This teaching is not sugar-coated, and it does not contain any leaven. On the contrary, it is according to the pure Word of God.

According to the Word of God, when the Lord Jesus descends from heaven, the dead saints will rise up. Their spirit and soul will rise out of Paradise, their body will rise up from the tomb, and their spirit and soul with the body will make them perfect. They will then join the believers who are living, and together we shall all be caught up to the Lord.

THE RAPTURE OF THE LIVING

In verse 15 Paul says, "We who are living, who remain unto the coming of the Lord." In verse 17 he also says, "We who are living, who remain." Why does Paul add the clause "who remain unto the coming of the Lord" in verse 15 and the clause "who remain" in verse 17? If you consider this matter thoughtfully, you will realize that this indicates, or at least implies, that there are some living ones who do not remain. Some living ones are gone. These living ones who do not remain are overcomers.

There is a difference between the rapture of the overcomers and the rapture of those believers who are alive and remain until the Lord's coming. The rapture of the overcomers will take place before the last three and a half years, a period known as the great tribulation. In other words, the overcomers will be raptured before the tribulation (Rev. 3:10). But those who are alive and remain will be raptured at the end of the tribulation, that is, at the last trumpet (1 Cor. 15:52). This is the rapture mentioned in 1 Thessalonians 4. Regarding time, these two raptures are different: one takes place before the great tribulation, and the other, at the end of the tribulation. Furthermore, there is a difference regarding location. According to Revelation 12, the overcomers are raptured to the throne of

God in the third heaven. But according to 1 Thessalonians 4, the rapture of those who are alive and remain will be to the clouds in the air.

THE PAROUSIA

We have pointed out that the Greek word for "coming" in verse 15 is parousia, the same word as used in Matthew 24:3. Christ's coming will be His presence with His believers. This parousia will begin from the time the overcomers are raptured to the throne, continue with His coming to the air (Rev. 10:1), and end with His coming to the earth. Within His parousia, there will be the rapture of the majority of the believers to the air (1 Thes. 4:15-17), the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10), and the marriage of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7-9).

Parousia denotes the Lord's presence; it does not directly denote His coming. Of course, His presence involves His coming. If I am away from my family and then am present with them again, my presence includes my coming. Actually, my presence equals my coming. For this reason, the word parousia may be translated coming. It would be rather awkward to literally render it as presence. But even though this translation may be awkward, it would be correct to say "unto the presence of the Lord."

According to the New Testament, the Lord's parousia, His presence, will last a period of time. It may begin immediately before the start of the great tribulation. The Lord's coming (the parousia) will begin probably near the start of the tribulation. At present, the Lord is in the third heaven. When the great tribulation begins on earth, the Lord will leave the throne in heaven and descend from the throne, concealed in a cloud, to the sky. Revelation 10:1 speaks of a "strong Angel coming down out of heaven, clothed with a cloud." This strong Angel is Christ, who descends secretly from the third heaven to the air. Probably the Lord will stay in the air concealed by the cloud for a period of time, possibly more than three years. This is the reason we say that the Lord's parousia will last a certain length of time.

When the Lord is in the air, He will do a number of things. He will rapture both the resurrected and the living believers. He will judge all the saved ones at His judgment seat. At that time the decision will be made by Him concerning who will join Him in the millennial kingdom and who will not. This judgment will, of course, take place after the rapture mentioned in 1 Thessalonians 4. This sketch should give us a general idea of the Lord's coming according to the pure Word. This sketch is not according to strange or traditional teachings.

As Christians, we should live a holy life for the church life. This life has a hope, the hope that the Lord whom we are serving today will come back. At His coming back, the saints who have died will rise up from Paradise and the tomb to be caught up with those who are alive and remain.

AN ELEMENTARY WORD

This word concerning our hope was written to the believers as a comfort and encouragement in the death of their relatives. It is an elementary word concerning the Lord's coming back and our being caught up to Him. If we would know the details, we need to study Matthew 24 and 25, the whole book of Revelation, 1 Corinthians 15, and other portions of the Word, including 2 Thessalonians. Once we study all these portions of the Scriptures, we shall see that the matters of the Lord's coming and our rapture are not as simple as what is presented by many today. The details include the rapture of the overcoming saints, the judgment at the judgment seat of Christ, the reward in the kingdom, and the discipline by the kingdom. All these things are involved in the Lord's coming and our rapture.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST THESSALONIANS

MESSAGE SEVENTEEN

WATCHFULNESS AND SOBERNESS

Scripture Reading: 1 Thes. 5:1-11

Immediately after Paul presents the hope of a holy life for the church life, he covers the matter of the watchfulness and soberness of this life. We have a wonderful hope, a hope that the Lord Jesus will come back and that we shall be raptured to Him. Along with this hope, we need watchfulness and soberness. As we are hoping, we need to watch and be sober. For this reason, 1 Thessalonians does not end with chapter four. In this wonderful book for new believers, Paul adds yet a further word concerning watchfulness and soberness. Once again, we should follow Paul's pattern. We should not simply encourage new believers in their hope. We should also go on to tell them that along with this hope, they need to be watchful and sober. They should not be asleep, and they should not be drunk or in some kind of stupor.

As Paul was writing the last part of chapter four, I believe that he was burdened to speak a word on the watchfulness and soberness of a holy life for the church life. If this book concluded at the end of chapter four, and if we did not have 5:1-11, some believers may be misled. In fact, because they isolate 4:13-18 from the rest of this Epistle, Christians have been misled or even drugged in their mentality. Therefore, as we apply chapter four to our situation, we should not neglect 5:1-11. This means that as we wait for the Lord's coming back, we need to be watchful and also sober.

TIMES AND SEASONS

In 5:1-3 Paul indicates that the day of the Lord comes as a thief in the night. Verse 1 says, "But concerning the

times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need for anything to be written to you." Times and seasons here refer to the Lord's coming. This is confirmed by the expression "the day of the Lord" in verse 2.

THE DAY OF THE LORD

In verse 2 Paul goes on to say, "For you yourselves know accurately that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night." The coming of the Lord in the preceding chapter is mainly for comfort and encouragement. The day of the Lord in this chapter is mainly for warning (vv. 3-6), since it is mentioned in the Word mostly in relation to the Lord's judgment (1 Cor. 1:8; 3:13; 5:5; 2 Cor. 1:14; 2 Tim. 4:8).

The fact that the day of the Lord comes as a thief in the night indicates that its coming is kept secret and that it will come suddenly. It is not known beforehand by anyone (Matt. 24:42-43; Rev. 3:3; 16:15). This thought is strengthened by what Paul says in verse 3: "Whenever they say, Peace and security, then sudden destruction comes upon them, as birth pangs to a woman with child, and they shall by no means escape."

THE SAFEGUARD OF FAITH, LOVE, AND HOPE

In verses 4 through 11 we see the safeguard of faith, love, and hope. In verse 4 Paul reminds us that we are not in darkness that the day should overtake us as a thief, and in verse 5 he points out that we are sons of light and of the day, and thus are not of the night nor of darkness. Then in verse 6 he exhorts us to watch and be sober: "So then, let us not sleep as the rest, but let us watch and be sober." To sleep here is to be unwatchful. Watch is versus sleep (see v. 7), and sober is versus drunk. In verse 7 Paul says, "For those who sleep, sleep in the night, and those who are drunk, are drunk in the night." Here to be drunk is to be in a stupor.

Christians are familiar with the word watchful. However, we probably do not know the real meaning of this word. What does it mean to be watchful? Our answer will

be too vague if we merely say that to be watchful is not to sleep. In this case, as with many other things, we may take for granted that we understand what the Bible says, when actually we do not understand the matter at all. The same is true about what it means to be sober.

To be watchful and to be sober are related to safeguarding the three basic structures of the holy life for the church life: faith, love, and hope. Verse 8 indicates this: "But we who are of the day, let us be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and a helmet, the hope of salvation." The words breastplate and helmet both indicate spiritual warfare. The breastplate is of faith and love covering and protecting our heart and spirit according to God's righteousness (Eph. 6:14). The helmet is the hope of salvation (Eph. 6:17), covering and protecting our mentality, the mind. Faith, love, and hope are the three basic structures of the genuine Christian life as depicted in 1 Thessalonians 1:3. Faith is related to our will--a part of our heart (Rom. 10:9)--and to our conscience--a part of our spirit (1 Tim. 1:19). Love is related to our emotion, another part of our heart (Matt. 22:37); and hope is related to our understanding--a function of our mind. All of these need to be protected that a genuine Christian life may be maintained. Such a life is watchful and sober. At the beginning of this Epistle, the apostle praised the believers' work of faith, labor of love, and endurance of hope (1:3). Here, at the conclusion of the Epistle, he exhorts them to keep these spiritual virtues covered and protected by fighting for them.

HOPE IN THE LORD'S COMING BACK

The hope spoken of in verse 8 is the hope of our Lord's coming back, which will be our salvation from both the coming destruction and from the slavery of corruption of the old creation (Rom. 8:21-25). Salvation in verses 8 and 9 is not salvation from eternal perdition through the Lord's death, but salvation from the coming destruction through the Lord's coming back.

According to verse 8, we need armor to safeguard our

faith, love, and hope. If we would protect these aspects of the basic structure of a holy life for the church life, we need to be watchful and sober. Therefore, being watchful and sober is part of the living we should have as we hope in the Lord's coming back.

We have pointed out that in chapter four Paul comforts us with this hope, telling us that at the Lord's coming we shall be raptured. We shall be transported into a state of ecstasy to meet with the Lord in the air. However, this hope requires a living of watchfulness and soberness. We need a life of watchfulness and soberness in order to wait for the Lord's coming. In other words, as we exercise our hope in the Lord's coming back, we need a watching life and a sober life. If we are watchful and sober, we shall protect, safeguard, the basic structure of our Christian life.

THE MEANING OF WATCHFULNESS

Now we come to the crucial matter of understanding what it means to be watchful and sober. Watchfulness here is related to a battle, a fighting. Some versions use the word vigilant, a word related to warfare. Soldiers in a battle need to be watchful, vigilant. The fact that watchfulness is related to fighting is confirmed by Paul's mention of the breastplate and helmet in verse 8. A breastplate and helmet are not ordinary items of dress. They are, of course, part of the armor used by soldiers in fighting. Paul's concept of being watchful and sober, therefore, is related to fighting, to warfare. In these verses Paul is talking about some kind of battle.

There are sugar-coated teachings about the Lord's coming and the rapture revealed in chapter four, but these teachings do not prepare believers for fighting. Instead, they cause them to be drugged and in a stupor. It is important for us to see that watchfulness refers to a proper spirit in fighting a battle. If we grasp this thought, we shall have in large measure the proper understanding of what it means to be watchful.

To be watchful is to continue fighting. Soldiers in a battle do not merely look around. That is not to be

watchful. They are watchful because they are fighting. When they stop fighting, they are no longer watchful. According to our understanding, to be watchful is simply to look out for something, for example, to watch our step as we are walking. But this is not the meaning here. In these verses to be watchful is to remember that we are in a battle, that we are fighting and are surrounded by enemies. This is the reason we need a helmet and also a breastplate.

Again and again we have emphasized the fact that 1 Thessalonians is an epistle written to new believers. This book contains many basic concepts regarding the Christian life. In each of the five chapters certain basic principles, certain elementary teachings, are covered. But even in a book concerned with elementary teachings, Paul includes the matter of spiritual warfare. Paul does not explicitly tell the believers that they are on a battlefield and need to fight. But what he says in 5:1-11 implies spiritual fighting.

SALVATION FROM THE COMING DESTRUCTION

In verse 3 the word destruction is used: "Whenever they say, Peace and security, then sudden destruction comes upon them, as birth pangs to a woman with child, and they shall by no means escape." What is this destruction? It is related to the salvation mentioned in verses 8 and 9. Salvation in these verses is salvation from the coming destruction through the Lord's coming back, not salvation from eternal perdition through the Lord's death. Fallen man will perish for eternity. That is eternal perdition. We who have believed in the Lord Jesus will be saved from eternal perdition. We have already obtained salvation in this respect. We have been saved from eternal perdition, and we shall never perish.

Biblical salvation from eternal perdition is eternal salvation. Once we are saved, we are saved for eternity. Contrary to the teaching of the Arminian school of theology, we cannot lose our salvation. Salvation is once for all. But here Paul is speaking about salvation in another respect, that is, salvation from the coming destruction.

Furthermore, in the light of Romans 8:21-25, we shall also be saved from the slavery of corruption of the old creation. All created things are today subject to the slavery of corruption. The entire old creation is enslaved to corruption. Everything, including our physical body, is decaying. Do you know what it means to get old? To get old is to decay. We all are in the process of decaying. The slavery of corruption in the old creation is controlling us, and we are subject to it. But when the Lord Jesus comes and we are raptured, we shall be saved from the slavery of corruption of the old creation. Therefore, the Lord's coming and our rapture will save us from two things: destruction and the slavery of corruption. This is the salvation mentioned in verses 8 and 9. However, the primary meaning is the salvation from the coming destruction.

Now we must go on to find out what this coming destruction is. This destruction is related to the battle that is raging between God and Satan. Near to the time of the Lord's coming, destruction will take place suddenly. That destruction will come primarily from God, but a portion of it will be caused by Satan. God will judge this rebellious world, and Satan will fight back. The result of the intense battle raging between God and Satan will be sudden destruction. It will be when people say, "Peace and security," that this destruction will come suddenly.

We need to be saved from this sudden destruction. The way to be saved from it is to be watchful and sober. As God is fighting, we must take sides with Him and fight for His interests. Since He is fighting, we should be fighting also.

Actually, to fight is to be watchful. Only those who are fighting are truly watchful. The more we are fighting, the more watchful we shall be. As long as you are fighting, you need not try to be watchful, for you will be watchful automatically. Sometimes soldiers in an army go for days without sleep. The battle does not allow them time to sleep. This illustrates the fact that to fight is to be watchful. The Christian life, a holy life for the church life, is a life of fighting. We are on the battlefield, and we need to be alert, watchful, vigilant.

THE MEANING OF SOBERNESS

Soberness is related to watchfulness. To be sober is to be clear about the situation in which we are fighting. It is to have a proper understanding concerning where we are and where the enemy is. It is to see how the enemy is attacking and how we should fight back. If we are sober, we shall be clear about our direction.

To be sober is to be clear about everything related to the battle. It is to be clear about where the enemy is, what the enemy is doing, and how the enemy is attacking. It is also to be clear about how to protect ourselves and how to fight back. Those who are sober are fully clear about their situation.

THE LACK OF WATCHFULNESS AND SOBERNESS

Most of today's Christians do not have such a soberness. As a result, they are drugged, they are in a stupor, and they do not have the proper sense of direction. This is the reason it is often difficult to have fellowship with them. If you fellowship with certain ones about a particular matter, they will argue with you. Should you try to fellowship about something else, they may condemn you or even slander you.

In verse 6 Paul says, "So then, let us not sleep as the rest, but let us watch and be sober." The word watch here is versus sleep in the following verse, and sober is versus drunk. As we talk about the hope of the Lord's coming, we need to consider ourselves and ask whether we are watchful or sleeping, whether we are sober or drunk. Certain slogans on bumper stickers concerning the Lord's coming indicate that many Christians are drugged and in a stupor. With respect to the coming of the Lord, there is no watchfulness or soberness. We, therefore, need to be on the alert. Are we fighting for the Lord's interests? Are we watchful? Are we sober and clear about our situation? We need to ask ourselves questions such as these.

We have emphasized the fact that Paul wrote the Epistle of 1 Thessalonians in an elementary way, talking about basic matters. He speaks concerning the Lord's

coming and our being caught up to Him. But instead of stopping there, he goes on in chapter five to speak of watchfulness and soberness.

PUTTING ON THE ARMOR

If we are watchful and sober, we shall put on the armor. According to verse 8, we should put on the breastplate of faith and love and also a helmet, the hope of salvation. This breastplate protects our faith and love; the helmet guards our hope. Hence, by the armor, the basic structures of the Christian life--faith, love, and hope--are protected.

If we read 1 Thessalonians 5 carefully and compare it with Ephesians 6, we shall see that in 1 Thessalonians we have an elementary teaching concerning spiritual warfare. In Ephesians 6, however, the teaching about spiritual warfare is much more advanced. Therefore, we need to go on from 1 Thessalonians 5 to Ephesians 6.

We have pointed out strongly that to fight properly is to be watchful and also sober. This fighting safeguards our Christian life; it preserves and protects the basic structure of the Christian life.

Some who formerly were with us in the Lord's recovery put off the armor and thereby were exposed to the enemy's attack. Because they had no covering, no protection, and no safeguard, they were defeated by the enemy. Instead of being watchful and sober, they were sleeping and in a stupor.

We need to be watchful and sober. This means that we need to keep on fighting. We also need to safeguard the structure of our Christian life by wearing the armor. Then when the Lord Jesus comes, we shall be saved from the sudden destruction.

SUDDEN DESTRUCTION

God will one day judge the world, and Satan will seek to destroy it. If we read the book of Revelation carefully, we shall see that during the last three and a half years, God will be angry with this evil, sinful, and rebellious world and judge it. Moreover, Satan will not want the

world to exist any longer and will seek to destroy it. The result will be sudden destruction.

In verses 9 and 10 Paul says, "Because God did not appoint us to wrath, but to the gaining of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, Who died for us that, whether we watch or sleep, we may live together with Him." Since God did not appoint us to wrath, we should watch, be sober, and fight to cooperate with God that we may gain His salvation through the Lord Jesus. As we have pointed out, salvation in this verse is not eternal salvation; it is salvation from the coming destruction and also from the slavery of the corruption of the old creation. We are waiting for salvation from destruction and from the slavery of corruption. Then we shall enjoy the freedom of the glory of the sons of God.

LIVING TOGETHER WITH THE LORD

In verse 10 Paul speaks of living together with the Lord. The Lord died for us not only that we may be saved from eternal perdition, but also that we may live together with Him, through His resurrection, a life that can save us from the coming destruction. We may live together with Him whether we watch or sleep, that is, whether we live or die. On the one hand, the Lord is away from us and we are awaiting His coming back; on the other hand, He is with us (Matt. 28:20), and we can live together with Him (Rom. 6:8).

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST THESSALONIANS

MESSAGE EIGHTEEN

COOPERATION WITH THE DIVINE OPERATION

(1)

Scripture Reading: 1 Thes. 5:12-28

Chapter five begins with the word "but." This indicates that the last part of chapter four, which is concerned with the rapture, needs a further word about another matter. According to 5:1, this further word is related to the times and the seasons.

As a young believer, when I heard messages about the Lord's coming, I was very excited. It is common for new believers to be excited when they hear about the Lord's coming back. They may expect the Lord to come at any moment. For this reason, they need Paul's further word in chapter five.

The "times and the seasons" in verse 1 refer to the Lord's coming. This is confirmed by the expression "the day of the Lord" in the following verse. The coming of the day of the Lord is different from what we imagine. Actually, it is a mystery. The Lord Jesus even said that, as a man, He did not know the time of His coming. The date of the Lord's coming is absolutely hidden as a mystery in the Father's heart, and this mystery has not been revealed. Therefore, in 5:2 Paul says that the day of the Lord "so comes as a thief in the night." To be sure, no thief would give an advance warning that he is coming to steal something. In the same principle, the day of the Lord will come suddenly and unexpectedly. Thus, we need to be watchful and sober. Because we have no way to figure out the time of the Lord's coming, we need to be watchful and sober.

After covering the matter of watchfulness and

soberness in 5:1-11, Paul turns in 5:12-24 to our cooperation with the divine operation. In these verses Paul covers a number of items in an elementary way.

In the New Testament there is no book that ends in such a marvelous and all-inclusive way as 1 Thessalonians. Paul's concluding word includes a number of crucial things, which Paul did not have the time to cover in detail. Therefore, he listed them together in one section toward the end of this Epistle.

RESPECTING THE LEADING ONES

Verse 12 says, "Now we ask you, brothers, to know those who labor among you and take the lead among you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to regard them most highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves." The word "know" here means first to recognize and then render respect and regard. According to Matthew 7:23, when the Lord Jesus comes back, He will say to certain ones, "I never knew you." The expression, "I never knew you" means not to appreciate or respect what was done. In the same principle, in verse 12 the word "know" means to appreciate and respect those who labor among us and who take the lead among us. Here Paul probably refers to the elders who labor in teaching and take the lead among the believers (1 Tim. 5:17).

To take the lead is not mainly to rule, but to set an example in doing things first that others may follow. The elders should not only labor in teaching, but also do things as an example. The example may become a ground for their admonition.

It is indeed marvelous that, although the church in Thessalonica had been in existence less than a year and Paul had spent only three Sabbaths working there, some leading ones had been raised up. In a short period of time a church was established, and some leading ones were produced. Paul surely was a qualified and skillful Christian worker.

In verse 13 Paul charges us to regard the leading ones most highly in love because of their work. The word

"regard" here means to lead the mind through a reasoning process to a conclusion; hence, it is to think, consider, estimate, esteem, regard. The leading ones should regard themselves as slaves serving the saints. But the believers should regard them highly in love because of their work.

As Paul was writing this Epistle, one thought followed upon another. As we have pointed out, the subject of the preceding section (5:1-11) is watchfulness and soberness. The Christian life is a life of fighting for God's interests, and we need to be watchful and alert. Then Paul goes on to say that we must learn to respect, honor, the leading ones in the church. It seems that the matters of watchfulness and soberness and respecting the leading ones have no logical connection. However, they are related in a very practical way. If we are on the alert, full of watchfulness in spiritual warfare, we shall surely honor the leading ones. Those who have had experience in military service know that soldiers must respect their commanding officers. If they have no respect for the officers, the leaders, the army will not be able to fight properly. The first thing a soldier must learn in order to fight is to respect the one leading him. I believe that this was Paul's concept in turning to the matter of respecting the leading ones at this point.

TO BE AT PEACE

In verse 13 Paul gives this exhortation: "Be at peace among yourselves." To regard the leading ones and to be at peace with one another is a proper condition of a local church. But if the saints in a local church do not respect the leading ones, there will be no peace. The same principle applies to the family life. If the children do not respect their parents, how can there be peace? In such a situation it will be impossible for a family to have peace. In like manner, there will not be peace in an army if the soldiers have no respect for the officers.

The sequence of Paul's thoughts in these verses is significant. First, we need to be watchful and sober in fighting the spiritual warfare. Second, we must highly

regard the leading ones. Then we shall be at peace among ourselves.

ADMONISHING, ENCOURAGING, UPHOLDING, AND BEING LONGSUFFERING

In verse 14 Paul continues, "And we entreat you, brothers, admonish the disorderly, console the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be longsuffering toward all." Those who are disorderly are idle or busybodies; they are not disciplined, but are unruly and rebellious. Acting on their own, they are disorderly and do not care for the proper order in the church life. According to verse 14, all the brothers, not only the leading ones, should admonish the disorderly. This means that all the saints must function to shepherd others and edify them.

In verse 14 Paul also encourages us to console the fainthearted. Literally, the Greek word for fainthearted is "of little soul." It refers to being narrow and weak in the capacity of mind, will, and emotion. Those who are little-souled have a very limited capacity to bear sufferings or difficulties. Among the saints there are some who are born with such a small soul. They need to be comforted, consoled.

In verse 14 Paul also encourages us to uphold the weak. The weak here probably refers to the weak ones in general, who are weak either in their spirit, soul, or body, or weak in faith (Rom. 14:1; 15:1). Some saints among us are weak. They may be weak in body or in spirit, weak in heart or in will. Some are weak in their faith or weak in praying. What shall we do with these weak ones? According to Paul's word, we need to uphold them.

In verse 14 Paul exhorts us to be longsuffering toward all. This implies that in a local church, besides some being disorderly who need admonishing, some being of little soul who need consolation, and some being weak who need upholding, all the members may be a problem in some way and need our longsuffering toward them.

Today we are still in the old creation, not in the New Jerusalem. This is the reason there are many problems

among the saints. According to my experience, every one of us can be a problem to others. I may be a problem to you, and you may be a problem to me. On the one hand, we may love all the saints; on the other hand, they may cause us problems. Therefore, we need to be longsuffering toward all.

We should not dream that the church will be a utopia. On the contrary, the church life is full of problems. If a believer does not have any problems, it is not likely that he will come into the church life. Those who have no problems have no need for the church life. In a sense, the church is a hospital filled with those who are sick. For this reason, we need to be longsuffering toward all the saints.

Do not be bothered when others come to you with problems, even with problems that seem to be small and insignificant. In particular, those who are little-souled may come to you with minor problems. To such ones, even a hair is like a heavy weight. Instead of being angry at them for bringing such a small thing to you, help them to deal with their problems. However, an elder may be irritated by one who brings a little problem to him. Elders, learn to be longsuffering, especially toward the weak and those with a little soul. Any brother who expects to be an elder must be longsuffering. Paul's word in verse 14, however, is not limited to elders; it is a word for all the saints.

A number of times saints have come to me saying that they cannot tolerate the church life in their locality and want to move elsewhere. I told them that if they move to a different place, they will find the situation in the new place to be even worse. If they travel from place to place, eventually they will probably prefer the locality where they began. This is a common experience among church travelers. Instead of seeking to move to a different locality where you think the situation in the church will be better, remain where you are and be longsuffering toward all. Because no church is heavenly, free of problems, all the saints, and not only the elders, need longsuffering.

In verse 15 Paul goes on to say, "See that no one renders to anyone evil for evil, but always pursue what is

good for one another and for all." This means that regardless of how others treat us, even if their treatment is evil, we should pursue good for them. If we do not have longsuffering, however, we shall render evil for evil.

REJOICING, PRAYING, AND GIVING THANKS

Verse 16 says, "Always rejoice." This exhortation is based upon the conditions mentioned in verses 14 and 15. Rejoicing includes calling on the name of the Lord. Can you rejoice in the Lord without calling on Him? I do not believe this to be possible. We simply cannot rejoice in the Lord without uttering His name. Hence, the name of the Lord is implied in Paul's charge to always rejoice. When we rejoice, therefore, we rejoice with the Lord's name.

In verse 17 Paul says, "Unceasingly pray." This is to have uninterrupted fellowship with God in our spirit. It requires perseverance (Rom. 12:12; Col. 4:2) with a strong spirit (Eph. 6:18).

In verse 18 Paul continues, "In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." We should give thanks in everything because all things work together for our good that we may be transformed and conformed to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:28-29). The clause "for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" modifies all the three preceding items. God wants us to live a rejoicing, praying, and thanking life. Such a life is a glory to God and a shame to His enemy.

The sequence in verses 16 through 18 is according to Paul's experience. Paul knew that first we rejoice, then pray, and then give thanks. If you try to practice these in the opposite order, you will find that Paul put them in the correct sequence according to experience. The will of God in Christ Jesus for us is that we rejoice, pray, and give thanks.

NOT QUENCHING THE SPIRIT

In verse 19 Paul goes on to say, "Do not quench the Spirit." The Spirit makes our spirit burning (Rom. 12:11)

and our gifts flaming (2 Tim. 1:6). So we should not quench Him.

The Christian life is a life inspired and stirred up by the Spirit. Throughout the day we must have the Spirit inspiring us, stirring us, and moving and acting within us. Thus, instead of quenching the Spirit, we need to fan the flame that is within us. The word "quench" implies fire. The Spirit is burning within us. We should not quench this fire, but instead we should fan it into flame

NOT DESPISING PROPHECIES

In verses 20 and 21 Paul says, "Do not despise prophecies; but prove all things; hold fast what is good." To despise here is to count as nothing, lightly esteem. The prophecies in verse 20 refer mainly to prophesying, to prophetic speech from a revelation. This does not need to be a prediction (see 1 Cor. 14:1, 3-4). To prophesy is to speak for the Lord and to speak forth the Lord. Only a small percentage of prophecy is related to prediction. We should not despise this kind of speaking. To prove all things includes to discern the prophecies (1 Cor. 14:29), to discern the spirits (1 Cor. 12:10), to test the spirits (1 John 4:1), to prove what is the will of God (Rom. 12:2), and to prove what is well-pleasing to the Lord (Eph. 5:10). On the one hand, we should not despise prophecies; on the other hand, we should not follow blindly. We need to prove things, to test them, and then hold fast what is good.

ABSTAINING FROM EVERY FORM OF EVIL

Verse 22 says, "Abstain from every form of evil." The King James Version of verse 22 says, "Abstain from all appearance of evil." Using this translation, a number of Bible teachers have misunderstood this verse, thinking that it tells us to avoid not only evil but even the appearance of evil, anything that may be suspected of being evil. In the past, we also were influenced by this understanding. But if we consider the meaning of the Greek word rendered "form," we shall have the proper understanding of this verse. Literally, the word is species,

as subordinated to the genus; hence, kind. It denotes anything in view, anything in perception; hence, a sight. It does not refer to the appearance of evil, but the kind, the form, the shape, the sight, of evil. The believers who live a holy life in faith, love, and hope should abstain from evil in any form and of any kind.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST THESSALONIANS

MESSAGE NINETEEN

COOPERATION WITH THE DIVINE OPERATION

(2)

Scripture Reading: 1 Thes. 5:12-22

When Paul wrote verses 12 through 22 of chapter five, he had much on his heart that he still wanted to say to the new believers in Thessalonica. He had many things that he yet wanted to teach them. However, because he did not have the time to write further, he listed many different items together in these verses: honoring the leading ones, being at peace, admonishing the disorderly, consoling the fainthearted, upholding the weak, being longsuffering toward all, not rendering evil for evil, always rejoicing, praying unceasingly, giving thanks in everything, not quenching the Spirit, not despising prophecies, proving all things, holding fast what is good, abstaining from every form of evil. Actually, nearly every item requires a full chapter to be developed adequately.

COOPERATING WITH GOD

In verse 23 Paul goes on to say, "And the God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly, and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." "And" conjoins the blessing of God's sanctifying of our entire being, given in this verse, with the charge of our abstaining from every kind of evil, given in the preceding verse. On the one hand, we abstain from every form of evil; on the other hand, God sanctifies us wholly. We cooperate with God for a holy living.

According to verses 16 through 22, we should rejoice, pray, give thanks, not quench the Spirit, not despise

prophecies, prove all things, hold fast what is good, and abstain from every form of evil. If we take care of these things, the God of peace will sanctify us wholly. Here we see the matter of the believers' cooperation with the divine operation. In verses 12 through 22 we have the believers' cooperation in living a spiritual and separated life. In verses 23 and 24 we have God's operation in sanctifying and preserving the believers.

If we would live a holy life for the church life, we must cooperate with God's operation. God is now dwelling in us. The indwelling Triune God is operating within us all the time. This is the reason we should not quench the Spirit. Actually, the Spirit is the processed Triune God. The inward burning of the Spirit is the operation of the Triune God within us, an operation with which we need to cooperate. We cooperate by taking care of all the matters covered in verses 12 through 22. On our side, we need to cooperate. On God's side, God is operating within us. The God of peace Himself will sanctify us wholly. The Triune God indwells, and we are the ones indwelt by Him. Hence, there must be two sides: God's side and our side. He operates, and we cooperate with His operation.

In verse 23 Paul expresses his wish, his desire, that the God of peace would sanctify us wholly. Actually, this is the apostle's prayer. Paul prays that the God of peace Himself sanctify us wholly. We may also say that the first part of verse 23 is Paul's blessing, that he blesses the believers with a word concerning the God of peace sanctifying them.

In the second part of this verse Paul says, "May your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete." In the first part of the verse, concerning God's sanctifying us, it is God who takes the initiative. But in the second part of the verse, concerning our spirit, soul, and body being preserved, we are the ones who should somehow take the initiative.

BE PRESERVED

The command "be preserved" may be regarded as an active-passive verb. This means that we take the initiative

to be preserved. However, God is the One who preserves our spirit, soul, and body. Therefore, we take the initiative, but God does the work of preserving our entire being. Therefore, we should pray, "Lord, I long to have my spirit, soul, and body preserved. However, I cannot do this work. I take the initiative, Lord, to ask You to do this."

Do you have the desire, the aspiration, that your entire being would be preserved complete? If we do not have this desire, we should ask the Lord to have mercy on us and grant us such an aspiration. But if we already have this longing, we then need to take the initiative to pray that the Lord would preserve us.

Paul wrote verse 23 not according to doctrine, but according to his experience. It is difficult for us to say whether in this verse we have Paul's prayer or his blessing. It is certain that here we see Paul's desire, his wish. Paul desired that the God of peace would wholly sanctify the believers and that the believers would have an aspiration for their spirit, soul, and body to be preserved complete and without blame. Can you see in this verse God's operation and our cooperation? No doubt, the apostle represents God. Thus, Paul's wish is God's wish. His desire is God's desire. This means that God wishes, desires, to sanctify us wholly. But do we have the aspiration for our spirit, soul, and body to be preserved? The sanctifying work is God's operation, but the aspiration to be preserved is our cooperation. When we have both God's desire and our aspiration, we then have our cooperation with God's operation to sanctify us wholly and to preserve our entire being.

THE COMING OF THE LORD

In verse 23 Paul refers to "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." This is a further reminder of what Paul has written in chapter four. In verse 23 Paul seems to be saying, "Are you believers excited that the Lord Jesus will come back? Are you waiting for His coming? If you are excited and are waiting, you need to practice what I have just written concerning being sanctified and having your

spirit, soul, and body preserved. If you do not practice this matter you will not be ready for the Lord's coming back. You must be sanctified and preserved. Then you will be ready, prepared, qualified, for the coming back of the Lord Jesus. You must admit that at present you are not ready for the Lord's coming. This means that He must delay His coming until the believers are ready. Dear ones, I urge you to get ready for the Lord's coming by being sanctified wholly and by being preserved in your spirit, soul, and body complete and without blame."

SANCTIFIED WHOLLY

According to verse 23, the Sanctifier is the God of peace. His sanctification brings in peace. When we are wholly sanctified by Him from within, we have peace with Him in every way.

The word "sanctified" here means to be set apart; it is to be separated unto God from things common or profane.

The word "wholly" means entirely, thoroughly, to the consummation. God sanctifies us wholly, so that no part of our being, either of our spirit or soul or body, will be left common or profane.

Paul's word concerning our spirit and soul and body strongly indicates that man is of three parts: spirit, soul, and body. The spirit is our inmost part, the inner organ, possessing God-consciousness, that we may contact God (John 4:24; Rom. 1:9). The soul is our very self (Matt. 16:25; Luke 9:25), a medium between our spirit and our body, possessing self-consciousness, that we may have our personality. The body is our external part, the outer organ, possessing world-consciousness, that we may contact the material world. The body contains the soul, and the soul is the vessel of the spirit. In the spirit of the regenerated ones, God as the Spirit dwells; in the soul, our self; and in the body, the physical senses. God sanctifies us first by taking possession of our spirit through regeneration (John 3:5-6); second, by spreading Himself as the life-giving Spirit from our spirit into our soul to saturate and transform it (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18); and last, by

enlivening our mortal body through our soul (Rom. 8:11, 13) and transfiguring it by His life power (Phil. 3:21)

God not only sanctifies us wholly, but also preserves our spirit, soul, and body complete. "Wholly" is quantitative; "complete" is qualitative. In quantity God sanctifies us wholly: in quality God preserves us complete, that is, He keeps our spirit, soul, and body perfect. Through the fall our body has been ruined, our soul has been contaminated, and our spirit has been deadened. In God's full salvation our entire being is saved and made complete and perfect. For this, God is preserving our spirit from any deadening element (Heb. 9:14), our soul from remaining natural and old (Matt. 16:24-26), and our body from the ruin of sin (I Thes. 4:4; Rom. 6:6). Such a preservation by God and His thorough sanctification sustain us to live a holy life unto maturity that we may meet the Lord in His parousia, His presence.

In verse 24 Paul says, "Faithful is He who calls you, who also will do it." The faithful God who has called us will also sanctify us wholly and preserve our entire being complete. This is Paul's word of assurance to the believers.

THE CONCLUSION OF THE EPISTLE

In verses 25 through 28 we have the conclusion of this Epistle. Verse 25 says, "Brothers, pray concerning us." Is it not surprising that Paul would ask those who have been in the Lord less than a year to pray for him? Would you have asked such young believers to pray for you? Paul's request in this verse for prayer can be compared to a grandfather asking his young grandchild to pray for him. Nevertheless, Paul asked new believers, those who had been in the Lord for only a short time, to pray for the apostles. Paul knew that, no matter how little was their experience in prayer, it still would be helpful for them to pray. By this we see that we should not despise the new ones or the young ones. On the contrary, we should ask them to pray for us.

In verses 26 and 27 Paul says, "Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss. I adjure you by the Lord that this letter be

read to all the brothers." Some manuscripts insert the word "holy" before brothers. This would mean that since this Epistle is concerned with the holy life of the believers, the apostle in his concluding charge calls the believers holy brothers.

Paul's concluding word is this: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you." Grace is God in the Son as our enjoyment. According to John 1:17, "The law was given through Moses; grace and reality came through Jesus Christ." The law makes demands on man according to what God is, but grace supplies man with what God is to meet what God demands. No man can partake of God through the law, but grace is the enjoyment of God for man. Thus, grace is God enjoyed by man.

In 1 Corinthians 15:10 we have a further word concerning grace. Here Paul says, "But by the grace of God I am what I am; and His grace unto me was not in vain, but I labored more abundantly than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me." Grace in this verse is the resurrected Christ becoming the life-giving Spirit to bring the processed God in resurrection into us to be our life and life supply that we may live in resurrection. Therefore, grace is the Triune God becoming life and everything to us.

The grace that motivated Paul and operated in him was not a matter or a thing, but a living Person, the resurrected Christ, the embodiment of God the Father becoming the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit, who dwelt in Paul as his everything. It is only when we enjoy the Lord as grace that we can live a holy life for the church life, a life that is genuine and proper for the church by the Lord as the life supply.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST THESSALONIANS

MESSAGE TWENTY

OUR HEART TO BE ESTABLISHED BLAMELESS IN HOLINESS

(1)

Scripture Reading: 1 Thes. 3:6a, 10, 12-13; Prov. 4:23; Jer. 17:9; Psa. 73:1; 78:8; Ezek. 36:26; Matt. 5:8; 15:8, 18-19; 12:34-35; 22:37; Acts 28:27; 2 Cor. 3:15-16; Rom. 10:10; Heb. 4:12; 1 Tim. 1:5; 2 Tim. 2:22

In this message we shall consider what it means to have our heart established blameless in holiness. First Thessalonians 3:13 says, "That He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints." Three important words here are heart, blameless, and holiness. What does it mean to have our heart established blameless? This certainly is an unusual expression. Of course, this establishing is not our work; it is the Lord's doing.

HOLINESS AND SANCTIFICATION

What is your understanding of the phrase "blameless in holiness"? The words "in holiness" do not qualify the verb "establish." Rather, they qualify the word "blameless." In this verse Paul is not saying that the Lord establishes our heart in holiness. Instead, he is saying that the Lord is making our heart blameless, and making it blameless in holiness. Thus, we need to find out what it means for our heart to be blameless in holiness.

Second Thessalonians 2:13 says, "But we ought to thank God always concerning you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you from the beginning unto

salvation in sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." This verse speaks of salvation in sanctification, and 1 Thessalonians 3:13, of being blameless in holiness. To be in holiness is different from being in sanctification. Of course, holiness and sanctification both refer to an element that is holy. However, holiness refers to the element itself, and sanctification refers to the process of being made holy, the process of being sanctified. A process is going on to make us holy; this process is sanctification. Therefore, to be in holiness is to be in the element, and to be in sanctification is to be in the process of being made holy.

God's salvation is in sanctification. This means that God's salvation involves a continuing process through which we are being made holy. As this process is taking place, we enjoy God's saving power. Holiness is the element of God's holy nature. It is in this element that we are to be blameless.

Once again I would like to take as an illustration the simple matter of making tea. Tea is an element, and "tea-ification" is the process of making tea. Suppose you have a cup of plain water. In order to tea-ify the water, you need to place a tea bag into it. When a tea bag is first put into water, the water may seem to remain the same. It seems to be little more than plain water. But after a period of time and some action of stirring, the water will become tea-ified; that is, tea is added to the water and mingled with it. Hence, we may say that the water is under the process of tea-ification. Eventually, the tea is in the water, and the water is in the tea. This means that the element of tea is mingled with the water. As a result of this tea-ification, the tea and water are blended together to make one beverage. Actually, this kind of drink is tea-water.

For the tea to be in the water is one thing, but for the water to pass through the process of tea-ification is another. In like manner, we need to be blameless in the element of holiness, and we also need to undergo the process of sanctification so that we may enjoy God's salvation daily and even hourly.

FAITH AND LOVE

If we have a bird's-eye view of 1 Thessalonians, we shall see that the first three chapters make up one section, and the last two chapters make up another. We have seen that this Epistle has a basic structure containing three elements: the work of faith, the labor of love, and the endurance of hope. Paul speaks of this in 1:3: "Remembering unceasingly your work of faith, and labor of love and endurance of hope of our Lord Jesus Christ, before our God and Father." With this structure as a basis, Paul says in 1:9 and 10 that the believers turned from idols to serve a living and true God and to wait for His Son from the heavens. In chapter two we have the fostering of a holy life for the church life. This fostering is the work of a cherishing mother and exhorting father. The result of the proper fostering is that we walk worthily of God, who calls us into His own kingdom and glory (2:12). In order to have such a walk, we need to be perfected in our faith, and we need to increase and abound in our love. In chapter three Paul is deeply concerned about the Thessalonians' faith and love. According to 3:10, his desire was to perfect anything that was lacking in their faith. Yes, the Thessalonians had faith, yet it needed perfecting. Paul longed to see them in order to perfect what was lacking in their faith. In 3:12 he goes on to say, "And the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love to one another and to all, even as we also to you." As believers, we all need to be perfected in faith and to increase and abound in love.

In verse 13 of chapter three we see the specific reason we need to be perfected in faith and to increase and abound in love: it is that the Lord may establish our hearts blameless in holiness. The establishing of our heart is the issue, the result, of the perfecting of our faith and of the increase and abounding of our love. The Lord is doing a work of building. This building work is to establish our heart. Our heart needs to be built up, to be established blameless. Later we shall seek to explain what the word blameless in verse 13 means.

In 3:13 Paul says that the Lord will establish our hearts

blameless in holiness. He does not say that our heart will be established blameless in purity or in cleanness. The New Testament emphasizes the matter of a pure heart. The Lord Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8). Paul exhorted Timothy to be with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart (2 Tim. 2:22). Furthermore, in Psalm 51:10 David prayed that the Lord would create in him a clean heart. Why, then, does Paul not say blameless in purity or in cleanness, but instead says blameless in holiness? The reason is that the book of 1 Thessalonians is on a holy life for the church life. The conclusion of the first section of this Epistle, composed of chapters one, two, and three, is the Lord will establish our heart blameless in holiness.

I believe that we all have faith, love, and hope. We have turned to God from idols, we are serving the living God, and we are waiting for the coming back of the Lord Jesus. Therefore, we have faith, love, and hope, and we have the turning, the serving, and the waiting. But we still need to be perfected in our faith. In 1 Thessalonians faith refers to our believing ability and also to what we believe. Faith, therefore, is a great matter. The aspect of objective faith, the things we believe in, is a vast field including many things. The messages we have put out over the years have covered different matters in this field of faith. These messages show us how much the Christian faith, Christian belief, comprises. It even includes the matter of the mingling of the Triune God with saved and regenerated human beings.

Through the preaching of Paul, the Thessalonians heard the gospel. This means that they heard the faith. Not only did the Thessalonians hear the faith--they received it. However, because Paul was with them such a short time, approximately three weeks, he could not have presented all the contents of the New Testament faith. No wonder he was eager to visit them and see them face to face in order to speak further to them concerning the faith and to perfect them in the faith. Like the Thessalonians, we also need to have our faith perfected.

The Thessalonians had faith and also had love. As believers in Christ, we also love one another. The divine love is without measure; it is immeasurable. Hence, we need to increase and abound in our love.

If we are perfected in our faith and if we increase and abound in our love, we shall have a living, a daily walk, that is worthy of God's calling. If we would have this kind of living, the Lord must set our heart on a fixed foundation. This is to establish, to build up, our heart.

A CHANGEABLE HEART

Instead of having an established heart, most Christians have a changeable, movable heart. We need a heart that is solidly established, not a heart that is changeable. According to our natural birth, however, our heart is changeable. The most changeable thing about us is our heart. For example, in the morning a brother may be very kind to his wife. But during breakfast he may become bothered by something and treat her in an unkind way. This is an illustration of the changeableness of our heart.

Our heart is changeable not only in relation to other people, but even in our relationship with the Lord. God is the unchanging One; He never changes. We are the ones who are changeable, and we are changeable in our heart. For this reason, Paul was concerned that the hearts of the new believers at Thessalonica would be set, built up, and established.

Verse 13 opens with the word "that." The Greek word here actually means "in order that"; that is, it indicates an issue, a result, of the foregoing verses, especially verses 6 through 12. We need to read verses 6 through 13 as a complete section. Then we shall see that verse 13 is a conclusion of what Paul covers in this section. In these verses Paul's concern is for the Thessalonians' faith and love. His desire is that their faith would be perfected and that their love would increase and abound in order that the Lord may establish their hearts.

Our heart still needs to be established. This is true both of the young and of the old. I know the experiences of

young people. I also know that young people are changeable. I can recall my experience as a young person many years ago. Young people are not steadfast. Now as an elderly man I can speak concerning those who are old. Old people are not more steadfast than young people. Actually, there is no one who, according to his natural, human life, is steadfast in his heart. As human beings, we all are changeable. Simply because we grow older does not mean that there is a basic change in our nature. For example, a piece of glass may be very fragile. After fifty years, the glass will still be fragile. Age will not make it any stronger. The same is true in human life. Both the old and the young are changeable in heart. Therefore, I urge you, especially those who are not so young, not to have any confidence in your heart. Because our heart changes so easily, it is not at all trustworthy.

In my ministry I have met thousands of people. Throughout the years I have seen the changeableness of the human heart. Time after time I have seen someone have a change of heart. Because our heart is changeable, a crucial need in our Christian life is the establishing of our heart.

Although we need our heart to be established, we are not able to do this ourselves. Only the Lord can establish our heart. Therefore, we need Him to cause our heart to be solidly established and built up.

A BLAMELESS HEART

We have seen that according to verse 13 the Lord seeks to establish our hearts blameless. Do you know why our heart is blamable, worthy of blame? Our heart is blamable because it is changeable. If your heart is set, built up, and established upon a solid foundation, it will then become blameless. An unchanging heart is a blameless heart.

Sometimes we criticize others for being changeable when we ourselves are also changeable. For example, a brother may tell his daughter not to trust in a particular young man because he is fickle and changeable. As parents we may speak this way in order to protect our

children. Also, in order to care for new believers, we may warn them not to trust certain people who are changeable. But how about ourselves? Are we not changeable? I must confess that in the natural life I am changeable. Further, most of the changes I am referring to are negative. Years ago I recorded certain things in my diary, for instance, a record of how I had dealt with a particular matter thoroughly before the Lord. But years later I dare not read what I have written, for even after writing such a record I experienced some change.

We need to realize and admit that our heart is changeable. Therefore, we need to receive the mercy and grace from the Lord that we may give Him the permission to establish our heart. He is waiting for our permission before He works within us to do the establishing. When our heart has been established, it will become blameless.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST THESSALONIANS

MESSAGE TWENTY-ONE

OUR HEART TO BE ESTABLISHED BLAMELESS IN HOLINESS

(2)

Scripture Reading: 1 Thes. 3:6a, 10, 12-13; Prov. 4:23; Jer. 17:9; Psa. 73:1; 78:8; Ezek. 36:26; Matt. 5:8; 15:8, 18-19; 12:34-35; 22:37; Acts 28:27; 2 Cor. 3:15-16; Rom. 10:10; Heb. 4:12; 1 Tim. 1:5; 2 Tim. 2:22

The Bible tells us that, as human beings, we have inward parts in addition to the outward members of our physical body. The inward parts are the parts of our inner being. According to the Bible, man is composed of spirit, soul, and body. The body, our physical being, is visible. This is our outer being. But the spirit and the soul, our inner being, are invisible. The soul includes the mind, the emotion, and the will. Along with all these inward parts of our being, the Bible also speaks of the heart and the conscience. We may say that the Bible is a book that deals with the genuine psychology, for it treats in a full way man's seven inward parts: the spirit, the soul, the heart, the mind, the will, the emotion, and the conscience. These inward parts are the components of our inward being.

THE POSITION OF THE HEART

At this point I would like to raise two questions. First, what is the position of the heart in our inner being? Second, what is the function of the heart? In our study of 1 Thessalonians it is important that we find the answer to these questions. In this basic book to new believers Paul tells them in chapter three that they need to be perfected in their faith, and they need their love to increase and

abound so that the Lord may establish their hearts. Surely Paul's word concerning the heart in 3:13 indicates something crucial. Why does Paul not say that the Lord would establish their conscience, or that He would establish their mind, will, or emotion? It is very important that here Paul speaks of the Lord establishing the heart.

Throughout the years we have emphasized the spirit, and we have stressed the importance of turning to our spirit. Although we have given a number of messages on the heart, we have not emphasized the matter of the heart as much as we have emphasized the spirit. Now we would ask why in 3:13 Paul does not say that the Lord would establish our spirit or our soul, but our heart.

We know that our being is composed of three main parts--the spirit, the soul, and the body. But in 3:13, the end of the first section of 1 Thessalonians, Paul says, "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." However, at the end of the second section, composed of chapters four and five, Paul says, "And the God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly, and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (5:23). Why at the end of this Epistle does Paul mention nothing concerning the heart? What has become of it? What, then, is the relationship of the heart to the three main parts of our being? In order to answer this question, let us consider some verses that indicate the close relationship of the heart to the spirit and the soul.

Hebrews 4:12 says, "For the word of God is living and operative and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, both of joints and marrow, and able to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart." This verse speaks of the spirit, the soul, and the heart. Once the soul is divided from the spirit, we are able to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart. The thoughts, of course, are of the mind, and the intents are of the will. According to this verse, the mind and the will are related to the heart, since the thoughts

and intents are of the heart. The heart, therefore, includes the mind for thinking and the will for making decisions. This verse indicates that the heart is very close to the soul and the spirit.

Psalm 78:8 says, "And might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not steadfast with God." In this verse we see that when the forefathers of Israel were stubborn and rebellious, their heart was not set aright, and their spirit was not steadfast. The spirit is not steadfast whenever the heart is not set aright. This verse indicates how close the heart is to the spirit.

Matthew 5:3 speaks of the spirit, and 5:8, of the heart. Verse 3 says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens." Verse 8 says, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." From these verses we see that we need to be poor in spirit and pure in heart. All these verses indicate that our heart is very close to our spirit and also to our soul.

We have pointed out a number of times in the past that our heart is a composition of all the parts of our soul--the mind, the emotion, and the will--plus one part of our spirit, the conscience. Hence, the heart is a composition of all the parts of the soul and one part of the spirit. Our soul is our personality, our person, our self. The English word psychology is derived from *psuche*, the Greek word for soul. The soul is the base of all psychological matters. The *psuche*, the soul, is the "I"; it denotes our being as humans, that is, our personality. This is the reason that in the Bible the number of persons is often given as the number of souls. For example, we are told that seventy souls of the house of Jacob went down to Egypt (Exo. 1:5). This indicates that a person is a soul, for the soul is one's person.

As human beings, we have an outward organ, the body, to contact the physical, visible world. We also have an inward organ, the spirit, to contact God and the spiritual realm. The soul, located between these two organs, is our person, our self.

THE FUNCTION OF THE HEART

The soul is the person himself, but the heart is the person in action. This means that whenever you act, you act by your heart. Therefore, we may say that our heart is our representative in action. We have something in our inner being that represents us, and this representative is our heart. When a brother says to his wife, "Dear, I love you," this means that his heart loves her. Likewise, whenever we hate something, it is our heart that does the hating. Whenever we enjoy something or dislike something, it is our heart that enjoys or dislikes. Thus, our heart is our representative, the acting commissioner or ambassador, of our inner being.

Because the heart is our representative, Solomon says in Proverbs 4:23, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." To keep our heart is actually to guard it. The Hebrew word rendered "keep" means guard. We should guard our heart above all because out of it are the issues of life. "Issues" here implies sources and springs as well as issues. Thus, the heart is related to the sources of life, the springs of life, and the issues of life. First we have the source, then the spring, and then the issue.

Out of the heart come all the issues of our daily life. As human beings, we have life, and this life acts through our heart. Using the illustration of electricity and a switch, we may say that the heart is the switch of our inner being, of our human life. As the flow of electricity depends on the switch, so our daily living is dependent on what our heart switches on and off. Our heart is the switch of our human life, of our daily life, of our being. The word "life" in Proverbs 4:23 implies an organic element, the element of life; it also implies our daily living and activities, in fact, our entire human life. Hence, the word life in this verse is inclusive. As human beings, we have a human life, and this human life has an organic element and also a daily living. The switch of this life is the heart.

Suppose as a brother is studying the Bible he is disturbed by the barking of a dog. Bothered by this sound, he shouts at the dog. The thought and intent of shouting at the dog has its source in his heart. It also springs from

the heart and issues from it. As he is reading the Bible and is disturbed by the dog's barking, something within this brother's heart motivates him to shout at the dog. This shouting is an issue that springs out from the source of the heart. This is an illustration of the heart as the acting representative of our entire being.

The activities and movements of our physical body depend on our physical heart. In like manner, our daily living depends on our psychological heart. The way we act and behave depends on the kind of heart we have.

A RENEWED HEART

Because we are fallen and sinful, our psychological heart is corrupt and deceitful. According to Jeremiah 17:9, our heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. A better translation of the Hebrew would say "incurable" instead of desperately wicked. Our heart is corrupt, rotten, to such an extent that it is incurable. This is the condition of the psychological heart of all descendants of Adam.

Turning To God

But God in His salvation promises to give us a new heart. Ezekiel 36:26 says, "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh." The new heart in this verse does not refer to another heart; it refers to a renewed heart. The first characteristic of this renewed heart is that it turns to God. The turning of our heart to God is a very healthy sign that He has renewed it. A corrupt heart is always away from God. If our heart is away from Him, that is an indication that our heart is still corrupt. Some may ask how they can know if their heart has been renewed. The sign of a renewed heart is that it turns toward God. The sign of a corrupt heart is that it turns away from Him. Therefore, we can know if our heart has been renewed by whether it is turned to God or away from Him.

In God's salvation the renewing of the heart is once for all. However, in our experience our heart is renewed

continually because it is changeable. Perhaps when you were saved, your heart turned to God in a very strong way. But after a period of time, your heart may turn away from Him somewhat. To a certain extent at least, your heart may turn away. Then by God's mercy your heart may turn fully to Him once again. Through fellowship with a saint, through coming to the meetings, or by some other gracious means, your heart may turn to the Lord once again. When your heart was turned away from Him, it became somewhat corrupt. But when your heart came back to the Lord, it was renewed. We need to say, "Lord, I thank You that in Your mercy You have visited my heart and turned it back to You." This turning to the Lord is the first characteristic of a renewed heart.

Seeking Purity

The second characteristic of a renewed heart is that it seeks purity. First Timothy 1:5 speaks of love out of a pure heart. In 2 Timothy 2:22 Paul encourages Timothy to be "with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart." What does it mean for the heart to seek purity? According to the Bible, to have a pure heart is to have a heart with a single motive. Purity, therefore, is a matter of motive. If we do something with a double motive, our heart is not pure. Whatever we do must be with a single purpose, a single motive, for God Himself. We should not have any other purpose. We love God, and because we love Him we do certain things for Him without any other motive. If this is our situation, then our heart is pure.

In Matthew 5:8 the Lord Jesus tells us, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." To be pure in heart is to be single in purpose, to have the single goal of accomplishing God's will for God's glory. According to this verse, those who are pure in heart shall see God. In order to see something clearly, we need to focus on it. This is to be pure in our seeing. In like manner, to be pure in heart is

to have a single aim. Our goal, our aim, should be God Himself, and we should not have any other motive.

If you read all the verses in the Bible concerning the heart, you will see that these two characteristics of a renewed heart--turning to the Lord and being pure--are the basic matters in the Bible with respect to the heart. If we turn to God and seek purity, we shall have the proper way to "switch on" our heart toward God. By turning our heart to Him and by being pure in our motive toward Him, the switch of our heart will be turned on and the divine electricity will flow within us. Otherwise, the switch of the heart will be turned off, and God will be cut off in a practical way from our daily living. Then evil things will come out of our heart. It is the source, the spring, and the issue of all manner of evil things. According to Matthew 12:34 and 35, both good and evil things may flow out of our heart: "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man out of the good treasure brings forth good things, and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things." Furthermore, in Matthew 15:8 the Lord speaks of those whose heart is far away from God. Then in verses 18 and 19 He goes on to say, "But the things which go out of the mouth come out of the heart, and those defile the man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witnessings, blasphemies." From these verses we see that out of the heart flow the springs of human life.

Turning to God and being pure toward God are the two matters that govern our heart. Psalm 73:1 speaks of a clean heart: "Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart." We have already pointed out how both the Lord Jesus and Paul stressed the importance of a pure heart. We need a heart turned to God and a heart that is pure toward Him.

A HEART ESTABLISHED BLAMELESS IN HOLINESS

Now we are ready to see what it means for our heart to be established blameless in holiness. Not only should our heart turn to God and be pure, but it also needs the

element of holiness added to it. To be holy is to be separated unto God and fully occupied by Him and saturated with Him. For our heart to be holy means that it is separated unto Him, occupied by Him, possessed by Him, and saturated with Him.

Once again we may use the illustration of making tea. Suppose you have a cup of plain water. This water does not contain any tea. But when the element of tea is added to the water, the water is tea-ified. The water is separated unto the tea, it is possessed and occupied by the tea, and it is even saturated with the tea. As a result, it becomes tea-ified water. After the water has been fully tea-ified, it is in a state of tea-ification, a state of having been tea-ified. This illustrates what it means for our heart to be established blameless in holiness.

One version of 3:13 says "in the state of being holy." The word holiness indicates a state; it does not indicate a process. A process would be indicated by the word sanctification. Therefore, it is correct to speak of holiness here as the state of being made holy.

When we were away from the Lord, our heart also was turned away from Him. Instead of being occupied by the Lord, our heart was occupied by many other things. Furthermore, our heart certainly was not saturated with the Lord. Thus, our heart was away from the Lord, it was not occupied by the Lord, and it was not saturated with the Lord. However, we can praise the Lord that, through His mercy and grace, we are now on the way to being separated fully unto the Lord, to being occupied wholly by Him, and to being saturated thoroughly with Him. When this process has been completed, our heart will be in the state of being holy, in the state of holiness.

For our heart to be established blameless in holiness includes much more than simply for our heart to turn to the Lord and to be pure toward the Lord. This is to have our turned and pure heart separated unto the Lord, occupied by the Lord, and saturated with the Lord. Such a heart not only has turned to the Lord but it also has a pure motive. It is separated unto Him, fully occupied by Him,

and thoroughly saturated with Him. It is here in such a state that our heart will be established. Once our heart has been established, it will be set, and it will be no longer movable or changeable. Furthermore, when our heart is in such a condition, it will become blameless.

To be blameless is not the same as to be perfect. When something is perfect, it is without blemish or defect. This goes beyond blamelessness. In other words, to be without blame is not as good as to be without blemish. In 3:13 Paul does not require perfection. Rather, he requires only that our heart be blameless. The way for our heart to be blameless is for it to be established by the Lord. If our heart is established by Him, we shall be those whose heart has been separated unto the Lord, occupied by Him, and saturated with Him. Then our heart will be set, established, built up, in holiness. Here, in this state of holiness, the state of being made holy, our heart will become blameless.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST THESSALONIANS

MESSAGE TWENTY-TWO

OUR HEART TO BE ESTABLISHED BLAMELESS IN HOLINESS AND OUR BODY TO BE PRESERVED CLEAN IN SANCTIFICATION

Scripture Reading: 1 Thes. 3:13; 4:3-8; Heb. 12:14; Rom. 12:1-2; Eph. 3:17-19; Mark 12:30; Phil. 2:5

In reading the Scriptures we need to touch the burden in the spirit of the writer. In particular, we need to know the burden in Paul's spirit when he was writing 1 Thessalonians. Paul concludes chapter three of 1 Thessalonians with a word of blessing: "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" (v. 13). Paul's desire was that the readers of this Epistle would be established in their hearts blameless in holiness.

In chapter four Paul goes on to charge the saints to abstain from the defiling sin of fornication: "For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that you abstain from fornication." In what way does Paul charge the saints to abstain from this sin? He charges them in the way of sanctification. First he tells them that the will of God is our sanctification. The will of God is that we would be sanctified, kept, preserved, and guarded in sanctification. The best way to abstain from fornication is to be sanctified, preserved, in God's holiness.

In 4:3, 4, and 7 Paul uses the word "sanctification" three times. In verse 3 he says that the will of God is our sanctification; in verse 4, that we should know how to possess our vessel, our body, in sanctification and honor; and in verse 7, that God has called us in sanctification. According to 4:4, we should possess our body in sanctification and honor. Sanctification is before God, and honor is before man. Every fornicator loses his honor

before man. In every society fornicators are despised; they have lost their honor before man. Therefore, we need to keep our body from such a sin, and the way to do so is in sanctification.

OUR RESPONSIBILITY IN BEING SANCTIFIED

In 5:23 Paul gives a concluding word concerning sanctification: "And the God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly, and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Here we see that our entire being--spirit, soul, and body--needs to be sanctified. We need to be sanctified by the God of peace not only in our soul and body, but also in our spirit.

According to 5:23, we bear some responsibility for being wholly sanctified. On the one hand, God will sanctify us wholly. On the other hand, our spirit, soul, and body need to be preserved. Although God preserves us, we need to bear a certain amount of responsibility to be preserved.

We may regard the words "be preserved" as an active-passive verb. This means that although we are being preserved, we need to take the responsibility, the initiative, to be preserved. Thus, "be" implies something active, and "preserved" implies something passive.

God intends to preserve us, but are we willing to be preserved? We may use the matter of giving medicine to children as an illustration of our need to bear responsibility to be preserved. Sometimes a child may need medicine, but he may not be willing to take it. In fact, he may resist the attempt of his parents to give it to him and even make it necessary for them to hold him down. Parents do this in order that the health of the child may be preserved. Sometimes we do not cooperate with the Lord to be preserved. This forces Him to do certain things to subdue us or restrict us so that we may take in what is necessary to be sanctified and preserved.

In 1 Thessalonians, a book on a holy life for the church life, we are told that different parts of our being need to be

preserved. Our heart needs to be sanctified, our body needs to be preserved in sanctification, and eventually even our spirit, the most hidden part of our being, also needs to be sanctified.

OUR ACTING AGENT

In the foregoing message we pointed out that our heart is our acting representative. Now I would like to make this matter a little more clear. Perhaps the term "acting agent" is better than representative. Every one of us is a being, a human being. The word "being" is a modern expression. The biblical term for a human being is "soul." This means that each one of us is a soul. The soul, as a being, has two organs: the inward organ, the spirit, and the outward organ, the body. We contact the physical world through the five senses of our body. Likewise, through the spirit, an organ which has senses of its own, we contact God.

Whether or not we are able to contact a certain thing depends upon the organ we use. For example, if you close your eyes, you will not be able to see anything. However, you cannot use your eyes to substantiate sound. For this, you must use your ears. Because atheists do not exercise their spirit, they say there is no God. We cannot substantiate God unless we use our spirit. John 4:24 tells us that God is Spirit and that those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit. If we exercise our spirit, we shall immediately sense that there truly is a God. Deep within, an atheist may say to himself, "Suppose there is a God after all--what will you do?" With the mouth an atheist may say that there is no God, but in the depths of his being, in his spirit, he may sense that there is a God.

ACTIVE IN HEART

Our soul must act. When our soul, our being, acts, that is the heart. But when we keep ourselves at a standstill, this means that our heart does not act.

We all have two hearts: a physical heart and a psychological heart. We know where our physical heart is located, but we do not know the location of our

psychological heart. The actions or activities of our physical body depend on the beating of our physical heart. According to medical doctors, the death of the physical body takes place when the heart stops beating. A person who does not have any pulse is dead, for his heart has stopped beating. The point of this illustration is that the death of the body takes place when the heart stops beating. This is also true of the psychological heart.

Both our physical heart and our psychological heart have arteries. The main arteries of the psychological heart are the mind, emotion, and will. Heart attacks are often due to the blockage of the arteries. Recently I read that doctors who examined the bodies of young men who died in the Vietnam War discovered that in many cases their arteries were blocked even though they were quite young. Realizing the danger of blocked arteries, many watch their diet and are careful to exercise in order to cleanse their blood vessels. The problem of the physical heart is an illustration of the problem of the psychological heart. Today there are millions of Christians. But how many of these Christians are truly living? Most of them are not living. The reason they are not living is that the arteries of their psychological heart have been blocked. This blockage has caused them to die spiritually.

We all need to ask ourselves if we are spiritually healthy. To be healthy physically we need a strong heart. We also need a strong heart if we are to be spiritually healthy. All spiritual diseases are of the psychological heart. Our psychological heart may be wrong in different ways. We may be wrong in our thinking, in our loving or hating, or in the way we use our will.

If our psychological heart is healthy, it will be very active in thinking, loving, hating, and deciding. Our heart is our acting agent. This means that if we are active, our heart will be active in mind, emotion, and will. However, if a person is not active in his heart, we may wonder if he is spiritually alive. If he is alive, why is there no activity in his heart? Why does his heart not function in a normal way, since it is his acting agent?

I can testify that, even though I am elderly, I am very active in my heart. I am full of thought, feeling, and intention. My entire being--spirit, soul, and body--is active. However, the agent of this activity is not the spirit, the soul, or the body; the acting agent is the heart with the three main arteries of mind, emotion, and will.

A RENEWED MIND

In Romans 12:2 Paul speaks of the renewing of the mind. As the body represents our outward being, so the mind represents our inward being. According to Romans 12:1, our body needs to be presented to God as a sacrifice and our mind needs to be renewed. To be renewed is to be saturated with God. This is sanctification. To be renewed actually is to be sanctified, and to be sanctified is to be transformed. Our mind needs to be renewed, sanctified, transformed.

AN EMOTION TOUCHED WITH THE LOVE OF CHRIST

In Ephesians 3:17 Paul says, "That Christ may make His home in your hearts through faith, that you, having been rooted and grounded in love." Love is a matter of the emotion. According to this verse, Christ makes His home in our hearts, and we ourselves become rooted and grounded in His love. This indicates that our emotion is touched by His love and that we grow in this love. To have our emotion filled with the love of Christ surely is an aspect of sanctification. Furthermore, when we are rooted and grounded in love, we can "know the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ" (Eph. 3:19). This is also related to the sanctification of our heart, in particular of the emotion. To have our emotion filled with the love of Christ is to be saturated with Christ. No doubt, this is the sanctification of our emotion.

LOVING THE LORD WITH OUR WHOLE BEING

Mark 12:30 says, "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength." Here we have the heart,

the soul, and the mind, with the soul mentioned in between the heart and the mind. The three parts of the soul--the mind, the emotion, and the will--are also parts of the heart. But why in Mark 12:30 is there no mention of the emotion or the will? The reason is that the emotion and the will are included in the soul. But why, then, is the mind mentioned? The mind is mentioned because it is the leading part of both the heart and the soul. Therefore, we need to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind.

Mark 12:30 also tells us to love the Lord with all our strength. The word "strength" here refers to our physical body. Therefore, we need to love the Lord with all our physical strength and with all our heart, soul, and mind. This indicates that our entire being, our inner being and our outer being, should be occupied with the Lord our God and saturated with Him. This is to be sanctified, made holy.

THE SPIRIT AND THE HEART

I am burdened to point out that, as Christians, believers in Christ, we must be living. To be a living believer involves both our spirit and our heart. Doctrinally, we may say that we can become living by exercising our spirit. But in practice often it seems that the exercise of our spirit does not work. Many of us can testify that we have exercised our spirit, but still this did not always work to make us living. The reason the exercise of the spirit may not work is that the heart does not act. This means that there is something wrong in the heart. Perhaps the mind is not renewed, sanctified, transformed; it may not be saturated with the Lord and occupied by Him. Instead, it may be filled with worldly things. We may exercise our spirit and say, "Praise the Lord!" However, this exercise may not work to make us living. The exercise of the spirit works only when our heart is active.

If our heart is dormant or asleep, exercising our spirit to call on the name of the Lord will not be effective. This exercise cannot work if our acting agent, our heart, is dormant. This is the reason we need to deal thoroughly

with our heart. This dealing must include our mind, emotion, and will. Our mind must be the mind of Christ, our emotion must be saturated with the love of Christ, and our will must be one with His will. If this is the condition of our heart, our heart will be active and functioning. Then if we call on the Lord when our heart is active, this calling will be very effective.

We all need to look to the Lord to have mercy on us. We need to pray, "Lord, have mercy on me. I want to have my mind renewed. I want to have my emotion filled with Your love. I want to have a will that is truly one with Your will." If we have such a heart, then the heart as our acting agent will be established blameless in holiness, blameless in the state of being made holy.

POSSESSING OUR BODY IN SANCTIFICATION AND HONOR

As Paul was writing chapter three of 1 Thessalonians, he must have had the intention to go from the inner being, the heart, to the outer being, the body. This is the reason he gives the charge concerning abstaining from fornication and concerning possessing our body in sanctification and honor.

Fornication is a gross sin. According to the Bible, Satan's purpose is to use sin to defile the man God created for Himself. Any kind of vessel is defiled when it becomes dirty. Furthermore, the function of a dirty and defiled vessel is annulled. For example, we do not use a cup that is dirty. Before a dirty cup can be used, it must first be cleansed. God created man as a pure vessel, but Satan injected sin into man with the intention of defiling him and spoiling him. The most defiling sin is fornication. Stealing is sinful and unclean, but it is not as defiling as fornication. Fornication damages God's purpose, it damages the human body, and it damages the family and society. Nothing else damages humanity as seriously as fornication does. Therefore, after speaking concerning the sanctification of the heart, the inward being, Paul could not forget to speak concerning the outward being.

Fornication always comes from a changing heart, a heart that has not been established. If your heart has been established, it will be difficult for Satan to seduce you to commit fornication. But it is easy for those who are changeable and fickle to fall into the snare of fornication.

As Paul was writing chapter three, he probably had the thought of going on to write concerning the believers' outward being. He may have said to himself, "Paul, you are speaking concerning the inward being. Faith is a matter of the heart, and love is a matter of the emotion. Both are related to the inward being. But what about the body outwardly?" Paul was an excellent writer. When he writes about a matter, he writes about it to the uttermost. Thus, when he comes to the matter of outward sanctification, he deals with the most defiling sin, the sin of fornication.

Stay away from fornication. If you become involved in fornication, you will open the door wide to all kinds of corruption. Believers and unbelievers have been damaged by the gross sin of fornication. Therefore, Paul commands the believers to abstain from fornication. He tells them that sanctification is God's will. Because God's will is to keep us always in sanctification, we should abstain from everything that is unclean so that the body may be preserved.

At this point I would like to say a word to the young people. As Christians, we may need to read the newspapers to know the world situation. I read a newspaper nearly every day, but certain pages I would never read, for they are defiling. Once your mind has been defiled by looking at a certain picture, it will be very difficult for you to remove this defiling element. Furthermore, we should not listen to certain kinds of conversations or touch things that are unclean. But most important we should abstain from fornication. We must keep, preserve, safeguard, our vessel clean in sanctification before God. It must be holy, separated, and saturated with God and also kept in honor before man.

Man was created by God with honor, for man was made

in God's image. Therefore, we are to express God and represent Him. We have been assigned a most honorable position. Marriage is a holy and honorable matter, and it is for the fulfillment of God's purpose. This is the reason the Bible tells us to honor marriage. But fornication destroys mankind and causes the one who falls into it to lose his honor. Therefore, we must preserve our body clean in sanctification and honor.

A HOLY LIFE FOR THE CHURCH LIFE

I believe we have touched the burden in Paul's spirit as he was writing chapters three and four of 1 Thessalonians. First he dealt with the inward being represented by the heart and then with the outward being represented by the body. Inwardly, our heart must be established in holiness; outwardly, our body must be preserved in sanctification and honor. This is to have a holy life, and this holy life is for the church life. If we have a heart established blameless in holiness and a body preserved clean in sanctification and honor, then, in a practical way, we shall have a holy life for the church life.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST THESSALONIANS

MESSAGE TWENTY-THREE

TO BE SANCTIFIED WHOLLY WITH OUR SPIRIT, SOUL, AND BODY PRESERVED COMPLETE

(1)

Scripture Reading: 1 Thes. 4:9, 13; 5:8, 16-24; 2 Cor. 7:1;
1 John 1:6; 1 Tim. 1:5; Rom. 6:6, 19; 7:24; 8:10-11; 12:1; 1
Cor. 6:13b, 15a, 19-20

A BRIEF SURVEY

In 5:23 Paul says, "And the God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly, and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." In order to understand this verse, we need to have a brief review of the entire book of 1 Thessalonians. Chapter one indicates that the holy life for the church life is constructed of faith, love, and hope. Such a life surely turns to God from idols, serves the living God, and waits for the coming of the Lord. This is the main point revealed in chapter one. Chapter two tells us that the apostles did their best as nursing mothers and exhorting fathers to foster such a life. They cared for this life and nourished it so that it would result in a walk worthy of God's kingdom and glory.

How can such a life become worthy of God's kingdom and God's glory? There is no way other than to be sanctified. Thus, chapter three says that this life needs to be perfected in faith and also needs to increase and abound in love in order that the Lord may establish our hearts, the acting agent of our being, blameless in holiness. This is the establishment of our inward being, of our heart, our acting agent.

In chapter four Paul goes on to point out that not only should our heart inwardly be established in holiness, but

also that our body outwardly needs to be preserved in sanctification, the process of being made holy. Furthermore, the physical body needs to be preserved not only in sanctification before God, but also in honor in the sight of man. In this chapter Paul also speaks concerning the saints who have died, who are sleeping. He deals with this matter in the scope of hope. In chapter three Paul says that the holy life for the church life should be perfected in faith and should increase and abound in love, and then in chapter four he shows that the resurrection of the dead saints is a matter of hope.

In 5:8 Paul covers the three matters of faith, love, and hope: "But we who are of the day, let us be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and a helmet, the hope of salvation." In warfare two crucial parts of our body--the head and the breast--need to be guarded. The breast must be covered, and the head must be protected. Hence, we have the breastplate of faith and love to cover our breast, and the helmet of the hope of salvation to cover our head. In our study of the Song of Songs we pointed out that the breasts of the seeking one signify faith and love in Christ. For this reason, the breastplate is of both faith and love. Our head, our mind, the thinking organ with its thoughts, needs to be protected by the helmet of God's salvation. Therefore, in chapter five we see that when we are fighting the spiritual warfare, we need to be covered by the armor of God that includes the breastplate of faith and love and the helmet of the hope of salvation. In chapter five the three basic elements of the Christian life--faith, love, and hope--are all included.

Eventually, in 5:23, Paul expressed his desire that the God of peace would sanctify us wholly, not only in heart or in body. Inwardly we have a heart, and outwardly we have a body. The heart and the body form the main structure of a living, acting person.

As living persons, we have a heart within and a body without. The heart is the directing agent, for it directs our

actions, activities, and motions. The body is the means, the organ, by which we act outwardly. Hence, through our body our heart moves, and our body acts under the direction of our heart. This is the reason chapter three deals with the sanctification of the heart and chapter four, with the sanctification of the body.

What, then, about our spirit and our soul? Even though the soul is very much like the heart in its components, there is still a difference between the soul and the heart. As far as the composition of our being is concerned, we have a spirit, a soul, and a body. But in our acting, our living, we have a heart and a body. Thus, when speaking of our being, we should refer to the spirit, the soul, and the body. But in speaking of our living and our actions, we should refer to the heart and the body. Our daily living is a matter of our heart and our body. For this reason Paul in 1 Thessalonians differentiates what we are from how we act. In action, we have a heart with a body. But in our being, that is, with respect to what we are, we have a spirit, a soul, and a body.

In chapter three of 1 Thessalonians sanctification is a matter of our inner part, our heart. In chapter four sanctification is a matter of our outward part, our body. Then in chapter five, as a conclusion of the book, sanctification includes our entire being. This is the reason Paul speaks of the God of peace sanctifying us wholly. By "wholly" Paul means our whole spirit and soul and body. Therefore, he expresses the desire that the saints' spirit and soul and body would be preserved complete. This is to be sanctified wholly.

The adverb "wholly" in 5:23 indicates quantity. It points to the fact that every part of our being--spirit, soul, and body--needs to be sanctified and preserved. Furthermore, the adjective "complete" refers to quality. Thus, Paul, an excellent writer, indicates in a brief way that quantitatively we need to be sanctified wholly, and qualitatively we need to be preserved complete. We need to be preserved not partially or superficially but completely, even absolutely and perfectly. I hope that this brief survey

of 1 Thessalonians will help you to understand what we shall cover in this message and in the message following.

A TRIPARTITE BEING

God certainly aspires to sanctify us wholly. He wants to preserve us in the three parts of our being--to preserve our spirit, our soul, and our body. According to 5:23, we are tripartite beings; that is, we have three parts: spirit, soul, and body.

When I was a young Christian, I learned the truth concerning man's tripartite being, and I contended for this truth. In theology this is known as trichotomy. There is also the school of dichotomy, which teaches that man is of two parts, body and soul. First Thessalonians 5:23 proves strongly that the school of dichotomy is not correct. In this verse there is a conjunction between the words spirit and soul and also between the words soul and body. This indicates that the spirit, the soul, and the body are different and distinct. Nevertheless, some teachers of the Bible claim that the words spirit and soul are synonyms. This can be compared to saying that the different members of our physical body, for example, the stomach and the liver, are the same. It is a very serious misunderstanding to claim that the soul and the spirit are synonymous.

Years ago, a missionary who believed in dichotomy came to Hong Kong to attend a conference I was holding there. After one of the meetings, he asked for a time to have fellowship with me. He told me that the conference was wonderful. Then he went on to say, "You teach that man is of three parts. I don't believe this. Man has just two parts--the visible part and the invisible part." I replied, "Brother, to say that man is of three parts is not my teaching; it is the teaching in the Bible. What would you say about 1 Thessalonians 5:23? In this verse Paul speaks of the spirit and the soul and the body, three nouns with two conjunctions. How can you say that man is of only two parts?" He answered, "I know this verse, but I don't believe that the spirit and the soul are two different things." Then I said to him, "Brother, this means that you don't believe the Bible." He then claimed that he believed

the Bible to the uttermost and that no matter what I would say, he would continue to believe that the spirit and the soul are synonyms. At that point I said, "If you think that the spirit and the soul are synonymous, this is like saying that the nose and the mouth are the same. If you want to believe this, I won't argue with you. But to me, the mouth is the mouth, and the nose is the nose. Do you say things with your nose, or do you smell things with your mouth?"

I relate this incident to point out that there is a big difference between the spirit and the soul. The spirit and the soul are not synonymous. Rather, the spirit is the spirit, and the soul is the soul. Just as the nose and the mouth are different organs with different functions, so the spirit and the soul are different organs and have different functions. First Thessalonians 5:23 speaks of the spirit and the soul and the body. This indicates clearly that we are of three parts.

It is easy to understand what it means for the body to be preserved. In chapter four Paul commands the believers to abstain from fornication. To abstain from fornication is to preserve our body in sanctification. But what does it mean to preserve our soul and our spirit? We need to be able to explain in a practical way how to preserve our spirit and our soul.

A SHORTCOMING IN READING THE BIBLE

We Christians have a shortcoming in the way we read the Bible. This shortcoming is that we take things for granted and assume we understand them. For example, in reading 5:23 we may say, "Oh, I know what 1 Thessalonians 5:23 says. It tells us that our spirit and soul and body should be preserved complete. From this verse we know that we should not believe in dichotomy, that man is of only two parts, but should believe in trichotomy, that man is of three parts. I, therefore, believe that man is of three parts." This is good, but it is not adequate, because it does not render much help in a practical way. Instead of

taking this verse for granted, we need to seek to understand how to preserve our spirit and our soul.

Can you give me the name of a Christian book that explains how to preserve our spirit and our soul? I do not know of any Christian writing that speaks concerning this matter. I believe that if there were such a writing, we would have learned of it during the course of the last fifty years. As we have pointed out, some Bible teachers do not believe that our spirit and soul are different parts. How could they tell us how to preserve our spirit and our soul? Therefore, my burden in this message is related to the preserving of the spirit and the soul.

SANCTIFIED AND PRESERVED

God not only sanctifies us wholly, but also preserves our spirit, soul, and body complete. "Wholly" is quantitative; "complete" is qualitative. In quantity God sanctifies us wholly; in quality God preserves us complete; that is, He keeps our spirit, soul, and body perfect. Through the fall our body has been ruined, our soul has been contaminated, and our spirit has been deadened. In God's full salvation, our entire being is saved and made complete and perfect. For this, God is preserving our spirit from any deadening element (Heb. 9:14), our soul from remaining natural and old (Matt. 16:24-26), and our body from the ruin of sin (1 Thes. 4:4; Rom. 6:6). Such a preservation by God and His thorough sanctification sustain us to live a holy life unto maturity that we may meet the Lord in His *parousia*.

EXERCISING OUR SPIRIT TO CONTACT GOD

Our spirit is composed of three parts: the conscience, the fellowship, and the intuition. Our spirit is mainly for us to have fellowship with God. When we have fellowship with God, we contact Him. This contact with God spontaneously gives us a sense of God, a consciousness of God. Intuition denotes the direct sense and consciousness that come from God. Through this intuition we can know whether we are right or wrong. If we are wrong, we shall be condemned by our conscience. But if we are right, we shall be justified by

our conscience. Our conscience, therefore, either accuses and condemns or excuses and justifies. The way to preserve our spirit is first to exercise it to have fellowship with God. If we fail to exercise our spirit in this way, we shall leave it in a deadened situation.

Whenever we Christians come together in a church meeting, we need to function. We need to pray, praise, or give a word of testimony. This is to exercise our spirit and not allow it to remain dormant or in a deadened condition. But sorry to say, many saints do not preserve their spirit by exercising it in this way. Instead, they allow their spirit to remain dormant. It seems that they leave their spirit in a tomb.

However, there are some brothers who disturb the meeting by functioning too frequently without any real riches of Christ. Again and again they stand up to speak without having anything to say. I would encourage brothers such as these to be silent for a period of time until they have the assurance that some of the riches of Christ have truly become their portion. If they stand up to release these riches, all the saints will be happy with them because their testimony will be helpful.

Although some saints may function too much without the riches of Christ, the need of most of the saints is to function much more with the exercise of their spirit.

KEEPING OUR SPIRIT LIVING

Certain verses in chapter five of 1 Thessalonians help us to see that the first way to preserve our spirit is to keep it living through proper exercise. Verses 16 through 19 say, "Always rejoice; unceasingly pray; in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit." To rejoice, pray, and give thanks are to exercise our spirit. When we exercise our spirit in this way, we cause it to be living. Exercising the spirit to keep it living is the first way to preserve it.

No one likes to have any kind of illness or disease in his physical body. If you become ill, you certainly will not want your body to remain in a sick condition. On the contrary,

you will do everything possible to bring your body out of such an unhealthy situation. Likewise, we should not leave our spirit in a deadened condition. We should struggle to have our spirit freed from that kind of condition.

How can we release our spirit from a situation of deadness? We can do it through exercising our spirit by rejoicing, praying, and thanking. Do you realize that to be quiet is to keep your spirit in a deadened condition? If you allow your spirit to remain in a situation of death, this means that you do not cooperate with the sanctifying God to preserve your spirit.

Because of the fall, our spirit has been deadened. Our spirit, therefore, must overcome the problem of deadness. Many times the saints attend the church meetings in death. When they attend the meeting, they sit in their chair with a deadened spirit. But other parts of their being may be very active. For example, in their thoughts they may criticize the testimonies given by others; they may think that some testimonies are not real and that others are full of oldness. Although these saints criticize others, they do not preserve their own spirit. Instead of preserving their spirit, they allow it to remain in a deadened condition.

I wish to emphasize strongly the fact that to preserve our spirit is first of all to exercise it in order to pull it out of death. The spirit of an unbeliever is absolutely dead. Most of those around you at school, at work, or in your neighborhood are utterly dead in their spirit. Many of your relatives, perhaps members of your immediate family, are also dead in the spirit. Have you been sanctified, separated, from a spirit-deadening situation? Many saints have not been separated in this way. This is the reason they never pray or praise the Lord in the meetings. They do not rejoice or give thanks. Instead of praising the Lord with the exercise of the spirit, they prefer to save their face by leaving their spirit in a deadened condition. Some may say to themselves, "I am a cultured person. I must cause others to realize that I am refined and have a high

education. Thus, I shall sit quietly in the meeting in a cultured way. Let the young people and those who are not well educated shout praises in the meetings. I don't care to behave in such a way." If this is your attitude, your spirit will remain deadened. Furthermore, as far as the condition of your spirit is concerned, you are not sanctified. You are common, for you keep company with those who are dead in the spirit.

This habit of allowing our spirit to remain in death has even invaded the church meetings in the recovery. I am not encouraging anyone to behave in an unruly manner in the meetings. My point is that we need to pull our spirit out of death and cooperate with the operation of the Triune God in sanctifying us. He wants to separate all of us from those whose spirits are deadened. Because we have been regenerated, we need to be different. We need to show that our spirit is living, that it is not deadened. Thus, our spirit should rejoice, pray, and give thanks to the Lord.

KEEPING OUR SPIRIT FROM DEFILEMENT

Another way to preserve our spirit is found in 2 Corinthians 7:1. In this verse Paul says, "Having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." This verse indicates that we should abstain from all defilement of both flesh and spirit. We need to stay away from anything that contaminates our spirit. This is the reason we should keep our eyes from looking at evil things, such as defiling pictures. Such pictures defile not only our eyes; they also defile our spirit. This is something I have learned from experience. In 1933 I visited Shanghai the first time. The church had two meeting halls then, one in western Shanghai and the other in northern Shanghai, quite far from each other. For transportation we often used the street car. The ride from western Shanghai to northern Shanghai took more than an hour. The first few times I took this ride in the street car I looked around at the various sights on the main street. But when I arrived at the meeting hall, I realized that my spirit was deadened. It

had been deadened by my looking at so many things on the street. From this I learned to close my eyes and pray when taking the ride by street car. This preserved my spirit. Because I learned to preserve my spirit in this way, when I arrived at the meeting hall in northern Shanghai, my spirit was living. I had truly been sanctified in my spirit.

If you become contaminated by looking at certain kinds of pictures, your spirit will be defiled, contaminated, and deadened. As a result, you will not be able to pray unless you first ask the Lord to cleanse you from all defilement. I offer this as an illustration of our need to cooperate with the sanctifying Triune God to have our spirit preserved from deadness and contamination.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST THESSALONIANS

MESSAGE TWENTY-FOUR

TO BE SANCTIFIED WHOLLY WITH OUR SPIRIT, SOUL, AND BODY PRESERVED COMPLETE

(2)

Scripture Reading: 1 Thes. 4:9, 13; 5:8, 16-24; 2 Cor. 7:1;
1 John 1:6; 1 Tim. 1:5; Rom. 6:6, 19; 7:24; 8:10-11; 12:1; 1
Cor. 6:13b, 15a, 19-20

In 1 Thessalonians 5:23 Paul says, "And the God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly, and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." In the foregoing message we pointed out that the way to preserve our spirit is first to exercise it to have fellowship with God. According to 5:16-18, we need to rejoice, pray, and give thanks. If we do this, our spirit will be pulled out of a condition of deadness and will be living. Second, we preserve our spirit by keeping it from all defilement and contamination. In this message we shall go on to consider how to preserve our soul and our body.

CLEARING THE ARTERIES OF OUR PSYCHOLOGICAL HEART

Our psychological heart has three main arteries. These arteries, which are also the three parts of the soul, are the mind, the will, and the emotion. It is important to know how in a practical way to have these arteries unclogged. For the unclogging of the arteries of our physical heart, doctors may prescribe medication. But in many cases surgery is required to remove the blockage. The way to unclog the three main arteries of our psychological heart is to make a thorough confession to the Lord. From

experience I have learned that we need to stay with the Lord for a period of time to confess our defects, failures, defeats, mistakes, wrongdoings, and sins.

Concerning the Mind

We may begin by confessing all the sinfulness and uncleanness that is in our mind, in our thinking. The artery of our mind can be compared to a ditch that is clogged with dirt and needs to be dug out so that water can flow through it. Our mind is filled with dirt. As a result, this artery is clogged. In order to unclog the artery of our mind, we need to confess everything that is sinful in our thoughts and in our way of thinking. By confessing our thoughts one by one, we shall remove the blockage from this artery.

As we are making confession in this way, we may confess to the Lord how natural our understanding is concerning many matters. Perhaps you do not feel that your understanding of so many things is natural. This is the reason you need to go to the Lord and say to Him, "Lord, enlighten me and expose my mind. Expose all my thoughts. Lord, bring my mind fully into Your light." Then you should follow the enlightenment and exposure to confess the problems in your thinking one by one. For example, the Lord may show you that in your married life and family life your understanding is very natural. You may understand your spouse, your children, and your family affairs in a natural way, not at all in a spiritual way. If the Lord exposes this in you, you should immediately confess and say, "Lord, forgive me. Although I love You, my understanding of married life is altogether natural. Lord, deliver me from this natural understanding and take it out of me." This is an illustration of the kind of confession we need to make concerning our mind. For this kind of exposure and confession it may be necessary for us to stay with the Lord for a long time.

Concerning The Will

What, then, about our will? If we go to the Lord

concerning our will, He will expose it in a thorough and detailed way. It may seem as if we are being examined under a divine microscope, for one by one there will be brought to light all the germs in our will. In particular, we shall realize that we are very rebellious, that we do not know what it means to be submissive to the Lord. One by one, we need to confess the germs of rebellion in our will. The Lord may show you that, a few years ago, you were wrong in a particular matter. Then He may go on to show you how you were wrong with a certain brother or a certain sister. Each time you will need to confess. You should thank the Lord that you are under His light, under His exposure. By confessing all that the Lord exposes in our will, we unclog the artery of our will.

Concerning the Emotion

The artery of the emotion also needs to be unclogged. When we realize how serious is the problem we have with our emotion, we may be deeply sorrowful. We may despair and feel utterly ashamed of the condition of our emotion. We shall realize that in many cases we hate what we should love, and love what we should hate. When we come into the light of the sanctuary, we shall see that the most ugly aspect of our being is our emotion, for we do not use it properly. Both our joyfulness and our sorrow may be altogether natural. As the Lord exposes us, we may feel ashamed of the way we have expressed joy and sorrow, for that expression often was natural, fleshly, even fleshy. No wonder our psychological heart does not function normally.

If we take the time necessary to unclog the three main arteries of our psychological heart, we shall have the sense that our entire being has become living. Our mind, will, and emotion will all be in a very healthy condition. All the "dirt" in these "ditches" will then be dug away.

No one can do this unclogging for you. I can speak to you concerning it, but you must do it yourself. Thus, you need to go to the Lord day by day and ask Him to expose

everything wrong in your mind, will, and emotion. Then in the light of what He exposes, you need to confess.

Perhaps you do not feel that you are wrong in your thoughts, in your decisions, or in your emotion. This is the reason you need to go to the Lord for His enlightening. As an illustration, sometimes we may have a physical problem that we are not aware of. Even after the doctor discovers our problem and prescribes the proper medication, we may not feel the medication is necessary. However, when we take the medication and it does its work to cleanse and heal our bodies, we shall be convinced that the doctor's advice was right. In like manner, even though we may not feel that we are wrong in our mind, emotion, and will, we need to go to the Lord and take the "medication" He gives us. If we take it, the arteries of the psychological heart will be kept clean and unclogged.

PRESERVING OUR BODY

In addition to knowing how to preserve our spirit and our soul, we must also know how to preserve our body. Sin has damaged and ruined our body. For this reason, Romans 6:6 says that our body is a "body of sin." Furthermore, we have presented the members of our fallen body to sin, to evil, to lawlessness. Romans 6:19 says, "You presented your members as slaves to uncleanness and lawlessness unto lawlessness." For instance, in gambling a person presents his hands to things that are sinful and unclean.

In Romans 7:24 Paul goes on to say that our body is a body of death: "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from the body of this death?" Then in Romans 8:10 Paul points out that although the spirit is life because of righteousness, "the body is dead because of sin."

If we would preserve our body, we should live a life that never follows the old man, that never follows our soul. Romans 6:6 says, "Knowing this, that our old man has been crucified with Him that the body of sin might be made of none effect, that we should no longer serve sin as slaves." If we do not follow the old man, the body of sin

will be made of none effect. This means that the body of sin will lose its job and become unemployed. But if we live according to the soul, we shall use our body to serve the old man. Therefore, to preserve our body first requires that we do not live according to our soul.

Second, to preserve our body requires that we not present any member of our body to anything that is sinful. For example, we should keep our eyes away from evil pictures and our ears from unclean things. Many things that are broadcast over the radio are defiling. A number of saints have testified that they cannot bear to listen to certain talk among those at school or at work because that talk is so evil. Many people of the world are able to speak concerning sinful things without any sense of shame. Thus, we need to keep our body from seeing and hearing things that will contaminate and ruin it. This is to preserve our body in sanctification.

Paul illustrates the importance of preserving our body in this way by giving in chapter four the charge to abstain from fornication. To abstain from fornication is to preserve our vessel, our body, in sanctification and honor. Therefore, in order to preserve our body, we should not present our members to anything sinful.

Today's world is full of contamination and defilement. This makes it very difficult for us to preserve our body. Wherever we go there are defiling elements. Parents need to train their children, even those in elementary school, to keep away from these contaminating elements. Any parent who thinks that children should be allowed to be tested in order to develop resistance is seriously mistaken and in the future will regret this course of action. The parents who follow this way in caring for their children surely will reap the harvest of what they have sown.

As an elderly person, I can testify that we need to preserve our body. Do not think that as you grow older you will not need to guard yourself from lust and defilement. As long as we have not been transfigured and still remain in the old creation, we need to preserve our body.

To preserve our body is actually very difficult. It is

much easier to preserve our spirit and our soul than to preserve our body. The most difficult thing for us to do in this defiling, contaminating world is to preserve our body. We need to be careful not to look at anything, listen to anything, or touch anything that will defile our body.

OUR COOPERATION WITH GOD'S OPERATION

In 5:12-24 we see the cooperation of the holy life with the divine operation. In verses 12 through 22 we have the believers' cooperation in living a spiritual and separated life. In verses 23 and 24 we have God's operation in sanctifying and preserving the believers. God desires to sanctify us wholly and to preserve our spirit, soul, and body complete. However, we need to cooperate with Him. The way to cooperate is to rejoice, pray unceasingly, give thanks to Him in everything, not quench the Spirit, and not despise prophesying in the church meetings. If we cooperate in this way, our spirit will be preserved from deadness, our soul will be preserved from pollution in mind, will, and emotion, and our body will be preserved from the defilement of this age. Then in a practical way we shall have a holy life for the church life. Paul's aim in writing 1 Thessalonians, a book for new believers, was that they would live such a sanctified and holy life for the church life.