

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

NEW TESTAMENT BIBLE LESSONS
1&2THESSALONIANS, 1&2TIMOTHY, TITUS, PHILEMON



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Cover: Designed by Daniel Webster – Photo is magnification of Acts 17:11

Bible Quotations:

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SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

RADIO SERIES

DEVELOPED BY: DANIEL WEBSTER (2010)

Torah scroll - on sheepskin dating from 1155-1225



Courtesy of Alma Mater Studiorum - University of Bologna

KEY VERSE:

THESE WERE MORE NOBLE THAN THOSE IN THESSALONICA, IN THAT THEY RECEIVED THE WORD WITH ALL READINESS OF MIND, AND

SEARCHED THE SCRIPTURES

DAILY, WHETHER THOSE THINGS WERE SO.

ACTS 17:11

THEME:

AND YOU WILL SEEK ME AND FIND ME,
WHEN YOU SEARCH FOR ME WITH ALL YOUR HEART.

JEREMIAH 29:13

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Preface

The lessons from Matthew to Revelation have been prepared through personal study of the New Testament. As an on-going part of our radio ministry in Ghana, it was decided to broadcast a series of teachings that would provide one lesson for each of the two hundred and sixty chapters of the New Testament. This work was completed over a five-year period from 2010 to 2015. These lessons are not intended as a commentary, or as an in-depth exegesis of each chapter. The lessons were written to be a concise, and consecutive teaching of the chapters of the New Testament, while providing practical instructions in Christian living. There is a strong emphasis in these lessons on the gospel message of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. The author's intent is not simply to help people learn the teachings of the New Testament, but more importantly, he desires that all would come to know Jesus as their personal Savior and Lord. Each lesson contains a section entitled "Today's Bible Question". This section is designed to address a relevant question, pertaining to the chapter lesson, or with a view to the present spiritual climate. The lessons will serve many purposes for those interested in the teachings of the New Testament. I envision this work helping various bible teachers, Sunday school teachers, or youth leaders who wish to use a consecutive approach to presenting the scriptures to those whom they teach. Each lesson has been kept to a standard of two typed pages, or between 1500 to 2000 words. This will allow the lessons to be easily adapted into a regular teaching schedule. Each lesson, including the bible question section, can be read in less than 15 minutes, leaving time for group discussions, or further commenting, during a 30 to 45 minute bible teaching class.

It is my hope that this work will serve many in the Christian community with a greater appreciation of the teachings of the New Testament, and also be used by God to bring people to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

This work is dedicated to the glory of God, and the expansion of His kingdom both now and forevermore.

Daniel Webster
Oct. 2015

LESSONS IN 1THESSALONIANS



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“FOR THE LORD HIMSELF WILL DESCEND FROM HEAVEN WITH A SHOUT, WITH THE VOICE OF AN ARCHANGEL, AND WITH THE TRUMPET OF GOD. AND THE DEAD IN CHRIST WILL RISE FIRST. THEN WE WHO ARE ALIVE AND REMAIN SHALL BE CAUGHT UP TOGETHER WITH THEM IN THE CLOUDS TO MEET THE LORD IN THE AIR. AND THUS WE SHALL ALWAYS BE WITH THE LORD.”

1THESSALONIANS 4:16,17

LESSON 183
Work of Faith
1THESSALONIANS I

In our last lesson we finished our studies in Paul's letter to the Colossian believers. Today we begin a new study in the book of 1Thessalonians, also written by Paul. This New Testament letter was written to Christians in Thessalonica, and was one of the first New Testament letters written by Paul around AD 50. Paul was concerned for these believers, for they were young converts from his second missionary journey, and they were undergoing persecution. Paul could only spend a short time with this young church, but was able to teach them much in that short time, particularly about the rapture of the church, and the Day of the Lord, when Christ returns to establish His kingdom on earth.

Paul opens this letter with greetings, adding Timothy and Silas' names, who had also been traveling with Paul when they had been in Thessalonica. He desired the grace and peace of God for the Thessalonians believers. This is a common greeting in the New Testament, which includes the standard Jewish greeting of 'Shalom', (meaning: peace), along with grace, which is the greeting of Christians who have experienced God's grace. He begins by saying how thankful he was for the believers at Thessalonica, always mentioning them in his prayers. He remembered their work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in Christ. These are three characteristics that are an overall theme of the Christian experience and life. The work of faith at first might seem self-contradictory, for faith is really the opposite of work. To work towards salvation is to express a lack of faith, and to put our entire faith in Christ for save us, means we are freed from working towards it. Much of Romans teaches this very point to us. But the point of this phrase the work of faith, is not to say that work is what merits our salvation, but rather work results from faith. When a person is justified by God's grace through their faith in Christ, it will inspire their love and devotion to Christ, so that they get busy serving the Lord, and doing good works. These works that result from faith could be called the work of faith. It is faith that saves, but faith that does not work is dead, as is stated in James chapter 2. The faith that saves our souls is faith that works. In other words a genuine conversion will be seen by the work it produces.

He mentions their labor of love. When we work for the Lord, our motive should always be from love. It was God's love for our souls that led Jesus to die for our sin. It is His love working in us, that compels us to show this love to others by serving their needs. Much of Christian service can be motivated by greed, or self-glory, but love is the only proper Christian motive for serving Christ. He mentioned their patience of hope, and this refers to their looking forward to when Jesus would come to take them to be with Him forever. The great hope of Christians is centered in the person of Jesus Christ, and His coming again for us. It could be likened to a bride waiting for her groom to come and take her away to be his wife. There ought to be a great, and joyful, expectation of Jesus return for His own.

Paul refers to their election by God, by which he means that their faith was proving that God has chosen them for all the spiritual blessings that belong to those in Christ. The evidence of their election was seen by the works of their faith. When the gospel had reached them it came in power, and in the Holy Spirit with much assurance. When Paul was among them preaching, they could recall how He spoke through the power and direction of the Holy Spirit, so that they believed. They had been persecuted during their short time in Thessalonica, and now the Christians there were also being persecuted for their faith, and were thus following Paul's example and also the Lord's example. Though persecuted they received God's word with joy in their hearts, and set forth an example for the whole region of Macedonia and Achaia. These regions are what comprise northern and southern Greece on today's map. Their example was not only by their joy, but also in their witness for Christ. The gospel was being sent forth from them to all the surrounding areas. Paul did not even have to tell anyone about their faith, for everyone was well aware of it, because the news of them had been spreading widely. Others were telling the news of how the Paul and his companions had visited Thessalonica, and how well their message had been received by the believers, and how their faith in Christ, caused them to turn away from following idols, and turn to serve the living and true God. This is a good practical insight into what it means to experience a conversion to Christ. It means to leave the idols of our past. This could include religious beliefs and practices, or include those things that directed our lives before putting our faith in Christ, like selfish ambition, greed, or pleasure. When turning from idolatry, a new believer will have his heart turned towards God, to hear and follow all that God has planned for the new life in Christ. This will involve new associations, by belonging to a good church: new aspirations, by seeking God's kingdom first: new loyalties, by obeying God rather than men; new affections, by learning about Christ rather than the vanity of this world.

The great hope of the new believer is Christ Himself. Christians are waiting for the Son of God to come from heaven. We believe not in a dead Savior, but in the one that died on the cross just outside of Jerusalem's gate some 2000 years ago, and then rose again from the dead, and is alive forevermore. This Jesus is the one who redeemed our souls to God, and purchased our pardon, so we don't have to face God's judgment, and soon coming wrath.

Thessalonians is very much directing our thoughts to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The time when Jesus returns to this world is called, 'the Day of the Lord', both in this book, and in several places in the Old Testament prophets. The Day of the Lord is not just one day, but a period of time, when Jesus is coming to judge the world in righteousness, and then establish His kingdom on earth. The Day of the Lord is a day of hopeful expectation for believers in Jesus Christ, because it means being saved out of this world, and from the wrath that is coming upon this world. However, the Day of the Lord is a dreadful day of horror and judgment to those who have rejected Jesus offer

of salvation. Are you looking forward to Jesus return? Be sure you have placed your trust in Him as your Savior and Lord, so that you will not fall under the judgment and wrath that will soon fall upon our world.

"and to wait for his son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come." 1Thess 1:10

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we learned about the young Thessalonian church that were left to struggle against their persecutors, but remained strong in their faith, such that the gospel was being heard widely through their testimony. We also heard that they were patiently waiting for the coming of Jesus. Someone might ask the question, "If Christians have been waiting for more then 2 millennia for the return of Christ, is our faith vain?"

It is true, that by Paul's teaching of the return of Christ, the Thessalonian believers were patiently hoping and waiting for Christ to come for them to take them home to heaven. These words would have brought much comfort to their hearts as they endured the persecutions of their enemies. If they believed Christ could come at any moment for them, then how is that we, after such a long period, can still be waiting for His coming, and not suspect that perhaps our hopes have been in vain. Since the early Christians were hoping, and their hope was not realized in their lifetime, we might have a hard time believing that Christ is coming within our lifetimes. The imminent return of Christ is certainly a New Testament teaching, and has been held by God fearing Christians down through the many centuries. Why don't we lose hope? The hope of the believer is not based upon sentiment, or experience, but on the revealed word of God. The Christian who is familiar with God's word, will understand that God is not moving according to our timetable. God's time is very patient. Listen to what Peter wrote about the return of our Lord, *"the lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance, but the day of the lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up"*

(2Peter 3:9,10). In this passage we see that the coming of the Lord will come unexpected like a thief who breaks in at night when everyone is sleeping. He also points out the reason for the apparent delay in His return. It is because, when He comes in judgment, the chances for salvation will be gone for many souls, and He is not willing that anyone should perish. God loves the souls of men, and He does not look forward to the day when he must execute His judgment on the wickedness and rebellion of men. God is waiting as long as He can endure so that as many souls can be saved as possible. His delays are a reflection of His great love for humanity.

Peter told us that men would scoff at the doctrine of Christ's return to judge the world, because to them everything seems to be just carrying on as it always had. They will scoff because they hear Christians talking of the coming of the Lord, but they don't see any evidence of His return. They forget that history has lessons for us to learn. We are supposed to remember that God has come in judgment upon the earth in the past. Back in the days of Noah, when the earth was a wicked and evil place, God judged the world with a flood, destroying all life except for Noah and his family. God was patient at that time also, and after he told Noah about his intentions to destroy the earth with a flood, he waited another 120 years before finally bringing that judgment. In that 120 years, there were undoubtedly many who mocked Noah when they saw him building a huge boat. But Noah heard the word of the Lord, and believed that God was indeed going to send judgment upon the earth. The Christian, like Noah, also understands that God is angry with man's sin, and though God in patience may wait a little while longer, He will eventually carry out his judgment as promised on this wicked world. The only safety to be found is in the Lord Jesus Christ. When Noah and his family were safe inside of the Ark they were protected from God's judgment, and their lives spared. When we place our full confidence in Jesus Christ to save our souls we shall be sheltered from the judgment of God that is about to fall upon this earth.

These days of judgment are spoken of in the book of Revelation, and it is frightening to think of how life on earth will be at that time. Many people will die, and there will be great wars and violence. Even the leaders, captains, and nobles will hide in the caves of the earth, and cry for the rocks to crush them and hide them from the wrath of the Lamb. God's anger will be fierce, and those who face it will have no where to hide. We live in a day of grace, and we should be so thankful that we still have opportunity to repent and believe in Christ. I hope you will turn away from your idols, and turn your heart to Jesus in faith, and go on to produce the works that reveal the genuineness of your faith.

Christians have been waiting now for more then 2000 years for Christ's return, but not in vain, for we understand that the Lord is in no hurry to judge. He waits for you, and others like you, to repent and believe. Why not take Jesus Christ as your Savior today?

"But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." 2Peter 3:8

LESSON 184
Nurturing Love
1THESSALONIANS 2

In our last lesson we introduced our study of 1Thessalonians, where we considered this young church that was sending forth the gospel message by their strong faith, even in the face of persecutions. Today we continue into chapter two, and will consider the nurturing love of Paul for these young converts to Christ. He likens himself to both a nursing mother, and wise father who instructs his children.

There is no break between chapters one and two, and verse one is a continuation of his thoughts from the previous chapter. He had been speaking of their faith and witness for Christ, and hope in His soon return. He points out that their time in Thessalonica was not in vain, but had been used of the Lord to give the Thessalonians courage to live for Christ, even when their faith was under attack. Paul reminds them that before coming to Thessalonica they had been in Philippi where they had been mistreated because of their gospel preaching, even winding up in prison and beaten. This did not hinder them from coming to Thessalonica with great boldness, because their gospel was not from erroneous teaching, corrupt motives, or deceit. It was a message approved by God, and they spoke this message for God, to please God and not men. It is difficult for men to die to the opinions of others, and speak only and always for God; not in arrogance, but in sincere faith and humility of heart. This is noble and courageous, but not the nobility or courage that the world esteems. To be true to God will most likely mean a lonely path through this world, as men reject and despise God's faithful servant. Paul did not try to impress the people with flattering words, nor use the gospel as a means to make money – God was His witness. He was not seeking to gain any glory from men, even though he may have been in a position to make demands as an apostle of Christ. Paul did not take advantage of the authority and position entrusted to him, because he was not interested in his own welfare, but in the care of others. How much we have to learn from this godly man, his humble character, and work for Christ. Men today are all about themselves, and their glory, their ministry. It can be seen in the way they dress, talk, and preach that they are full of themselves. Let's abandon all such foolishness and return to the true spiritual leadership displayed in the humble example of brother Paul.

Paul likens himself to a nursing mother, when he was so gentle among them. These new babes in Christ needed to be treated with the gentle care that is seen in how a mother handles her young children. This shows us that the character of Christian work, and shepherding, involves much time and personal sacrifice to meet the needs of another who is very dependent on that care. There was a great affection in Paul's heart for these dear children of the faith, such that he was not only willing to share the glorious message of life and salvation, but also wanted to share himself entirely with them for their spiritual benefit. He was not interested in just a quick preach and then moving on to other exploits to further his own accomplishments. No he was ready to surrender himself entirely to these dear friends and children of God. This is a true mark of a genuine shepherd of God's people, namely one who is willing to stay with the flock and see to their needs, and not someone who abandons the flock for greener pastures.

While among them Paul worked night and day to pay his own way, so that he could preach the gospel and not be a burden to any of these young believers. Paul was willing to receive gifts from believers to support his gospel work, but his desire of heart was not to burden others, and therefore did work to support himself. He did not want anyone to get the impression he was preaching to make money. Today preaching has become a very lucrative profession, and many are drawn to it by their love for money. How sad when we see how the heart that was in the Paul, has been exchanged for the professionalism and formality that characterizes today's preachers. Preachers should spend some time carefully considering Paul's words here to his children in the faith, so that they might adopt his same heart towards those they serve in Christ.

Paul was not only like a gentle nursing mother, he was also like a wise father providing counsel to his children. Children need both the gentle care of a mother, but they also need the balance of the wise instruction and correction of a father. Too many children today are being raised with the absence of a mother or father, and it impoverishes them in life, stealing away all the care and instruction that God intends to help children face the world. In the spiritual realm we also need a balance of spiritual care between gentleness, and wise instruction. The Christian life is not all about hearing sermons, it is also about loving and caring for one another in practical ways to foster our spiritual development.

Paul had behaved devoutly, justly and blamelessly when at Thessalonica, and this set forth an example for them to follow, so that they would walk worthy of the Lord, who calls us to His greater kingdom and glory. Paul was thankful that they received their teaching as the word of God, and were willing to suffer for Christ even as Jewish believers had from the Jews. Some men persecute those whom God has blessed, and store up wrath for the day of God's judgment. Paul really wanted to visit the church at Thessalonica but was prevented from doing so by Satan. He would have such joy to see them face to face once again, but that would have to wait for another time. He had his joy bound up in these believers, for he knew that because of their faith, he would one day see them in the glory, and they would be to him his joy and crown of rejoicing. When servants for Christ are blessed to see souls won for Christ, and see them go on well in their faith, it brings such joy, since this will bring great reward and joy in heaven. I cannot imagine a greater joy that a person could know, than to be an instrument in God's hand to share His blessing of

eternal life with others, and be there when God saves precious souls. May God save your soul, and perhaps someday we will meet in the glory, and rejoice together because of our common bond in Christ. I would count it such a joy and honor to know that some soul reached heaven's shore because the Lord used my preaching to assist them to find Christ as Savior. Perhaps you will be my joy and crown of rejoicing. Accept Jesus as your Savior today!

for what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? is it not even you in the presence of our lord Jesus Christ at his coming?" 1Thess 2:19

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we learned about Paul's great love for the believers in Thessalonica, and how he was like a spiritual mother and spiritual father to these young Christians. We saw what a great example Paul was in his attitude and service for these believers, even willing to give himself to them entirely for their spiritual benefit. Someone might ask the question, "What is involved in doing God's work?"

As we witness Paul's relationship to the believers in Thessalonica, it can teach us a great deal about what is involved in doing God's work. We know that there are basically two facets to spiritual work, and they are seeing souls saved, and then nurturing those baby Christians until they become mature in Christ. Paul was more than a traveling evangelist, he was also a teacher, and longed to nurture the believers whom he lead to Christ for salvation. Sometimes we segregate these two works, because of how we understand spiritual gifts. We have the evangelist, and the Teacher/pastor. The evangelist is supposed to go into the highways and byways preaching the gospel, and see some trust in Christ. He brings them to a good church, and leaves them for the teacher/pastor to look after. The teacher/pastor is not involved in seeing people come to Christ, because he is more interested in teaching God's word, and ensuring his ministry is supported by those who attend his church. Now lets compare this model with what we learn of Paul in this chapter from 1Thessalonians. Paul was certainly the evangelist who help bring these believers to faith in Christ. Paul, however, did not abandon them to others to care for. In fact, he stayed on with them as long as he could. Some have estimated that he may have spent about three months with the believers in Thessalonica. The only reason he left was due to the persecution, and the insistence of the local brethren, who were concerned for his safety. Paul longed to go back, and teach them more and help them grow up in Christ. So we see in Paul both the evangelist and the pastor/teacher. That is not to say we will all be like Paul, and have all these gifts. There is definitely those who are more gifted to do the work of evangelism, and those more gifted to the work of bible teaching and shepherding the flock. We should remember though that the evangelist ought to have interest in those whom he leads to Christ, to aid them as much as he can towards spiritual growth. If he cannot do so himself, for lack of ability, then he should find someone he can trust to help him with nurturing new Christian converts. The teacher and shepherd also ought to be interested in bringing souls to Christ, by trying to reach out with the gospel message. It does not make sense to care for souls only after they are born again. It is much easier and natural to love your own children, rather than someone else's children.

Though God's work involves the bringing souls into God's kingdom and then helping them grow in Christ, we certainly do not want to give the impression that this is the sum total of God's work. God's work involves much more than the spiritual nurture of others, it also involves loving them, and investing our lives into them. As we also see in Paul's example of loving the believers, and willing to impart himself entirely for their benefit. The work of God involves working with people in such a way that we demonstrate God's interest in them entirely. That means caring about their job, education, marriage, family, sickness, interests, and recreation. The Christian life is not just listening to sermons on Sunday, it is an entirely new life that is, or should be, entirely guided and directed by the will of God, and for His glory. Thus God's servant will be interested in every aspect of the lives of those whom he seeks to help spiritually. This is why the local church is vital to the health and growth of believers, for this is where Christians can find spiritual parents to nurture them in Christ, who take them under wing, and show them how to live godly in Christ from day to day.

God's work involves visiting a mother who has just given birth, encouraging her and blessing her child. Also visiting the child when struggling with his education to advise or help with his needs, then advising him as a young adult when searching for a marriage partner; counseling the young couple how to devote themselves and family to the Lord; Then being available to the family when he is in a bed of sickness, or passing from this world. The work of God is involved at every stage of a person's life to provide guidance, and instruction from the Lord, while setting an example of how live for Christ. It will look much more like a mom or dad, than a polished preacher in his suit, and will be the one you want to attend at your graduation, wedding, or funeral, not because it is his job, but because he is the one who has most deeply and dearly loved your soul through the years. Paul set forth a beautiful picture of what it means to do God's work, and if we want to be true to our Savior, we will learn from this godly example and also love and nurture God's people as he did.

"so, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of god, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us." 1Thessalonians 2:8

LESSON 185
Joyful News
1 THESSALONIANS 3

In our last lesson we learned about Paul's role as a loving shepherd of God's family, and how he provided a balance of spiritual care by being both a gentle mother and wise spiritual father to the Thessalonian believers. Today we shall learn of the good report that reached Paul about the steadfast love and faith of the Thessalonians, and how encouraged he was by this joyful news.

As we study this lovely letter of Paul to the Thessalonians, we cannot help but notice the very personal nature of the correspondence. The affection between believers is not something for only private letters, but is recorded in the sacred text of scripture, so that all may know that God loves us, and has shed his love abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

Paul speaks to the Thessalonians about his longing to see them, and how he had reached a point where he could no longer forbear. Such was his love and concern, that he just had to know how his dear children in the faith were getting along. He knew they were undergoing persecutions, and he wanted to be sure that their faith was not wavering in the face of all this trouble. He decided that he should stay in Athens, and send Timothy to them, to find out how they were doing. The Thessalonians knew Timothy, for he had been with Paul when they visited Thessalonica, but Paul still considers it important to speak of his confidence in Timothy's Christian character, mentioning that he was a brother, minister of God, and fellow-laborer in the gospel. He would be able to comfort their hearts and assure them in their faith. He wanted these young believers to know that the afflictions they were suffering were expected in the Christian life, for God has appointed us to suffer for His name sake. Paul was concerned that the persecutions might have weakened their faith, discouraging them from publicly declaring their belief in Christ. Paul reminds them that when he had been with them, he spoke of the persecutions they would have to face for the kingdom of God. By reminding them of this, it would reassure them, that this did not come by surprise, but was expected and predicted by their mentor in the faith. Paul says that he was himself concerned for them, and therefore when he could not bear the suspense longer, he had to send to know how they were doing in their faith. He considered the possibility that some of them might have been tempted by Satan to abandon their Christian testimony, when threatened with violence or even death. If they should give up their faith in Christ, it would mean that Paul's efforts in the gospel had all been in vain.

However Timothy had come back from Thessalonica with joyful news of how the believers were strong in faith and showing Christian love. He also reported how they were remembering Paul and the others in their prayers, and that they shared a mutual desire to see Paul face to face. This news was a great comfort to Paul. Paul himself was in prison at the time of writing this letter, and undergoing his own afflictions and distress. This made the fellowship of suffering for Christ all the sweeter, since the Thessalonians had joined him in suffering for Christ. What an encouragement this was to Paul, for his life was bound up in the children he led to faith in Christ. If those, whom he led to faith in Christ, should abandon their faith, and he was about to die for his own faith, than it would seem that his life and efforts in the gospel were all for nothing. But now if the Thessalonians could undergo persecutions and still stand fast in the Lord, then his life had meaning and purpose, and he could bravely face his own persecutors.

We see in Paul such a commitment to Christ, as we read this letter to the Thessalonians. He was so very dedicated to the gospel, that his life was entirely bound up in the spiritual welfare of his children in the faith. This is a supernatural love, unlike anything we see in this world. It speaks of God's love for our souls. Sometimes we may feel discouraged that our spiritual leaders do not take more interest in our struggles and personal lives. It would be wonderful if we all had a shepherd to care and love our souls like Paul the apostle. We must not lose heart, even when we do not find such dedication and love in those whom we look to for spiritual help. Our help is from the Lord, and He loves our souls greater than anyone else possibly could. It would be a helpful response to this lesson if you, as a believer, decided to take on the spiritual nurture and care of another believer, so that they too could know something of Christ's great love for their soul.

Paul further speaks of the joy he found in the Thessalonians, and the thanksgiving that he offered to God. As his heart welled up with great floods of joy, he found himself lost in gratitude in the presence of God. How wonderful to see that our spiritual success can bring much joy and worship in the presence of God for our fellow believers. Live your Christian life in such a way that others will have cause to worship God because of your faith and dedication to Christ. Paul prayed both night and day for his Christian friends. His request was that he could see them again, and build up their faith to be mature in Christ. I wonder how much we look forward to seeing our Christian friends on Sunday, or whether we have it in our hearts to nourish their faith in Christ. We are often guilty of going to church just because of habit, or to make a good appearance. Our motivation ought to be to enjoy the sweet fellowship of our Christian friends, and to serve them by encouraging their faith. Being absent from church meetings would certainly not encourage our brothers and sisters. Be there on Sunday, and at the prayer meeting, and visit the people of God to encourage them in their faith.

Paul finishes this chapter with a prayer to God asking for an opportunity to visit with the Thessalonians again, and that their love would increase and abound for each other, and toward all men, just as he also loved them. He wanted

God to establish their hearts to be unblameable in holiness at the coming of the Lord Jesus with his saints. Paul's eyes were fixed on the glory that awaited them, and the coming of Jesus to take us home. Is this the longing of your heart? Trust in Jesus to save your soul today, so that you too will have that hope of glory burning in your heart?

"so 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." 1Thess 3:13

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we learned about Paul's deep affection for the believers in Thessalonica, and his desire to see them, and hear how their faith was holding up against persecutions. We saw how Paul's life was so bound up in the spiritual success of his children in the faith so that their failure would make him feel his life and work were all in vain. Someone might ask the question, "How do some Christians find greater spiritual success?"

You might look around your local church and take notice that some believers just seem to have more of the spirit, and do greater exploits for God. You might see them making great strides ahead in their spiritual life, and see how everything seems to work out for their good. You might even envy them, and wonder how is it that they have made advancement in their Christian life, while you sit week after week, and don't seem to be making any progress. You might even think that those who are successful in the church have been favored by the pastor or leader of the church, and wonder if they have pushed themselves forward with prideful ambition. I hope that this is not the way any Christian would think, but it almost appears that way, when we see some of the strange behavior, grand-standing, and showmanship in the church. It is not uncommon for people to come and throw themselves at the feet of the pastor begging for his hands of blessing to touch them or deliver them, with some desire to be in the spotlight.

Spirituality is often not what people think. It is not in how loud I can sing worship songs, or how dynamic my preaching, or how impressive I sound to others. It is not in anything that caters to the pride of men. Spirituality is found in the secret devotional life of the believer. When a believer invests his time into learning God's word, in his own private reading and meditations, then he will grow and prosper spiritually. Also another very vital part of the spiritual life is prayer. I am not speaking of the public prayers that are designed to impress others with how spiritual I am, or how long and eloquently I can address the Almighty. I am speaking of private prayer in our own rooms, where we do business with God. We lay before him our burdens, confess our sins, intercede for the welfare of the church and our loved ones. This is the place where our intimacy and relationship with God is nurtured, and where our character of love, mercy, and compassion is developed, as we petition God for His grace to help in time of need.

Some Christians move forward in their Christian lives, because they have dedicated themselves to getting to know Christ. They are not just playing church on Sunday, but are genuine in the faith, by daily attending to the word of God. Rather than turn on the radio or TV, they would rather read their bible and think about what God has for them. When there is a conversation that is turning to an argument, they do not roll up their sleeves for a good verbal exchange, they pray and ask for God's help and intervention. They have learned the secret of spirituality is a close walk with God. We all have a responsibility to nurture our own souls. Do not just depend on listening to the pastor on Sunday to get your spiritual food. If you do this, then you will continue to be a baby Christian, live carnally, and wonder why other Christians are moving forward while you are still in spiritual diapers.

Paul spent only a short time with the new converts in Thessalonica, and yet in that short time, he managed to teach them a great deal. He taught them about their future hope in Christ, to be raised with Him and abide with Him forever. He spoke of the coming judgment and wrath of God for those who reject Christ. He spoke of the man of sin and Antichrist who would come to deceive and blaspheme. Because these believers were given a greater vision of what was coming in the future, and their faith was stimulated, they set their hopes on the unseen future glory, and not on this passing world. This gave them strength to face their persecutors bravely. They advanced because they started their Christian life well. They attended the teachings of the apostle daily, and then continued following the teachings of Christ, after Paul had departed from them.

Maybe you started your Christian life well, with much hope and ambition of doing great things for God. Excited about your faith, and the church you attended, but somewhere along the way your interests changed. Maybe it was school, relationships, family problems, employment problems. Something divided your attention from Christ, and church became less important to you. Turn around and go back to the beginning, and love Christ with all your heart, as you once did. Make God's kingdom first in your life, then you will find greater spiritual success. Do not fool yourself into thinking you can play church on Sunday, and expect God's blessing on your life. Our Lord will not be satisfied until you give Him your entire love and devotion.

"And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart." Acts 2:46

The Rapture of the Church

1 THESSALONIANS 4

In our last lesson we learned about the Joyful report that had come to Paul from Timothy concerning the believers in Thessalonica. They were standing for Christ in the midst of persecution, and growing in their love. Today Paul will help them to think correctly about the coming of the Lord for his church, what is commonly called the Rapture.

Paul uses the last portion of this letter to correct some potential problems in Thessalonica. One of the problems, seems to be that there was either some sexual immorality among the church, or at least the threat of it. The second problem was a misunderstanding the Thessalonians had concerning the coming of the Lord for His church.

Paul is exhorting the believers to abound in their spiritual walk, learning how to please God. This is certainly a noble pursuit in life. Not seeking to please ourselves, but God who created us, and sent His son to be our redeemer. He reminds the Thessalonians of the commandments he had given them through the Lord Jesus, concerning their sanctification. This means to be set apart for God's holy purposes. This means the pollution of sins have to be removed from our Christian lives. He specifically mentions abstaining from sexual immorality. He thus introduces the first problem that may have been among the believers at Thessalonica. There are many forms of sexual immorality, but he has in mind the sin of adultery, as the context will show us. He therefore says that every man should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor. By vessel it seems Paul is talking about the body, and the need to control our bodies, so they do not lead us down pathways of lust and sin. This is how the ungodly behaved, giving full place to their sinful appetites, and enjoying sex outside of the covenant of marriage. He further adds, that no one should defraud his brother in this matter. He is perhaps dealing with someone in the church who may have been taking sexual interest in another brother's wife, perhaps trying to lure her to be with him. If a man should violate the marriage covenant of a brother, he is not only sinning against that brother and his wife, but also fighting against God, who holds the marriage covenant as sacred. Marriage is to be a reflection of the love of Christ for his bride, the church. When men destroy the beautiful image of God's love it makes God very angry, and He will most certainly judge such wicked behavior. Let's all be sure to value the marriages of our family and friends and never do anything to separate what God has joined together, lest we insight the God's wrath. The bible says "fornicators and adulterers God will judge". There is no question about this. The Thessalonian church needed to hear and understand this, because of the immoral and ungodly influence in their time and culture.

When it came to brotherly love, the Thessalonians did not need further instructions from Paul, for he could see plainly from their actions that they were being taught to show love through the work of the Holy Spirit. There love had spread from their own church fellowship to all the believers in the surrounding areas. Though they excelled in love for their brothers in Christ, Paul exhorts them to love even more, because Christian love should always grow and increase. This is the nature of God's love, it continues to spread, becoming deeper and richer, not stagnant or weak.

Paul touches on another problem that he will discuss more in his second letter to the Thessalonians. He says that the believers should seek to lead a quiet life, mind their own business, and work with their own hands. They should have a good testimony in their community, to show that Christians were honorable people, who did not expect others to pay their way for them, but were willing to work for their own support. When a man puts in an honest days work, he can expect an honest days pay, and have his basic needs for food and clothing met. God expects his children to be responsible members of society, and not lazy parasites feeding off the kindness and charity of others.

The remaining part of this chapter deals with the doctrine of the rapture. Here we are taught that the Lord will return someday to catch away His church, and bring her to heaven to be with him forever. The problem the Thessalonians were having, was that some of them were grieving because some of their Christian friends had died, and they were under the impression that these dead Christians had missed out on the rapture of the church, and would somehow miss God's blessing of being with Christ. However Paul dispels their false notions, by pointing out that at the rapture those who have died in Christ will rise first. Then Christians who are still alive on the earth when the Lord comes, will meet the Christians of former ages, now raised with glorified bodies, and together we shall meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we be forever with our Lord. These words were designed to comfort believers, and still afford comfort at Christian funerals as we remind ourselves that the body laid in the grave will one day rise again to be with the Lord. That is if they were indeed true Christians.

Some things we should take notice of regarding the rapture. The bible does not specifically use the word rapture, but the Greek word for being caught up conveys the word and truth of what we mean by the rapture, which is a snatching away. We also learn that the rapture is not by angels, but it is the Lord himself that will descend from heaven, and with the sound of a trumpet, and voice of the archangel. Whether everyone will hear the coming of the Lord at the rapture is uncertain, but I have no doubt that those who are followers of Jesus, will hear his shout, just as Lazarus in the tomb heard his voice and rose up to meet the Lord. The rapture is only for those who are believers, as is clearly stated in this text. This is not the same as the resurrection of the living and dead. This is the snatching away of believers to be with the Lord. When Christ comes to the earth to reign he comes to the mount of Olives, and not to the air to catch away His church. So the rapture and the 2nd coming of Christ are to be understood as two separate and distinct future events. The church is looking forward not the 2nd coming, though we shall be with Him at that

time. We are looking forward to the sudden rapture into His presence. Have you prepared for that day, by taking Jesus as your Lord and Savior? Why not trust in the Lord Jesus today so you can look forward to the rapture.

"then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the lord in the air. and thus we shall always be with the lord." 1Thess 4:17

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we learned the importance of keeping our bodies under control, so that lust does not lead us down the path of sin. We also learned about the Lord coming to snatch away the church from this world in what we call the rapture. Someone might ask the question, "When can we expect the rapture to occur?"

When Paul teaches the Thessalonians about the rapture of the church, He spoke in the first person and said, "when we which are alive and remain". This shows us that Paul himself, and believers of his day had the hope that the rapture could take place at any moment. We know that the next event in the prophetic calendar to occur, according to what the bible teaches, is the rapture of the church. This is followed by a seven year period of judgment upon the earth called the tribulation period, and after the tribulation Christ will return to rule and reign upon the earth in His Millennial kingdom for 1000 years. This prophetic outline is well accepted among evangelicals and scholars today, but there are also many who hold to different views of prophecy. Some think the rapture will occur during the tribulation period, or at the end of it. Whatever view we hold we certainly can deduce that the Day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, which means it will come as a great surprise to most. Paul speaks in his letter to the Corinthians about the instantaneous transformation of our bodies into the glorified eternal bodies that resemble the glorified body of our Lord. This we believe will take place at the moment of the rapture, when Christ raises those who have died in Christ, and Christians living at that time. In that split second of time, the entire church, including all those from the day of Pentecost until the rapture will be together in the presence of Christ and with new glorified bodies.

If we accept this clear understanding of scripture, that the Lord's coming will take everyone by surprise, and we know the rapture inaugurates the period we call the Day of the Lord, when Christ comes to visit the earth with his judgment and to reign, then we can deduce that the rapture is the next major event of the Lord's intervention into this world. When the Lord comes to take the church, it should not be an utter surprise to Christians, for they are provided with many signs of the times in the scriptures. We can see for instance the rise of the nation of Israel after being dormant as a nation for 2500 years. This in itself is a remarkable fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies about Israel. We also know from scripture, that during the coming tribulation period, God once again will take up Israel as his primary focus of interest, as he restores this nation, and fulfills his promises to Abraham and King David. Not only does Israel figure prominently in end times prophecy, but also there are many signs our Lord spoke of that will characterized the last times before the coming of the Lord. These signs are likely to be seen during the tribulation, and are called the beginnings of sorrows. Signs in the heavens and in the earth. We could perhaps discern these times are coming upon us, since we have seen an increase in these signs in the last century, and in particular the last few years. There appears to be an increase in earthquakes, and natural disasters. The mention of famine and pestilence, also has increased, as we see new diseases like aids affecting more and more, and some areas suffering from lack of food, and starvation. We also see wars, and other signs mentioned in Revelation such as globalization. Some of these have been with us for a long while, but others are certainly characteristic of our present age, and all point to the soon appearing of our Lord in judgment. The bible also describes the time before the Lord returns as similar in character to the days of Noah, when violence filled the earth, and the days of Lot, when homosexuality was accepted and practiced. Today there is plenty of violence in our world, but one could argue that this has always been the case, but it seems to be getting more heinous. We heard, not so long ago, of a young man walking into a primary school and opening fire on the children, killing around 20 children and some of the teachers. This would have been unthinkable in previous generations, but today with weapons so widely available, and the sick and confused state of our world, it seems to be common now for these kinds of sick and violent attacks on innocent lives. We can certainly take notice how homosexuality is on the rise in our world today, particularly in more developed countries, where even laws are being passed to support such wickedness. It is for these reasons that the wrath of God will be poured out on this world. Discerning exactly when the Lord is coming for His church is not certain, but those who believe the bible and what it says about the Lord's coming, certainly have plenty of evidence that the rapture could be at any moment from now.

The bible does not provide us with an exact date, and unfortunately some false bible teachers have sought to set dates, only bringing confusion and reproach upon the church. Believers in Christ can be assured that one day, perhaps very soon we will be caught away to be with the Lord. The question is, 'are you ready for that day?'

In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." 1Corinthians 15:52

LESSON 187
The Day of the Lord
1 THESSALONIANS 5

In our last lesson we learned about rapture of the church. In today's lesson Paul continues to teach the Thessalonians about the future of Church, this time speaking about the Day of the Lord. The rapture is actually the commencement of this 'day', which is not one single day, but a period of time in which the Lord will judge and reign.

Paul speaks of the "Day of the Lord" that will come suddenly like a thief in the night. He has already taught them about these things, so this is only to remind them of what they had already learned. Before God's judgment falls upon the earth, people will be saying "Peace and safety, but then sudden destruction will come to them. It will be similar to the sudden pains of a woman who is pregnant and having labor pains. There will be no time to escape from the judgment and wrath of God.

The Christians did not need to fear the Day of the Lord, for they would be spared by the rapture, which takes them away before the destruction begins. Christians do not walk in darkness, so the sudden appearance of the Lord in judgment should not take them by surprise. Paul says that Christians should not be sleeping as others do, and by this he means the sleep of spiritual dullness, or not being aware of the times and seasons of the Lord's coming. Christians are to be eagerly waiting and watching for the Lord's return. Waiting does not mean to sit idly by, but to use the knowledge of Christ's return to be actively preaching the gospel, and serving the Lord. This is waiting with hopeful expectation of His soon return. Christians should be sober, meaning they should be serious about spiritual things. Unbelievers do not care about the Lord's return, but only about enjoying the life they have in this world. They are like those who are asleep in the darkness, or those who get drunk and can not think correctly. Christians, by contrast, are to be engaged in spiritual battles by walking in faith towards God, and love towards men, having their hope fixed on their future reward in heaven. The Christian must be aware that God has not appointed him to wrath. This verse is strong evidence to support the teaching of the rapture taking place prior to the tribulation when God pours out his wrath on the world. The Christian is appointed to salvation, not wrath. Here the idea of being appointed to salvation does not refer to the salvation of our souls, for that took place the moment we trusted in Christ. The salvation we are appointed to is the salvation from the day of God's fierce anger and judgment on the world. We shall be caught away, and not have to see or face this horrible day of destruction. Our salvation is due to the fact that Jesus has died for us, and therefore purchased our redemption to God. Therefore whether a Christian has died in Christ, or is alive at his coming, we shall live together with Christ, when he comes to take us out of this world. This teaching about the future "Day of the Lord" was to be used to comfort and edify the Christians, just as they were doing in Thessalonica. To edify means to build up and strength.

Now Paul comes to a series of exhortations to help the church conduct themselves in a manner that pleases the Lord. He first mentions that they should be aware of those who are laboring among them, and who are over them in the Lord, and admonish them. These are likely a reference to their elders, or at least the mature brethren who were teaching the church. These workers are to be esteemed very highly in love for their work sake. God values those who voluntarily give themselves for the teaching and nurturing of the church. We should esteem and support those who serve God in faith and love, and not necessarily everyone who calls himself a pastor or preacher. Some are not honoring the Lord, but only trying to fill their pockets with money, or get a name for themselves. He also says they should live peaceably with one another, warn the unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, and show patience to all.

Christians are not to render evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good for themselves and for all. So often we think of what is best for us, like when we are stuck in traffic and angry at everyone for getting in our way. It is not easy, but required of Christians to always think of the good for others also. The list of exhortations continues with rejoicing always, praying without ceasing, giving thanks in everything, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus. There are certain times and situations where we would not be inclined to show gratitude, but Christians are always to be thankful. Perhaps not thankful for some evil or trouble that has come our way, but thankful to the Lord for His grace, love and protection. Christians are not to quench the spirit. By this he means not working contrary to what the Spirit is doing in God's children. Quenching the spirit can come from a complaining spirit, or contentious behavior, or lack of spiritual effort, or lack of appreciation for spiritual labors. Next in the list is to not despise prophecies. This also could be quenching the spirit. Prophecy has the broad meaning of proclaiming God's word. When the preacher presents us with the word of God, and carries on past the scheduled time, we should not have to be looking at the clock and getting annoyed that he has not finished his sermon. This would be a good example of quenching the spirit. If the preacher is indeed preaching in the power of the Holy Spirit, then we owe it to him to listen carefully and take in everything the Spirit is seeking to teach us. Also Christians should test to see if something is bad or good, and cling to the good, avoiding all forms of evil. It is so easy for compromise to creep in to our Christian lives, in areas such as internet use, TV programs, attendance at football rather than at church. It is God's desire that our lives are separated from the ungodly behavior of this world. This is what is called sanctification, and has been frequently mentioned by Paul in this letter to the Thessalonians, because it is an important aspect of Christian living. Therefore Paul ends with a nice benediction, asking for God to sanctify them completely, so that their whole spirit, soul and body will be kept blameless until the Lord comes. Then he assures that the Lord is faithful, and will certainly accomplish this

sanctification in them. Lastly Paul asks them to pray for him and those with him, calling on them to greet one another with a holy kiss. He asks them to read this letter to all of those who belong to the church, and wishes the grace of Jesus Christ to be with them. If we are God's children then we shall walk in the light, and desire to please God by doing all that is asked here of believers. We also should have a longing and expectation of the soon return of the Lord to take us home. It could be today that Jesus comes for His church. If you want to be saved from God's coming day of wrath, then why not trust in Jesus right now as your Savior?

"For god did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our lord Jesus Christ." 1Thess 5:9

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we learned that the Day of the Lord is a period of time when God's judgment falls upon the earth, and that the Christians are to live holy lives that please the Lord in sanctification. Someone might ask the question, "How can a Christian know if he is sanctified?"

The letter to the Thessalonians speaks much about the sanctification of the believer. To be sanctified, means to be holy and set apart for God and His purposes. Traditionally, some men have been referred to as 'saints', by which we mean that they were especially holy men, dedicated to God's service, and highly esteemed for their spiritual example. This, however, is a very false notion of what is meant by being a "saint", or set apart for God. Every Christian is called a saint, because he has been set apart for God in Christ. Because many have abused this term, we should be careful on how we use it. Now another important thing for us to understand about the doctrine of sanctification is that it is a process. When we were saved from the penalty of our sin, that happened in an instant in time, when we called on the Lord in faith to save our souls. This brought us into the family of God, and gave us a right standing before God. The Holy Spirit came at that very moment to live inside of our body. After we were saved from the penalty of sin, then God began a work in our lives from that day and will continue until we reach heaven. That work involves saving us from the power of indwelling sin, that is our sin nature. We still have a corrupt nature that is drawn by lust to want to enjoy sin. By the Holy Spirit's power, we are to destroy the works of the flesh, and apply ourselves to the righteous works of God's kingdom. The more we apply ourselves to godly spiritual work, the less time and interest we will have for sinful things. This is the key to living in victory in Christ, and growing daily in sanctification.

We cannot just snap our fingers and think we shall instantly become the perfect saint, always walking with God and performing His will. In fact, God often leaves certain temptations and trials in our lives so that we will struggle against the sin nature within. God could just take all temptation to sin away from us, and be done with it, but God desires to see our sincere desire to live in righteousness, choosing each day to live godly. Therefore he will allow us to be tempted, and see if our love for God, and appreciation of His grace, is sufficient enough for us to say "No" to sin, and "Yes" to the will of God. It is not easy, and the battle often rages within us as believers. We would like to be done with these temptations, but God has a reason for them in our lives. God does not tempt us to do evil, but he allows temptations to come our way, so that we will grow stronger through the battle against the enemy of sin.

When the children of Israel were to enter the promised land, the Lord left some of the foreigners and idol worshipping in the land to test Israel. He wanted to see if they would fight against these ungodly nations, or befriend them and embrace their idols. This test was not pleasant, but at times it strengthen the Israelites against their enemies, and brought glory to God. Sadly to say that for the most part they miserably failed, and fell under the influence of the ungodly people around them, often adopting their idolatry and bringing the wrath and displeasure of God against them. We have an advantage in our battles against the idolatry of this world, for we have been given the Holy Spirit living within us to help us against our enemies. We still need to make the right choices each day to follow God, and not the evil practices of the world and culture that surround us. God wants us to succeed, so He even provides a way of escape when we are tempted by sin, so that we can endure the temptation and overcome it.

Sanctification will involve our determination and effort every day of our lives until we reach heaven. Some days you will feel like a great victor, and walk in the joy of the Lord. Other days you will fall to temptation and do something you know is not honoring or pleasing to the Lord. You might become discouraged by your failures, but be assured that the Lord loves you, and wants you to succeed. He understands why you sometimes fail, and He can help your to overcome your temptations. Confess your sin, pick yourself up, and continue to seek after God's will. Also you can pray for God's strength to win the battle against sin in your life. Sanctification does not simply mean saying "No" to sin's temptation, it also means to grow in Christ-like Character. This happens as we take time to study our Lord in the word of God. As we take time to behold His glory, the bible says we will be changed into His glory. As we see his kindness, it will rub off on us, and we shall also become kind. Whatever good qualities He has become part of our own lives, when we faithfully walk close with Him each day.

"But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the spirit of the lord." 2Corinthians 3:18

LESSONS IN 2THESSALONIANS



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“AND TO GIVE YOU WHO ARE TROUBLED REST WITH US WHEN THE LORD JESUS IS REVEALED FROM HEAVEN WITH HIS MIGHTY ANGELS, IN FLAMING FIRE TAKING VENGEANCE ON THOSE WHO DO NOT KNOW GOD, AND ON THOSE WHO DO NOT OBEY THE GOSPEL OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.”

2THESSALONIANS 1:7,8

The Day of Vengeance

2THESSALONIANS I

In our last lesson we finished our study of 1Thessalonians where we learned about the rapture, and the Day of the Lord. The Thessalonians were well taught in the doctrines of future biblical events, and as Paul writes his second letter to the same church, he will also continue on the theme of God's coming day of vengeance.

We learned from our previous studies in 1Thessalonians that Paul had a great affection for the believers in Thessalonica. He spent only a short time with these young converts, before he was sent away secretly for protection from persecution. In Paul's absence these Christians were being persecuted, and Paul was concerned for their spiritual well-being, fearing, that in their spiritual immaturity, they might lose heart in the face of persecutions, and walk away from their Christian profession. However Paul had learned from Timothy, after his visit to Thessalonica that the believers were standing strong in Christ, and growing in their love for one another, even spreading the gospel to all the surrounding regions. This brought great joy to Paul's heart, and encouragement while he was in prison facing his own persecutors, and possibly execution for proclaiming the gospel.

In his second letter Paul is again encouraged by the Thessalonians faith and perseverance. He speaks about the coming day of God's judgment and vengeance. Though he had provided some information on this subject in his last letter to Thessalonians, this time he makes some other important distinctions to dispel any false ideas they had about this future time of judgment. He also will discuss the importance of Christians being responsible to work and feed themselves, rather than taking advantage of others.

In his greetings Paul also includes Timothy and Silas, since they had been with Paul while doing their mission work in Thessalonica, and were with Paul at the time of writing this letter. He asks for God's grace and peace to be with them. He breaks immediately into overflowing gratitude for these precious brothers and sisters in Christ. He thanked God for them, because their faith was growing exceedingly, as well as their love for one another. It seems that the Thessalonians had taken Paul's first letter quite seriously, and put into practice his instructions for them to grow in love. How wonderful when believers read the bible as more than a book of theory, and actually practice the instructions given within its' pages. Paul was boasting about the Thessalonians among other churches because of their patience and faith while enduring persecutions. He considered their faith to be evidence of God's righteous judgment against their persecutors. He adds that they were also proving worthy of the kingdom of God. We are all saved on the principle of God's grace, but some live in a manner that shows they appreciate God's grace, and are willing to endure hardships and persecutions for God's kingdom. No one is deserving of God's grace, but grace can be more effectual in some believers lives, because of the faith and good works it has produced. Paul says that God is righteous to repay with tribulation those who were troubling the Thessalonians. God is jealous for His children, and when they cast their hope in God, He will be quick to answer their prayers, and bring down their enemies. One should be very careful when trying to harm a Christian, and in particular a Christian who proves himself worthy of his calling.

God's judgment may not fall right away however, for God is not impatient. He is waiting until the day of judgment to repay the evil that men have done. We might think they are getting away with their evil practices, but God is watching, and waiting, and will someday make everyone pay for their evil. He waits, by grace, for sinners to repent and accept his offer of salvation. He waits long, but eventually He will come in vengeance and flaming fire to repay all those who have rejected the gospel. Their punishment is very severe, for they will be banished from the presence of the Lord into eternal destruction. This hopeless state is very sad, for there is no escape, no mercy to be found, and the only Savior, who was rejected, has become their eternal judge. There is no hope, and destruction is their eternal condition. Their bodies destroyed, and their souls forever in the torments of God's wrath. This day of judgment has not yet come, but it will come when the Lord is glorified in His saints, and admired among all those who believe. This will include the Thessalonians who heard the gospel through Paul, Timothy and Silas, and believed the message.

Paul says that they were always praying for the Thessalonians, that God would count them worthy of their calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness, and the work of faith with power. The Christian is to be dedicated to fulfilling God's purposes in this world through their faith and by God's power working in them. Each believer needs to mature to the point that they understand their life is no longer to be lived as they please, but now they must understand that their lives are for God's good pleasure. At first this idea might seem hard to accept, because we naturally want to live our lives for our own pleasure, and not for anyone else's pleasure, even if it is for God. However, when we serve God in faith, seeking to do according to His good pleasure, we discover that this is what we were designed for, and where we find our joy, purpose, and pleasure. When God's power is working through our lives as we serve the kingdom of God, we are encouraged to know that we are not only on our way to heaven, but we are God's children, and His servants, through whom He works to accomplish His purposes in the lives of people.

Paul finishes His prayer by wishing that Jesus Christ would be glorified through them. God is glorified in the church because of His grace bestowed on the church, and what that has resulted in the children of God. Some Christians do not live up to their high calling, and God receives little glory because of their weak Christian walk. Wouldn't you like to be one of those who bring glory to God, because people can see the grace of God clearly at work in your life? Why not give your heart and soul to Jesus Christ today, and become one of God's beloved children?

"in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know god, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our lord Jesus Christ." 2Thess 1:9

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we learned that God will visit this earth one day with flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Some Christians hear God's word, and respond with obedience while others reject the truth and are eternally condemned to God's judgment. Someone might ask the question, "How can a person be counted worthy of the kingdom of God?"

In today's lesson we read from 2Thessalonians that these Christians were proving themselves worthy of the kingdom of God. This could easily be misunderstood by some, thinking that it means that some people are more worthy to receive God's salvation through Jesus Christ. The truth is that no one is worthy of the kindness and grace of God, for we are all sinners, and worthy only of God's eternal judgment. So how can it be said of some Christians that they are counted worthy of the kingdom of God. We must think of this in terms not of the condition we were in when God called us into His salvation, but rather the condition we are in after we receive Christ. All of us were in a bad condition before we were saved. We were all lost in the darkness of night, where depravity and sin ruled our lives. We had no inclination towards righteousness, and did not even feel our danger, or God's anger against our wickedness. Then the gospel came to us, perhaps through a preacher, or a gospel tract, or reading in God's word on our own. Whatever the means, God awaked us to our spiritual condition, and when we realized that we were unclean before God, and in need of a Savior, we found that Jesus was the answer that we needed. When we learned that He was God's answer to our sin, and that through faith in Him we could be born anew, and accepted by God, we made our choice, and committed ourselves to Him in faith. After the day we were saved, we then began to live the Christian life. For some this will mean rejection by family and friends, for some it will even potentially bring them harm. The Christian life can be lived in faith or in fear. We can move forward and let everyone know that we love and serve Jesus, or we can shrink back and hide in the shadows, because we fear what others may think or do to us. Clearly the bold Christian who is unashamed of Christ, and willing to suffer rejection and persecutions, will bring glory to God. God's salvation is clearly seen when someone is willing to suffer to be identified as a believer in Christ, and this helps others to also know that God is real, and the only Savior of men. Thus God is glorified by those who live by faith, and willingly suffer to be called Christian. On the other hand those who shrink away in fear, perhaps want to make it to heaven, but also want to be accepted and comfortable in this world. They might be a Christian, but their faith is small, and because of their fear, their behavior would suggest that Christianity is weak, and God is not able to support His own children when they face difficulties. This diminishes God and His gospel in the sight of the world, and therefore God's glory is not served by such shallow Christian living. A person who honors Christ, by willingly suffering for Him will be county worthy of the kingdom of God. Jesus was our great example, by His willingness to suffer being misunderstood, beaten and abused in order to complete the will of God, and offer salvation to men.

Let's consider some practical ways in which a person can show that they have been counted worthy of the kingdom of God. There are numerous ways in which a Christian can show his faith and allegiance to Jesus. In many cases this does not require any sacrifice, but when it does cost us something, then we show that we are willing to suffer as our master for the kingdom of God, making it not only valuable in our own eyes, but also in the eyes of others. Here are some things that will cost the Christian, and thus make him more worthy of the kingdom of God.

1. When family or friends reject a believer, because they have professed to be a follower of Jesus.
2. When a job is lost due to a good Christian testimony.
3. When persecutions against a Christian are endured by faith.
4. When a Christian leaves comfort, money or family to serve the Lord in faith.
5. When a Christian gives sacrificially of his resources to further God's kingdom.
6. When a Christian identifies with a local church, and commits to serving and supporting the church.
7. When a Christian gives up their life in service for Christ.

All these are means by which Christians can prove themselves worthy of the kingdom of God. It is not that these things make a person righteous before God, for righteousness is God's free gift to us when we believe in Christ. These sacrifices for the kingdom of God reveal our true faith, and what it is that we value most in life. As we sacrifice for God, we reflect Christ's sacrifice for us, and others will know that Jesus is real and changes lives. By this we will glorify God, and walk worthy of the kingdom. None of us deserves the position of being a child of God, but by God's grace we can demonstrate that we are grateful, by sacrificing to further God's kingdom in the world today.

"I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called."
Eph. 4:1

LESSON 189
The Man of Sin
2THESSALONIANS 2

In our last lesson we introduced the book of 2Thessalonians. We learned that the Lord will come again in vengeance to judge all those who have refused to believe the gospel. Continuing on the theme of God's future coming judgment on the earth, Paul seeks to dispel false ideas that were being introduced to the Thessalonian believers. The false teaching that the Day of Christ had already come is confronted by Paul, who explains that the future day of God's judgment will not arrive until there is a general apostasy, and the man of sin is revealed. He also provides more details about the man of sin, and the power of signs and lying wonders that characterize His appearance.

Paul uses the very doctrine of the Lord Jesus returning for His church, as a means to exhort the saints. It is in view of His soon return that we ought to have a steadfast hope, and faithful walk before the Lord. He says that they should not be troubled, or shaken in their minds. There were likely some, of a persuasive character, that had been influencing the church to believe the Day of Christ was upon them. They may have even had some letters to support this false teaching, which was rumored to be from Paul himself. Paul says they should not allow these things to unsettle their faith. He then begins to unfold to them the nature of the Day of Christ, and the man of sin.

The man of sin is not clearly identified and so it is best not to give a dogmatic interpretation as to his identity, although his character and rebellion are described for us. It would be reasonable to think that the "man of sin" is the same person that is called "the antichrist" (1John 2:18, Rev 13), since his character matches the description in these references. The man of sin is called so because of his pre-eminent character of sin. We are told that he will oppose God and set himself up as God in the temple. His outright rebellion against the true God shows that he is empowered and motivated by Satan. This person is yet to arise following the rapture of the church. It seems from the book of Daniel that he will be exalted at the middle of tribulation period, when he sets himself in the temple and declares he is God, and will like show some miraculous feats to prove his claim. Though the information here is sketchy as to the proper identity of this individual, we do learn something of his character, and the character of the age, which is in complete rebellion against God. The point of this information given to us, is not to entice our imaginations and curiosity, but rather to speak of the nature of the "Day of the Lord" as a day of lawlessness. This should settle the troubled minds of the believers in Thessalonica, so that they need not be concerned that the Day of the Lord had already come upon them, for they were not yet seeing this wholesale rebellion, as characterizes the Day of the Lord. We also take comfort in knowing that the Day of the Lord is preceded by our being taken away from God's wrath and judgment. To properly understand the doctrine given to us here, and in 1Thessalonians, we need not worry that we shall encounter the man of sin, since it seems clear that he shall appear during the tribulation period, of which the church shall have no part. Though he maybe living just prior to the commencement of the tribulation period, he will only be manifested (revealed), and it seems this is a global appearance envisioned, during that day of judgment.

As Paul speaks of the man of sin, he reminds the Thessalonians that he had spoken of these things, so they should be familiar with this teaching. He also speaks of a restrainer. Many believe the restrainer is the Holy Spirit, who holds back evil until the Day of the Lord. This makes sense, for we know the Holy Spirit working within believers is that righteous influence on our society that keeps evil suppressed. When the church is removed from this world by the rapture, then the Holy Spirit's gracious influence will be diminished because believers will be taken out of this world. The Holy Spirit will always be active and present working for the spiritual awakening of sinners, but when all the believers depart to be with Christ, His voice will grow dim, and God's judgment will fall heavy upon this earth. It is then following the rapture, we believe, that the man of sin, or Antichrist, will be manifested, rallying all the governments and religions of the world to join Him, and follow His leadership. The mystery of iniquity was already working in Paul's day, and this was the tendency of men towards apostasy, that is turning away from God. This mystery was something not previously revealed, but came to light in the gospel dispensation, through the revelations given to the apostles and prophets of the New Testament. Prior to the Lord's coming for His church there will be a great departure from the faith, which does not necessarily mean that they deny Christianity, but rather they are following a false form of Christianity. This we could discern about our present age, with the apostate church that preaches prosperity, or signs and wonders, rather than the simply message of salvation through faith in Christ. The man of sin will be destroyed by the Lord when He comes again in judgment on the earth, following the tribulation period. We learn here that the man of sin is a great deceiver, and causes many to reject the truth. In fact, they are guilty because they did not love the truth. Men who are lost in the darkness and deception of sin, are unconcerned about truth, and care only about what feels good to them at the moment. Since they do not care for truth, God will send a strong delusion as a judgment against them, so that they believe the lies of the antichrist. The judgment is damnation in Hell. God has passed his judgment on these rebels who have rejected his gospel message, preferring the pleasure of their sin.

Paul ends this chapter giving thanks for the believers in Thessalonica because God had chosen them to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit. In other words, the work of the Holy Spirit making them holy, was evidence of their genuine salvation. Paul had preached, they believed, and now they were headed for glory. Paul calls on them to hold fast to the traditions he had taught them. By this he could mean his teachings whether in person or by letter, and the practices they learned, such as breaking bread, fellowship, service and evangelism. He ends with prayer that

God will comfort their hearts and establish them in every good word and work. I hope this chapter has convinced you of the importance of being ready for the coming day of judgment, and submitting yourself to Jesus Christ as Lord.

"Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition." 2Thess 2:3

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we learned about the man of sin who will be revealed after the rapture commences the Day of the Lord. We learned that there will be a great apostasy in Christendom before the Day of the Lord. Someone might ask the question, "how are believers established in good words and works?"

This was the prayer that Paul made at the end of chapter two for the Thessalonians. Paul spoke much on the topic of future events, which was quite interesting, but not necessarily relevant to their present circumstances. This was due to the fact that the great apostasy had not yet taken place and would be set sometime in the future. Until that day would come, they should not be overly concerned about the coming day of God's judgment and the man of sin. I say not overly concerned, since even if that day were to come upon them in their lifetimes, they need not worry about it, since they would be raptured away before this time of judgment and the man of sin appears. Prophecies of the future, as given to us in God's word, are not intended to feed our curiosity, or foster heated debates among Christians, or sidetrack us from living our Christian life in a manner that is worthy of our calling. Many Christians find the subject of future events, and prophecy controversial. We are not given the full revelation of all that will take place, but God has provided us enough, so that we can live godly lives today. We do not need to know all the details, and we can trust God to work everything according to His good counsels. It is not that we should ignore these things, after all Paul wrote this letter primarily to teach about the future coming day of God's judgment, even though they would not experience it personally themselves. It is in view of the future judgment of God's coming wrath, that the Christian should be all the more motivated to live a godly life, and to be a faithful witness of the gospel. If we can see this purpose in the prophecies of the New Testament, it will help us to put into practice the teachings concerning the Day of the Lord. The important thing to remember is that we have opportunity today to share Christ with others, and we should take full advantage of it, before the door of opportunity closes on this world of rebellion.

So in the midst of his teaching on future events and God's judgment on the world, he prays that the believers would be established in every good word and work. In context he must be calling upon them to respond to the knowledge of future judgment, by living a Christian life that can speak to others about their need for salvation. As Christians labor at the gospel, and live godly lives, this should have a positive impact on our culture, turning souls to the Savior.

To be established in good words and works, means to make spiritual investments consistently so that they will bear fruit over time. It is not enough to go out with the mission group to do one evangelism campaign, and then forget about evangelism for the rest of the year. We should make sharing the gospel with others a daily priority, praying and seeking every opportunity to share with people their need to trust in Jesus as their Savior. The practice of good works is also to be effectual due to a consistent effort that proves one to be faithful over time. People watch how we live our Christian lives, and are looking for any excuse to prove our religion is not real, and just a passing fad. We need to show them we are established in our good works for the Lord, and let our works consistently send forth the message of peace and salvation. It is not easy to convince someone that Christianity is true, but when they can see that our words and our works match together they will become more convinced. The more we are established in our good words and works, the clearer the message will be, and this takes some time. There will always be those who reject the truth, not because it was not presented clearly enough, but because they love to walk in the darkness of sin. We might be praying for a loved one who does not know the Lord, and have prayed for them for years, and sought to live a godly Christian testimony before them, and yet they still reject Jesus as Lord of their life. This is because rebellion lies in the heart of man, and at his core is a desire for sin. God, in patience, will call again and again, but eventually the calling will fade into silence, and they will be left in their sin, awaiting for God's certain judgment.

Don't be like those who have turned away from the truth, and believed a lie. God wants to save your soul, and He calls on you today to place your trust in Jesus as Savior. You have seen the truth displayed in the lives of believers who have shown by their words and works that Christianity is true, and you must repent and believe. Make today the day you decide to hand over life to Jesus in faith.

"and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted, so that in every way they will make the teaching about god our savior attractive." Titus 2:10

LESSON 190
Work to eat
2THESSALONIANS 3

In our last lesson we learned about the man of sin who will appear when the Day of the Lord arrives, and there is a great falling away from the faith. Today is our final lesson in 2Thessalonians, where Paul will give some final words of exhortation to the believers. He will emphasize the need for believers to live responsibly by working to supply their own needs.

Paul begins this chapter by asking the Thessalonians to pray for himself and those with him, namely Silas and Timothy. He specifically requests prayer for the advancement of the word of the Lord. He wanted to see the gospel move swiftly and be glorified. By this he means that the word of God would not be hindered, but spread rapidly to all people. As people responded in faith to the message of salvation God's word would receive the glory that it deserves. The word of God is powerful, and changes lives, and wherever there is evidence of its influence, people will have to acknowledge it. This is what had happened through the faith and obedience of the Christians in Thessalonica.

His request for prayer continues by asking that he and his companions would be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men, since not all men have faith. It is sad that the gospel has many enemies, and these are rightly called unreasonable and wicked. They would do good to themselves and others by allowing the gospel to influence their culture and beliefs. However, resisting what was intended for their good was unreasonable; and to repress the message that brings hope and eternal life to others is wicked. Paul is not only asking for protection from these evil men, but also seeking the same for the Thessalonians since they too were undergoing persecutions. So he comforts his Christian friends by reminding them of the faithfulness of the Lord, for He will establish them and guard them from the evil one. It is encouraging to remember that no matter what forces may come against us, when we have the Lord Jesus on our side, He will not allow our enemies to harm us. Paul has confidence in the Lord that the Thessalonians were obeying, and would continue to obey the words of instruction that he had given to them from the Lord. Now Paul wants them to know his prayers for them, saying He desired the Lord direct their hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ. Here he emphasizes the importance in the Christian life to learn and express the love of God. By the patience of Christ, he is calling on them to keep their eyes on Christ in the midst of their persecutions, patiently waiting for His intervention. The Lord is patient in waiting for sinners to repent, and thus withholds His judgments as long as He can. As believers we need to adopt the same mind and bear patiently with sinners hoping and praying for their repentance and salvation.

Now Paul moves onto a very practical and important matter that was troubling the church in Thessalonica. There were some who were walking disorderly among them, and Paul says that when a brother walks disorderly the Christians should withdraw from him. By disorderly, Paul means those who will not obey the Lord's instructions, and look after one's own needs. While Paul was among them he did not expect others to feed them free of charge, so they worked night and day so that they had enough to feed themselves, and not burden others. As a servant of the Lord, and laboring in the gospel, Paul had every right to expect Christians who benefitted from his labors to help support him, but he made sure not to take advantage of this right. He did not want anyone to think he was sharing the gospel just to get a free meal. Paul lays down an important principle here in 2Thessalonians which we all need to hear and practice, namely that a man who will not work, should not eat. It appears that some among the church were refusing to work, but they certainly were not refusing to eat. They were glad to take advantage of others who were working to supply their own needs. In the Christian life it is important that we all understand that God expects us to do our fair share of the work, and to be a productive member of society, not spending the resources of others. Christians need to discern when someone has a genuine need, or is simply being lazy and taking advantage of Christian charity. Far too often the one asking for assistance is someone who should have been able to provide for themselves if they had been responsible. When we meet people who refuse to work, we are to refuse to feed them, and not even associate with them, for they bring disgrace to the name of Christ. Paul speaks directly to these individuals, who were busybodies, that they should not trouble others, eat their own bread, and work in quietness. A quiet and respectful life provides a good testimony to our neighbors. Christians are expected to live honorably in this world, and be willing to put in a honest days work.

In Paul's final words of exhortation he calls on the believers to not grow weary in doing good. This is an important statement for us to consider. While the church should not support lazy gluttons, they should be willing to serve the sincere needs of others, and not lose heart, or grow weary while trying to doing good. There is a tendency in all of us to start off well, and then our motivation begins to decrease and our efforts fail. It is when we maintain our good works that we shall bring glory to God, demonstrating that our faith is not a passing fad, but a new life to be lived. While speaking about those disorderly in the church, he says that while Christians should not keep company with them, they should not count them as enemies, but admonish them as brothers. Knowing the degree to which we should discipline others will take much spiritual care and wisdom, so as to avoid leniency with sin, or a lack of grace and compassion. Paul wishes God's peace for the church, and that the Lord be with them. He remarks that the letter was signed by his own hand, perhaps to authenticate it from the false letters they may have received. As he frequently does, he ends his letter with a desire for the grace of God to be with them all. Thessalonians has taught us that the hope of Christ's return, and His coming judgment, provide motivation to live godly, with a good testimony. I

hope if you call yourself Christian, that you are living in a manner that helps others to believe in Christ. If you are not yet a Christian, then take this opportunity to place your faith in Jesus today.

"now those who are such we command and exhort through our lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread." 2Thess 3:12

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we heard Paul give some final exhortations to the Thessalonians. They were to allow God's love grow in them, and to join with Christ in being patient with sinners. Someone might ask the question, "Should a Christian feel obligated to feed the hungry?"

This question has both a positive and negative response. Every Christian should feel a sense of love and compassion for his fellow man, and seek to offer help when it is appropriate to do so. In fact in the book of James we are warned that if a brother or sister comes to us naked and hungry, and we send them away wishing them to be warmed and filled, but we do not offer the help they need, when it is in our power to give help, our faith is empty. We cannot even make a claim to be a Christian when we turn a blind eye to the very real needs all around us. While this is true, the Christian will also need discernment to know when giving to someone's need is only encouraging irresponsible behavior. Today we learned that in Thessalonica, there were some who were very willing to eat the food others had worked for, but were themselves unwilling to work. We must watch for this attitude, for it is still with us, and often very prevalent in the church. Some people are aware that Christians are kind and will give to the needy, and so they make church their place of interest, so that they might get some free handouts. How sad that the church has attracted so much of the insincere, who are only looking to take advantage of the goodness of those willing to share. We have learned from scripture today, that Christians do not have to tolerate such evil conduct. Christians are expected to use some common sense, and turn away those who are only at church to beg for assistance. There will always be people who show up at church meetings for wrong reasons. Mature believers, while wanting to show compassion, should have some basic criteria for giving to those who seek help from the church. The first principle is whether the one asking for assistance is willing to work themselves. The principle here can be broadly applied to many situations. So often people expect others to give, contribute, and work, while they reap the benefits of another's labors. The Christian church is described in the bible as a body, with each member of the body doing his own part. Christianity does not support laziness, or superficial attendees, who want all the benefits, but none of the work. Those who labor should be encouraged, and given help first, before others who are not serving the Lord. In the letter to Timothy, which we will begin in our next lesson, Paul speaks of the church's responsibility to care for widows, who are widows indeed. This means there are some widows who are not worthy of the support of the church. To be counted worthy, they would have to be faithful, having always served the needs of the saints, and lived a godly testimony, and they are destitute of any family to care for them. We can see there is a criteria set in place for the church to decide how and when they can help someone in need. The criteria for widows is set very high, so that no one will simply join the church to seek free social assistance. The church is not to allow the irresponsible and uncommitted to be rewarded with the Lord's resources.

Now we will all need to use much wisdom and spiritual discernment to decide when to share with the needs of others. There may come times, when a man is not working and is seeking help, and we might say in our hearts that we do not wish to help because he should be working, and if a man does not work, he should not eat. This however could be a cold and unloving response to a genuine need. Perhaps the man is earnestly looking for work, and would be willing to do any job he is given. He normally would never ask for help, but in such need he is forced to seek help. If he is a brother in Christ, then we should be sensitive to his need and offer assistance. Remember, it is not whether a man is working or not that helps determine whether he is worthy of assistance, but whether he is **willing** to work or not. A man who refuses work when it is offered to him, has no right to ask for free food, bringing shame to his Christian testimony.

Another possible situation is where a person who is working, but has run low on funds, and is in need, and appeals for help. Looking carefully into the situation one finds that they have family who could, and ought to first offer the help, before the church is burdened. In this case the church might decide that they would rather not support the need, and ask the person to look first to their family to help them. Each case will be different, and will take prayerful consideration by spiritual mature believers, to determine when to offer assistance. Some people look to the church for help and sponsorship, but this is not a good Christian attitude. Everyone should be willing to serve and give, and seek by all means to not burden others with their own needs. The church's response, should be to have open eyes to the needs of those in the fellowship, and beyond, as well as an open heart, and open hands to help those who are in genuine need of help. This is how we can show our love and sincere faith, and win souls for the kingdom of God.

"but if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." 1Tim 5:8

LESSONS IN 1TIMOTHY

Pillar from Ancient city of Ephesus



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“BUT IF I AM DELAYED, I WRITE SO THAT YOU MAY KNOW HOW YOU OUGHT TO CONDUCT YOURSELF IN THE HOUSE OF GOD, WHICH IS THE CHURCH OF THE LIVING GOD, THE PILLAR AND GROUND OF THE TRUTH.”

1TIMOTHY 3:15

LESSON 191
Teachers of the Law
1TIMOTHY 1

In our last lesson finished off our study of 2Thessalonians, where we learned about the coming Day of God's judgment and how we need to live godly in view of Christ's return. Today we begin a study in the book of 1Timothy. Timothy was a young man who travelled with Paul as a missionary and co-laborer for the gospel. Paul thought of Timothy as a son in the faith, and had confidence in him to be faithful in preaching the gospel, and caring for the people of God. When Paul wrote this letter to Timothy, he had sent him to Ephesus to teach the church, correct those who sought to be teachers, and help establish godly leaders for the church.

Paul is sending a personal letter to his dear friend and son in the faith Timothy. Though personal, this letter is also divinely inspired, intended for the spiritual instruction of the whole church, and thus Paul formally identifies himself in the first line of the letter as an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commandment of God. Paul's calling was by God's command, and therefore it was his obedience to serve Christ, and not simply a vocation which he chose for himself.

The letter is written to Timothy, whom he calls his son in the faith. This does not necessarily mean that Paul was the one who lead Timothy to faith in Christ, but it likely means that Timothy followed the pattern of Paul's life of faith, giving himself over to the Lord's work of spreading the gospel. In Paul's address to Timothy, he desires the grace, mercy, and peace of God, and Jesus Christ, for him. He puts the Lord Jesus and God on the same level confirming the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul explains immediately the task which he has assigned to Timothy earlier. He had sent him to Ephesus, where they had previously seen an assembly established. He wants Timothy to remain in Ephesus to correct some of the problems the church was facing. He begins by telling Timothy to charge those who were setting themselves up as teachers, to teach sound doctrine. It appears that some of these men were seeking to be teachers of the Law, but were getting carried away with fables and endless genealogies, which only brought arguments and not spiritual edification. The purpose of teaching was to show love from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith. It is not anyone who should try to take up God's word and communicate it to others, for it takes a work of the Holy Spirit, and His calling to handle the word of God with a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith. A pure heart speaks of motives, which should be for God's glory, and not man's glory. A good conscience speaks of a life that is consistent with the preaching. A sincere faith speaks of the need to be compelled to serve the Lord because that is where faith leads us. There is no room for men, who have doubts about God's word, to preach it, though many who preach the word do not sincerely believe that which they themselves preach.

These men who made themselves teachers of the Law, did not understand the Law or it's purpose. Paul explains the Law is good for those who use it properly. The Law was not intended for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate. He lists several types of sinners to whom the Law could be applied, namely the unholy, profane, murderers of fathers or of mothers, manslayers, fornicators, sodomites, kidnappers, liars, perjurers. The Law is intended to convict these of their sinful ways, or anyone whose life was not living according to sound doctrine. Sound doctrine means according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God that had been committed to Paul's trust. Sound doctrine will always emphasize the gospel of God's grace as revealed in the New Testament. This is what the Law was pointing towards, and what all spiritual life will spring from. To waste time on discussing things that will not really affect one's eternal welfare, but only fuel debate, is not wise, and of no spiritual value.

Paul was entrusted with the glorious message of the gospel, and he wants to express here his gratitude to God for counted him faithful, and putting him into the ministry. Paul admits how exceedingly abundant God's grace had been displayed to him, since he was formerly a blasphemer, persecutor of the church, and an insolent man. Paul's behavior before he was saved, was due to his ignorance of Jesus Christ as Lord, but when God revealed Jesus to him, he immediately acknowledge Jesus as Lord, and surrendered his will and life in service to Him. Paul saw his life as an example of the exceeding riches of God's grace for all those who believe in Christ. Paul calls himself the chief of sinners. He gives the first of several statements that were to be considered faithful and worthy of all acceptance. This statement is that, 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners'. This wonderful fact is the reason Paul and all of us may have eternal life. This made Paul so very grateful, and a worshipper of God. So he shares a wonderful word of praise to God at the end of this chapter. He says now to the king eternal, immortal, invisible to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. This lovely description of God's character and attributes was not from the voice of ignorance, but from one who knew God intimately and loved Him deeply.

He charges Timothy to wage a good warfare, according to the prophecies made about him previously. Perhaps someone had received a revelation that Timothy would serve the Lord, and be a faithful Christian soldier. Certainly the service of the Lord is like engaging in battle, for there are many foes seeking our demise, and it will take the discipline and loyalty of a good soldier to stand up against all attacks. Paul mentions two in particular, Alexander and Hymenaeus, who had abandoned a good Christian conscience, and made shipwreck of their faith. These two men blasphemed, either by word or conduct, and Paul said he had delivered them to Satan so they would learn not to blaspheme. This teaches us that Christians must be careful with the knowledge of the truth, and not allow their behavior to contradict their faith to the extent that they make shipwreck of their faith. A true Christian cannot lose his

salvation, but he can make shipwreck of his faith, by losing his testimony before the world, due to sinful behavior. Do you have a good conscience and sincere faith in Christ. Be careful that you do not follow those who have made shipwreck of their faith.

"this is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." 1Timothy 1:15

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we introduced the book of 1Timothy, and considered the duties of young Timothy to correct those men who were trying to set themselves up as teachers in the church. We also considered the grace of God in the gospel, entrusted to Paul, who was the chief of sinners. Someone might ask the question, "What does it mean to deliver someone to Satan?"

In today's lesson we heard Paul mention two men, Alexander and Hymanaeus whom he had delivered to Satan, so that they would learn not to blaspheme. This statement about handing others over to Satan should be considered carefully, for we would not want to be in danger of misunderstanding what is meant, and wrongly applying this verse. We might think this is still our prerogative as believers today, and that when we see those whom we considered to have destroyed their Christian testimonies, and are unrepentant, that we should similarly attempt to deliver them to Satan. Notice though the purpose that Paul was trying to accomplish, and that was that the sinners would learn not to blaspheme. The motive of handing these men over to Satan, was so that by being in Satan's grasp, he could inflict some punishment on them. Satan's cooperation with God's purposes is certainly not his intention, but the inevitable outcome of his hatred of Christ, and the children of God. Satan can and will torment believers, but only within the allowable limits of that which the Lord permits. We see this clearly in the story of Job, where Satan was permitted to attack, but not kill God's servant. The Lord used Satan's viciousness and hatred to work out his own purposes, by refining and showing the genuine faith of his servant Job. Since Paul was trying to see these men turn away from their blasphemous behavior, he felt that Satan would do the job. Satan could have no power at all to touch a believer, unless that believer gives place to the Devil, by engaging in some sinful behavior. If Christians harm their testimony through sin, such that others would mock Christianity, then the Lord will chastise His children, and he may use Satan in the process. Sometimes when young people get involved in some petty crime, the police will put them in with a hardened criminal to frighten them half to death. Their purpose is to try to cause a deep change in the heart of that young person, who is on a bad pathway, that could lead them to be like that hardened criminal. After they are confronted with the real picture of their own future, they are in a big hurry to repent and make things right, leaving behind their criminal behavior. This appears to be the same purpose that Paul was using here to cause these men to change their ways. A day with Satan to bring repentance, would be much better than eternity with Him in the flames of Hell. It is not nice to face the ugliness of Satan's destructive ways, but the truth of it will hopefully scare most back to their senses.

Handing someone over to Satan, may have been a prerogative of the early apostles, that is no longer with us today, for we are not given instructions as a church to do this. The only thing that comes close to this is when the Corinthians church was called upon to put a man under discipline, which is also described as delivering him to Satan for the destruction of the flesh. In this context, it means to put the sinful person out of the fellowship, treating them as if they would an unbeliever. Once outside of the church, they fall under the realm of Satan, and the spiritual protection of the church has been removed temporarily in hopes that they will repent. Certainly if a believer is exposed to the attacks of Satan, and suffers either physically or spiritually, they will be in hurry to repent and make it right, and to once again be under the shelter of the assembly's spiritual care.

It would be safest to conclude that delivering a person to Satan was a special prerogative of the early apostles, and that only those who are subject to discipline, are those we could say have been delivered to Satan. Satan is well capable to do harm to those who have lost the protection of the Lord and His church. Christians should be warned not to offend the Lord through their sin, and bring upon themselves such judgment that leaves them open to Satan's attack. Remember that believers cannot be harmed or controlled by Satan unless God allows it, for greater is He that is in us, than he that is in the world (1John 4:4), which means the Holy Spirit who is in us is of greater power than Satan, and thus we are sheltered from harm through the indwelling Holy Spirit. We should also be aware that it is possible to allow the devil to get a foothold in our lives, by giving way to some sin that will ensnare us. We need to be careful to resist the devil, and walk in way that pleases the Lord, for we are no match for the devil, and if permitted He could do great damage to us. Our protection is from the Lord, so we must walk in a manner that pleases the Lord so that we will never fall under discipline and be delivered to Satan. That is a very scary proposition, for Satan is very powerful, and hates God and all Christians. It maybe necessary to be subjected to Satan's power in order to frighten the sinner back into obedience to the Lord.

"deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the lord Jesus." 1Cor. 5:5

LESSON 192
Men & Women in Church
TIMOTHY 2

In our last lesson we introduced the letter of 1st Timothy, and heard Paul sharing with Timothy how some men set themselves up as teachers of the Law, and yet were ignorant. He mentioned two men who were handed over to Satan because of their blasphemous behavior. In today's lesson Paul calls on Timothy to carry out a ministry in prayer, where he is to pray for all men, and those in authority so that the Christians can live in peace and godliness.

Paul's exhortation to Timothy to pray, includes making supplications, prayers, intercessions and giving of thanks. There are several aspects to prayer, and we can benefit by considering each. Supplications are requests made to God with the idea of making peace, whereas prayers are asking God for things we need or want. Intercession is when prayers are made on behalf of others, and giving of thanks is something that should accompany all of our prayers to God, for He gives us life and all blessings. Timothy is instructed to pray for all men, especially for kings and those in authority. The responsibility to pray should move beyond ourselves and our own needs, to the needs of others. When a prayer life matures, it is also concerned for the welfare of all men, for God loves all men, and desires their salvation. A mature prayer life also sees the importance of praying for government and leaders, for these are those who affect and determine the conditions and circumstances in which we all live. The goal in these prayers, is so that the Christian community can live quiet and peaceably with godliness and reverence. There is a beautiful balance in this request between the tranquility of life for those who love the Lord, and the testimony presented by Christians in the world of godliness and reverence. It is the decency and respectability of godly Christians that will cause the world to take notice of our Savior. Paul sees a direct correlation between the quiet godly testimony of Christians and the proclamation of the gospel in the world. Here is something important for us, especially in this modern era, where Christianity has become a stench to the world because of its obnoxious noise, and irreverent and wild behavior. The world looks on and mocks Christians, because of the hyper hysteria that goes on in many churches today, putting on a show of apparent spiritual power. The world can see how phony all this is, and when we preach so loudly that we disturb their peace, they will not be drawn to Christ, but rather be driven further away from Him. If we really love the Lord, then let us learn to be quiet and reverent in the way we present our testimony to the world.

An important verse for the gospel is here in 1 Timothy 2, which says there is "one mediator between God and men". This teaches us that Christ is the only one who is able to make peace for us with God, for He is the only mediation that God has, or will ever approve, for us. Notice here that God desires the salvation of all men. This is an important truth, since some teach that God only elects certain individuals to salvation. However the bible clearly states here that God wills the salvation of all men, and we know that He has also made provision for all men to be saved. Unto this gospel message, Paul says, he was appointed as a preacher, apostle and teacher. A preacher calls on others to obey God's word, a teacher explains God's word, and an apostle is someone sent into the world to preach the gospel.

Now Paul gives more instructions to the church, specifically to the men and women on how they are to conduct themselves in the church. First he addressed the men, and calls on all men to lift up holy hands in prayer. This means that all the brothers in the local church should take active part in public prayers at church meetings. The meetings should be conducted in such a way that affords any brother in the congregation who feels lead to pray, to have the opportunity to do so. As the Spirit of God leads in the congregation, several brothers may, one at a time, share prayers. This could happen in a prayer meeting, or in a communion meeting while breaking bread together. Perhaps one reason that men do not pray more in church meetings, is because the church does not have meetings where men are asked or invited to lead in prayer. Lifting up holy hands has little to do with a man's posture while he is praying, which has very little significance, but rather it refers to the condition of his heart before God. Men who lead the assembly in prayer, should have a clean heart before God, not be living in secret sin, and inviting God's judgment.

Women in the church are called to dress modestly, with propriety and moderation. This may look different depending on culture, maturity, and the fashion of the day. It might seem difficult to understand and apply this scripture, and certainly much grace and understanding must be afforded when instructing a sister about her attire. The overall sense of this instruction, is for the women not to draw undue attention to themselves, either by expensive clothing, or something seductive, or something exceptional different from the expected norm. The beauty of sisters should be seen in their good works, and not just their appearance. Also women are called upon to learn in silence in the church. Women are not to teach or usurp authority over the men. This teaching is not popular with some, for they want women to have a greater public significance in the church, but her significance is noted by her quiet and gentle spirit, which to God is of great value. Her greatest contribution is her submissive obedience and silence, which does require humility of spirit and tremendous self-control. These mark her as a godly women, and restore the creative order that was damaged by Eve in the garden of Eden. Paul takes us back to where the problem began, where the woman was first deceived, and was first in transgression. He points out that Adam was created first before the woman, and this gives man a place of authority over the woman. The natural mind is at enmity with God, and will rebel against this teaching, just as Eve rebelled against her God-given role. The spiritual mind will lovingly accept God's order and obey these simple instruction. A Christian woman finds her salvation in childbearing. This is not the salvation of her soul, but rather salvation of her unique role in life to bring forth children and nurture them for God. This is her greatest work, and where she will find her greatest fulfillment. While culture wants to send women out of the home, and have

others tend to the care of their children, the bible would teach the opposite, calling on Christian women to find their roles in the home, caring for their families. It is in the home that she will be fulfilled, and God glorified.

"for there is one god and one mediator between god and men, the man Christ Jesus." 1Timothy 2:5

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we learned the importance of laboring in prayer for the sake of all people, and for our governments. We also learned the important roles of men and women when in the church. Someone might ask the question, "When should a woman be corrected for wearing inappropriate clothing?"

In today's lesson Paul gave instructions about how Christian women were to dress. This instruction is given for when the church gathers together, as we learn from the next chapter. With this in mind, it would be unwise to try to stretch this instruction much beyond church gatherings. In other words, if we meet a Christian sister in town, or out for dinner, or at the beach, our acceptance of their choice of clothing has much more to do with their personal taste, and not so much to do with the conduct of the church. Having said that it is also clear that each sister needs to think carefully about what kind of testimony she presents to the world with her choices of what she wears in public. It is never appropriate for her to dress seductively so that men will lust for her body. Some younger ladies may not even realize the affect they can have on men, when they wear clothing that reveals their form. Conservative dress that fits tastefully with the cultural norms, will be accepted by all, and not bring unnecessary shame on one's Christian testimony. Most godly women would not want to be accused of dressing indecently, and therefore will take precautions to ensure that no one will have reason to judge them.

When a sister appears in church gatherings, and her dress is deemed inappropriate, by being immodest, or too costly or ornate, then what should be done, and by whom should it be done? This is a very delicate issue that needs to be handled by those who have maturity in the faith. The reason for this is that it is far too easy to misjudge a sister's heart and motives by the manner in which she dresses. A young sister who lacks maturity maybe easily hurt by comments about her dress, for she is trying to look beautiful and appropriate, and sometimes lack the discretion and wisdom to know what is acceptable. Much grace should be extended to our sisters, remembering that dress styles change from age to age, and from culture to culture. Often young Christian women are not given much help from their mothers, or from older sisters, to guide them in good choices for appropriate dress at church meetings. Only when the case is clearly a show of disrespect, either to her self or others, should mature sisters come along side and provide some gentle instruction. The older sisters must exhibit a warm and loving spirit when offering correction, so as to show that the most important thing is not their outward appearance, but the condition of the heart before the Lord. God is not so much interested in how we look on the outside, as He is interested in the attitude within. A proper Christian attitude will be guided to make choices that do not offend others intentionally. Sometimes it is wrong to take offense at what someone is wearing, for our hearts might be self-righteous and judgmental. Men must be very careful when going to a sister to correct her about her appearance and dress. A woman's identity, sense of worth and acceptance is often so closely associated to their appearance, so if someone makes a negative comment about them, it might damage her emotionally, or even spiritually. Now a mature Christian woman would not feel insecure about her appearance, but we cannot expect all to be mature in those areas in which we think we have a better understanding of God's word. Perhaps while I think a sister is dressed inappropriately, I am blind to the fact that I am not proving to be the spiritual leader God calls me to be in the church. I may be just as much, if not more, in need of a word of correction. I believe that if a woman is accepted, loved and disciplined by mature believers, she will learn the mind and heart of Christ, and things like her appearance will be taught to her by the Holy Spirit, without much need for other Christians to instruct her. Many things in the Christian life can be taught by setting a good example. As Christians in the assembly show how they dress modestly, they are teaching others. Some young men and boys seem to think it is fashionable to wear their trousers below their waist, showing their boxers. This is a disrespectful way to appear in an atmosphere of prayer and worship, but trying to instruct a young person may not have much impact. However if we demonstrate that we care about their soul, teach the word faithfully, and allow the Holy Spirit to work, patiently waiting for them to learn from the example of others in the church. Dress is certainly not a point for contention or offending one another. It takes spiritually mature believers to know when, if ever, someone should be spoken to about their choices of dress. When Christians get too concerned with how others dress, a spirit of legalism can stifle spiritual joy and growth in a church, through unloving and uncaring words. In most cases, what might appear inappropriate can be overlooked by grace, and prayers offered for the persons spiritual growth and understanding. If the case is extreme, such that it distracts the spiritual purposes of the church, then wise elders may choose to address the situation. They may ask an older mature sister to approach the sister who is dressing inappropriately. They might do it themselves, but an elder would be wise to take his wife along when giving such instruction to a young sister.

"brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. but watch yourself, or you also may be tempted." Gal. 6:1

LESSON 193
Elders of the Church
1TIMOTHY 3

In our last lesson we were learning about the important responsibility of prayer in the church, and also how men and women are to conduct themselves in church gatherings. Today we will tackle the important subject of leadership for the local church. This is important because many in the modern church have adopted a form of church leadership that is not authorized by God in the bible. So lets learn the proper leadership that God wants for His church and obey Him.

When telling Timothy about proper conduct in the church, he now tackles the subject of leadership in the local church. He will speak about the qualifications for both elders and deacons. The first thing we should notice about this chapter, and what it teaches about leadership in the church, is that the responsibilities of leadership does not fall on one single individual, but on a group of men, whom the bible refers to as elders. Deacons also are leaders, but their responsibilities are different from those of elders. Deacons look to the elders for the spiritual leadership of the local church. The qualifications for elders are listed, and though we do not have time to discuss each qualification, we can note some important things about these qualifications. For instance, almost all the qualifications deal with a man's character, and not his education, or experience. Both Education and experience may play an important part in preparing a man to serve in leadership in the local church, but the most important qualifications are his godly conduct and character. The elders must be men who have a desire to shepherd God's flock. Motivation to serve Christ is absolutely essential, and the first qualification mentioned. When Peter addresses elders in his 1st epistle he tells them they should not be motivated to serve for money, but to have a willing heart to feed and nurture the church. This simple qualification would likely rule out many pastors today who live very richly from their ministry. Only two of the qualifications refer to the elders work, namely "able to teach", and "lover of strangers". These two qualifications help us to understand that the elders work involves teaching the word of God, and taking interest in people. Some teachers are very good at explaining the word, but lack that personal pastoral spirit that cares about the individuals in the flock. Then there are those who have a caring pastoral heart, but lack the teaching skills to feed the flock. Both are required of an elder for the local church. The other qualifications will teach us that the elder is to be a man of the highest moral character, with a good and well ordered family life, business life, and church life. He should be a man who is serious, dedicated to the Lord, and not running after money or worldly things. He needs to have a family that respect him, and respect the things of God. He also must have maturity in the faith, so he does not get lifted up with pride lest he fall into the devil's trap. When selecting men to oversee the spiritual care of the church, time should be taken to consider each qualification listed here in 1Timothy 3. It is grievous to see how many churches have developed a leadership structure for their church which fails to follow God's clear instruction here in scripture. Having one pastor of the church, and other deacons and elders, as though they rank on a lower scale of authority in the church, is a great travesty. This will leave the church in the hands of one man holding onto authority that was never issued to him from Christ, and distorts the New Testament model for the local church. Elders are always mentioned as more than one when referred to in the New Testament, and so we should be careful to ensure that our local churches are lead by a plurality of qualified elders, and not a single pastor.

Deacons are those who support the elders by handling much of the practical affairs of the church, such as finances, visiting widows, and administration of various ministries. Elders oversee and make final decisions on spiritual matters for the church. The deacons have been delegated authority and responsibilities that the elders would find difficult to handle without neglecting their primary responsibility to pray and teach the word of God. Deacons, like elders, are to be of the highest character, but they do not share the same qualification for teaching or loving strangers, since that is not their primary sphere of responsibility. It is important to notice that both elders and deacons must have supportive wives and orderly children. Without this they are disqualified, for the scriptures says if they cannot order their own home, how can they lead the church. Deacons also are to be first tested and proven able to handle responsibilities in the church. It is never wise to take a novice, or someone rather new to the church and hand over some important responsibility, like handling of finances. This is only asking for problems, and putting temptation before those who may have not proven their godly character. A deacon must hold onto doctrine with a pure conscience, so that they can prove to be a sincere help, and example for the church.

Paul explains the reason for this writing was so believers would know how to behave in the household of God, which is the pillar and ground of the truth. This tells us that the church is of the greatest important to God, and should be important to us also since the church upholds the truth of God. The governing of the church by godly people is one important way that people can see the gospel, and the character of God. In fact this great revelation of God living within His people, is seen by Christ living in His body (the church), and the Holy Spirit authenticates the life of Christ in believers. Angels look on in wonder at Christ living in God's children. Christ is also made known through the church to all nations, so that many turn to the Lord in faith. Just as Christ was raised up, the church also will be raised into the glory, and with this hope in their hearts, they live a life of godly devotion. The church itself is therefore a message to the world, and to angels. Therefore how the assembly is lead is not just a matter of our own preference, but of showing the character of God in our lives, and learning from godly mature brothers who devote themselves to caring for God's people. Not all Christians are elders, but everyone should aspire to the same godly character of elders. Deacons are not elders, but elders will be deacons, for they serve the body of Christ. They bear the additional

responsibility to oversee the church and teach the word, and are therefore called elders. This name marks their maturity in Christ, and is not meant to be title of distinguishing honor. Moses was a great leader for Israel, and could certainly be referred to as an elder, but we never read of Elder Moses, or Elder Paul in the bible. Their name and character qualified them to be known as mature and able leaders.

"it is a true saying that if someone wants to be an elder, he desires an honorable responsibility." 1Timothy 3:1

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we learned about leadership in the local church, and the qualifications of both elders and deacons. These are men of excellent moral character and spirituality, who are willing to serve the body of Christ. Someone might ask the question, "How does the church go about selecting or removing elders?"

While Timothy is given a list of qualifications for elders in the local assembly, Paul does not give him any further instructions about how to go about the process of selecting or removing elders. It is clear that the list of qualifications given to Timothy was intended to help Timothy give guidance to the church for selecting men who were qualified to lead the church. We also learn from the book of Titus, that Paul had instructed Titus to appoint elders in every church on the island of Crete. Titus, like Timothy, was a missionary whom Paul had invested much time teaching, and in whom he could place his trust. Paul knew he was able to help the churches identify, and approve, those who were elders. Timothy or Titus certainly had the spiritual maturity and insights to be able point out those men who were qualified to serve as elders. Perhaps that is what they did, but it may also be the case, that these servants of God, simply pointed out to the congregation those whom they felt were qualified, and then allowed the church to confirm the recognition of these men. In Acts chapter 6 the apostles were lead by the Holy Spirit to instruct the church to select men for serving the needs of widows. It is clear that the apostles did not simply dictate to the church whom they thought fit to serve in the church, but rather trusted the Holy Spirit to guide the whole church to cooperatively recognize those who were qualified to serve. Since there is no clear guidelines for how elders are selected and put into place, the church must be cautious to use biblical principles to guide the process, though the process may vary from church to church. It would be wise to have the present elders help direct the selection of new elders. This has to be done cautiously, and with transparency before the church, so as not to allow elders to select those whom they favor. Elders should be impartial, but since they are mere men, we know they can falter in their judgments at times. Thus it would seem wise to employ the whole church in the process of selecting elders. If the church is walking in fellowship with the Lord, and the elders exhibit some spiritual depth, then it should not take long for the whole church to come to an agreement as to those who meet the qualifications. A church should take time to ensure that they select the right individuals, for if someone is selected who is not really qualified it could cause much grief to the church through their mishandling of leadership. The church is not to be run like a democracy, for not every opinion or vote can be weighted the same. Some are more mature, and some have more discernment, and so their contributions should be weighted more heavily than those who are just new to the faith. Godly elders who guide the process of selection will try to ensure that the person meets all the qualifications, and the church has given their agreement. Perhaps the elders will recommend certain individuals to the church, and ask the church to confirm, or question their judgment before a final decision is reached. This helps to ensure that the selection is under the control of the Holy Spirit and not just men.

What about removing an elder who no longer fits the qualifications? If the process of selection is handled by the whole church, then it stands to reason that all should also have some say in who and when an elder should be removed from their responsibilities. Once an elder has been appointed, it is difficult for others to question them, because scripture requires that we respect and obey them. Discerning believers will know that their obedience and submission to elders is to be honored until an elder is clearly in violation of God's word. Any believer who sees an elder sinning, should take the matter before the other elders, or before witnesses to establish the facts. There must be humility and respect for the office of elder, and give the benefit of doubt, not accusing of sin, unless the evidence is undeniable. The potential damage to the man, and the church, means that Christians must be certain before bringing an accusation against an elder. An elder might be challenged, and refuse to step down. Depending on the nature of the sin, church members will have to weigh out the consequences of the situation. If an elder is sinning and will not repent, he will need to be put under discipline. The church and it's elders must be willing to stand up against evil, even when it is found in one of their leaders. Paul warned the Ephesian elders that grievous wolves would arise from among themselves, no sparing the flock. Therefore the church must be ready to handle such situations. If the whole leadership is corrupt, and will not repent, then the believer might chose to leave the church, and look for another fellowship where the leadership is not in rebellion against God. This should be a very last resort, for God would have us seek for correction, discipline and restoration, rather than division. It is a sad fact that leaders fail, and sometimes refuse correction. If the church is careful to select only qualified men as elders then hopefully future problems can be avoided.

"brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. but watch yourself, or you also may be tempted." Gal 6:1

LESSON 194
A Good Minister
TIMOTHY 4

In our last lesson we heard Paul provide a list of qualification for elders and deacons, and thought about how elders are selected for the church. Now Paul gets a bit more personal and speaks to Timothy about how to be a good minister for Jesus Christ, through teaching correct doctrine.

He begins by sharing a prophetic look into the future, when men will depart from the faith, and listen to deceiving spirits, and doctrines of demons. Satan is very active in the church, seeking to turn people away from the truth and sound doctrine. We might find this hard to believe, but the bible points says that the church is where Satan seems to be most active, particularly in these last days. His methods are to use false teachings, using lies to convince the undiscerning. Some men teach that marriage is to be forbidden for some Christians, and certain foods should be abstained from. These two doctrines sound very close to the Roman Catholic restriction made upon priests from marrying, and also that Catholics are not to eat meat on certain occasions. We must make sure our doctrine comes from the bible, and not religious tradition, or we might also fall into the trap of believing doctrines of demons. Paul helps Timothy to understand and teach that all food is to be accepted and received with thanks. This important statement should help all Christians to understand that God has sanctioned all food for us to eat. Where the Jews had certain dietary restrictions, those restrictions have all been removed in this present church age. All food should be accepted with thanksgiving. Timothy was to teach this carefully to the church, and prove himself as a good minister of Jesus Christ. Timothy could do this by being well nourished himself in the words of faith which he had learned from Paul. He also had to reject profane words, and old wives fables. Truth is found in God's word, and we should be so careful when presented with certain fables which claim be true. Sometimes we might look to old wives, or older men for that matter, to gain wisdom. Often they can provide us with some help, but we must measure all teaching against God's revealed word, and let God's word be the standard by which we judge all doctrine.

Paul speaks to Timothy also about bodily exercise, which he says has some profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, for our present time, and also for the life to come. Bodily exercise is a good practice for all of us, but we should ensure that the care of our physical health is not made more important than our spiritual health. Paul adds that this statement about the value of godliness was faithful and worthy of all acceptance. It was the pursuit of godliness that compelled Paul and Timothy to labor, and even suffer for the sake of the gospel. They had their faith in God, who saves men, especially those that believe. What Paul means here is that all men receive daily mercies and provisions from God, but it is only those who trust in Jesus as Lord that receive the eternal salvation of their souls.

What Paul taught Timothy, he was to command and teach others. He was not to allow others to despise his youth, but to be an example to all the believers by his words, conduct, love, spirit, faith and purity. The call to preach is much more than just being able to talk well, it has to do with every aspect of a person's life, for all are looking on and trying to follow the example of the preacher. He is to be a model Christian that others can admire and follow in both words and behavior. He calls on Timothy to also give his time to publicly reading the word of God, to preaching it, and teaching doctrine. We must remember that these early Christians did not have their own copies of the bible, and thus public reading was the only way they could learn from the word. We still should give much attention in the church to publicly reading the bible, so that everyone will hear God speaking through His word. Timothy was not to neglect his spiritual gift. This gift had been confirmed by prophecy and the laying on of the elders hands. This no longer happens in the church, but elders might place their hands on a man before commending him to ministry or mission work, as a way of agreeing, or identifying with his calling. Timothy's gift was likely teaching, since Paul spends so much of his time going over doctrine with Timothy, and calling on him to teach and preach it. Whatever his gift was, it is clear that he could possibly neglect it. Too often Christians are not even aware that they have a spiritual gift, or those who have a gift are not given opportunity for that gift to be used for the benefit of the church. It is wonderful to see so many preachers around, but where are the other gifts, such as mercy, faith, administration, and giving? The church needs to have ministries which provide opportunities for the expression of all gifts in the body of Christ, so that God's purpose can be fulfilled in the church. Do you know your spiritual gift, and are you using it?

Not only was Timothy to be active in preaching and teaching others, he was to spend his time meditating upon the things he had heard and learned from Paul. He was to immerse himself entirely in his spiritual work, so that all could see how God was working through Him. There is no room for spiritual laziness when a man serves God. He is to think carefully about his life, and the teaching, and be determined to fulfill his ministry, so that he will preserve a good testimony for the Lord, and help many others avoid the trappings of the false teachers.

To be a good minister for Jesus Christ therefore meant that Timothy had to fully give himself over to the Lord's work. Clearly this meant he had to put aside all of his personal interests and ambitions. To be effective the Lord's servant must live a life that would look rather unbalanced to most people. This is because he is all out for the Lord. He is not just working from 9 to 5 and then putting his feet up to relax. Most men are motivated to work so they can provide for themselves and family, but God's servant is motivated by a much higher purpose to see men saved, and God glorified, and so he works tirelessly all the time. Allow me to be a good minister today, and ask you, "Are you saved?" Would you go to heaven if you died today? Why not trust in Jesus Christ as your Lord and personal Savior, and know

that your sins are forgiven, and you possess eternal life? You can become a Christian today, by simply allowing the Holy Spirit to speak to your heart, and believing in Jesus as your Savior.

"if you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed." 1Timothy 4:6

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we learned about being a good minister of Jesus Christ. We saw that God's work involves teaching sound doctrine, and being fully committed to a life of godliness, so others can see God at work in us. Someone might ask the question, "How does a person exercise themselves unto godliness?"

In today's lesson Paul told Timothy that while physical exercise had some advantages, it was godliness that was the most important thing in his life, and that he should exercise himself unto godliness. Godliness, has to do with God living in and through believers, such that people encounter God when they meet a godly person. Paul describes for Timothy what godliness involves, when he called him to be an example in several areas of the spiritual life. Lets think about each of these, as they will help us to understand and apply the truth about being godly.

First he mentions to Timothy that he should be an example in word. This could mean that he teaches God's word to others carefully, accurately and faithfully, for this would certainly be what is involved in being godly, since God desires everyone hear his word. However I think there is something else Paul may have had in mind, and that is the control of our speech. When Christians are careful to use their tongue for good purposes that encourage and help others, rather than to use their tongue to tell lies, insults, or speak evil of others, then they are behaving godly. God cares very much about the words that proceed from our mouth, and it often the tongue that gives away a man's true identity as either a follower of Christ, or a child of the devil.

Secondly he calls Timothy to be an example in conduct. This encompasses all of his activities and behavior. As people watch the things we choose to spend our time at, our behavior will either teach something about Christ, or not. If I spend much of my time watching sports on TV this is certainly is not going to help anyone get to know Christ. However if I spend much of my time reading the bible, then others might look to me to help them understand the bible, and that may lead them to faith in Christ.

Thirdly Timothy was also to be an example in love. The Christian life is about imitating God, and God is love. We are to demonstrate love in very practical ways to others, so that the love of God might be manifested in us. This happens as Christians look to one another's needs and share with one another. This involves serving others, and taking time to show interest in them, what they are doing, and praying for them.

Fourthly He was to demonstrate a good spirit. That is a spirit that demonstrates the work of the Holy Spirit, showing joy, compassion, patience, humility and goodness. It is not acceptable for those who claim to follow Christ, to be nasty, complaining, proud, and selfish. Our spirit should be directed by the gracious Holy Spirit so that the character of Christ is seen in us.

One more area of godliness is that of faith. Timothy was to show that his trust was in God and not in men. This could be applied in many ways, for faith will manifest itself in our varied circumstances. When Timothy had to confront others about their false teachings or practices, this meant his faith would have to be strong, so that he would not be tempted to try to please men rather than God. Perhaps for you and I faith will be shown when we try to preach the gospel to our friends and family, fearing how they might respond. Like Timothy we must allow our faith to prevail, by honoring God and his word, even when it is costly to do so.

The last area of godliness has to do with purity. Though not explained, it would certainly include the need for Timothy to be very careful about his conduct with the opposite sex. As far as we can tell Timothy was a single man, and this may have presented him with more opportunity for temptation as a young man. Temptation can be a very powerful influence, and those who serve Christ must be vigilant to tame the flesh so that they do not bring scandal and reproach upon the church by their lack of self control.

From this short list, we can discern that godliness involves the mastery of our tongue, time, temperament, trust, and temptations. Do not think that godliness is something that comes easily to a person of faith. It is a difficult challenge to both acquire and maintain godliness, and thus needs the support of fellow believers and prayer. It only takes one word, or one trial to damage a godly testimony, as we can so easily fall prey to the temptation to sin, or act in our flesh. Godliness is the great aim of our lives, and purpose of God, but will take our entire commitment to maintain it day by day, and much time spent with Jesus.

"According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue." 2Pet 1:3

LESSON 195
Supporting Widows
TIMOTHY 5

In our last lesson Paul was instructed Timothy on how to be a good minister of Jesus Christ. As he continues into this chapter, he further gives instructions to Timothy for how the church is to support widows. He also mentions the need to honor elders, be impartial in his judgments, and not share in the sins of other people.

Paul has many instructions for Timothy on how to instruct the church. Timothy was younger than Paul, and though we do not know his age, there were certainly Christians much older than himself in the church where he was ministering. He was not to allow others to despise his youth, but at the same time he was to respect older men. In deference to their age, he was not to rebuke someone older than himself. He could exhort them, in the same manner that he might appeal to a father. The younger men he should address as brothers, and older women as mothers, and young sisters with all purity. This is a wonderful synopsis of how Christians ought to think towards one another, and behave in their relations to one another. The church is a family, older Christians referred to as mother, father, uncle, or auntie; and those closer in age called brothers and sisters. This fosters the love of God in the church, and helps us to treat one another in manner that pleases God. A young man who sees a young woman in the fellowship might be tempted to look at her with lustful eyes, but here Timothy, and all young men, are called to look at women with pure eyes, thinking of them as sisters.

Now Paul tackles the important subject of caring for widows. The church has always been interested in the care of widows, because God cares for those who have no one to help them, such as widows and orphans. Widows were to be honored by the church, and this means the church was to offer them practical support, making sure their basic needs were met, for food and shelter; comforting them with companionship. The financial needs of widows were not to be distributed without some wise discernment. If a widow had children and grandchildren, then the family was expected to meet the needs of their elderly widow. The church was not to be burdened unnecessarily with the care of those, who should be cared for by their own families. The bible here tells us that if someone refuses to look after their own family members they are worse than an unbeliever, and have denied the faith. One of the basic principles of family is that we must care for one another. Even unbelievers know and practice this. Unfortunately in our money hungry world it is not uncommon to find children who have neglected the needs of their parents. To behave this way is a great shame, and should never be the case for Christians. Even if a widow did not have family to look after her, that did not obligate the church to care for her. She had to meet several other criteria to qualify for the church's support. She had to be at least 60 years of age, be known for good works, have raised children, lodged strangers, washed the saints feet, relieved the afflicted, and been diligent in doing good. This speaks of an excellent Christian character as seen in her caring for the needs of others. When someone has behaved so generously towards others for many years, then it is only proper and appropriate for the church to ensure she is well looked after in her senior years, after her husband is gone. Young widows were encouraged to marry, have children, and manage their house. Younger widows could easily become gossips, going from house to house and meddling in other people's business. This is a strong passage in support of marriage for Christians. The only good reason for a Christian to decide to remain single is to more effectively serve the Lord. Christians should not give an opportunity for Satan to use a poor testimony to bring a word of reproach against the church. Our conduct and personal choices will either give glory to God, or be used by the devil to bring shame on the Christian community. We need to be wise about our life choices, especially about marriage.

Elders are to be honored by the church. This applies not simply to all older men, but specifically to those who are the spiritual leaders of the church, who teach the bible to the congregation. Those elders who lead well by setting a good example for all the believers, are to be given a double honor, and especially those elders that labor in the word and doctrine. Some elders will prove to be more advanced in their teaching ministry to the church, and these should be helped by the church. Honor for these men who teach the word, means to show some financial support to them, according to their needs. Some elders will have secular employment, and be able to look after their own needs and their families, but some elders, due to their sacrifices to serve the church, will be in need, and so the church should sense their obligation to help them in their labors. This is why Paul quoted scriptures about not muzzling the ox as he treads out the grain, and the laborer is worthy of his wages. These two references from scripture teach us that God gives the right to those who labor for God to receive financial help from the church. It is the church's responsibility to help their elders as needed. However elders are instructed in 1 Peter not to do their work with the motivation of getting money. An elder is to be respected by the church, and therefore we are not to receive any accusation against an elder, unless it is from at least two or three witnesses. The devil would love to destroy the testimony of elders, and destroy churches, and thus Christians need to guard the reputation of these men of God, so that false accusations are not used by Satan. If an elder is sinning, then Timothy was called upon to rebuke him publicly, so that others would fear. Timothy must be willing to take this stand against sin, and to make sure he judges without partiality. It is very easy to allow men to drag us into their sins, but the man of God must be determined not to play favorites, and make righteous judgments with each case he encounters. Paul gives some practical advice to Timothy to use some wine for his frequent stomach illness. Please notice that he tells him to use just a little wine, and medicinally, so this is not a sanction for Christians to abuse the liberty of drinking alcohol. Timothy is warned about men whose sins were

obvious, in contrast to men who serve God as demonstrated by their good works. This tells us the importance of examining a mans conduct, as well as his words, to make a proper judgment. Look at what a man consistently does, and you will learn what kind of man he is. What kind of person are you? Are you a sinner? If you can admit that you have sinned, then have you trusted in Jesus to take away your judgment? Why not trust in Jesus today?

"but if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before god." 1Timothy 5:4

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we learned about caring for widows, and honoring elders who serve in the church. The church has a financial obligation to assist those in need, and those who teach the word faithfully. But not everyone qualifies for a free handout from the church. Someone might ask the question, "Should elders receive a salary from the church?"

The instructions that Paul provided to Timothy for the Ephesian church, are recorded as scripture, and thus applicable to all Christians. Paul tells Timothy that elders who rule well, and teach the bible faithfully are to be given double honor. Some might think this honor has to do with showing due respect to these men, but clearly the context would teach us that this honor is more then just showing these men respect. It speaks of a workman being worthy of his wages. Does this then mean that elders should be paid wages for their service in the church? One could certainly argue this very point from this passage, but we need to be very cautious about how we understand the text here, and the implications of offering salaries for spiritual labors. It is an instruction to the church to show double honor to some men who were serving well. This means that some men might receive more then other men based on the quality of their work. The church would need to use good judgment to examine the work of these men, and determine what would be suitable to share with them. We read in 1Peter 5 an exhortation to elders not to do their work with a desire for money. This shows us that elders may have been given some support from the church, otherwise, why would Peter have to warn them about having motives to serve the church for money? While elders are not to seek financial rewards for their service to Christ, the church should be aware of elders work, and also their practical needs. Today's study in 1Tim 5 discusses honoring elders, spending much time speaking about the churches obligation to honor widows who were widows indeed. Clearly this was an act of Christian charity to share with the widows. The reason for this is because her husband, and any other means of support were gone. If she had family to look after her then the church need not be burdened to give her support. Now if we use these same biblical principles to discern the manner in which elders were to be supported, we would be safe to conclude that the church should offer help to those elders who actually had a need for financial help. An elder may be engaged in some secular occupation, and be doing well financially, and therefore the church might judge that he does not need assistance. Perhaps the elder could be more effective if he gave up his secular trade to give himself more fully to the study and teaching of God's word. In this case the church would consider his personal sacrifices, and try to offer some support to him. The danger is to offer a paid position to elders. As soon as the work of an elder becomes a salaried position, then men will want to seek the office for the sake of gaining money, and we know that is wrong. Also the church might find this an easy solution to getting their spiritual work taken care of, and so they are glad to pay someone to do it. However this is not God's pattern shown to us in the scriptures. The care of elders, is similar to the care of widows, a sharing according to the particular needs of the individual, which can be done effectively through gifts, as the church has resources to do so. The trouble with offering a salary to elders is that most of the church offerings would be designated to pay their salary, leaving little room to support widows or others in need. We should value the teaching of God's word, but follow the New Testament pattern of having several capable men in the assembly who are able to teach the word. By paying one man to do all the teaching, others are pushed aside, and the church suffers from only hearing the preaching of one man. When a man gets a salary from the church, he will also have to be careful in his preaching not to offend the church members, lest they fire him. It becomes a job for hire, and not a calling of God. If men are employed by men, then they can be fired by men, rather then answering the call of God. An elder, or anyone serving the Lord should trust in the Lord for their support. The church may offer this support by way of regular gifts, without any set salary. This leaves both the church and the elder with freedom. If the church cannot continue to share gifts, or does not wish to continue sponsoring the worker, they can simply withdraw their support, without offense, for there was no obligation or contract. The worker also is free to move and teach as the Lord directs him, for he does not look to men, nor trust in them for his support. It seems that the church has gone far away from the biblical pattern. The church today suffers from being a business that hires men to preach for them. There are assemblies that do not hire a man to preach, or serve as their pastor. Instead they have elders, whom they encourage and support as they are enabled and prompted to by God. This seems much closer to God's intention as we read here in Timothy and other places in the New Testament. I leave it with you to consider, and follow what you believe the correct biblical pattern is.

"be shepherds of god's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers— not because you must, but because you are willing, as god wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve." 1Pet 5:2

LESSON 196
Godliness with Contentment
1TIMOTHY 6

In our last lesson we heard instructions for the church about how to care for widows, and honor elders. Today we will finish our studies in 1Timothy, where Paul gives some further instructions to Timothy about how servants should treat their masters, and a warning to avoid proud contentious men. He will also give us some important instructions about how to handle money, learning that godliness with contentment is greater riches than all the money in the world.

Paul instructs Timothy about the proper attitude of Christian servants towards their masters. Becoming a believer, does not nullify our station in life. Unfortunately at that 1Timothy was written slavery was very much part of the Roman empire. A slave who became a follower of Jesus, still needed to honor his master, so that God's name and his word would not be blasphemed. The Christian master was also expected to treat his slaves kindly. If the slave was a Christian he was to remember his relationship as a brother in Christ. Master's should be willing to serve the slave, since they were both members of the body of Christ and beloved. This was the teaching Timothy had to uphold. If anyone would teach contrary to this, and not consent to the teachings of Christ, and godliness, then he was to be considered proud, ignorant, and contentious. These kind of men brought envy, quarrelling, reviling and suspicions. They were men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth. These kind of men believe that godliness is a way to make money. Timothy was told to avoid them. This revelation about the use of religion for making money, is something we should consider due to all the money-hungry pastors we see today. Why is it that so many church leaders are begging their congregations to constantly sow a seed, contribute to the harvest, make an investment into eternity, or the bank of heaven. They will use all kinds of biblical words to convince people to give, and keep on giving. Meanwhile, they themselves are living rich lives by those donations given to the church. Have you ever wondered where all this money goes to? Does it help feed the poor, or pay medical expenses for the sick? Are they supporting widows and orphans? Or is the money being used to be make a monster church building, or pay the Pastor's salary? Is the work of God paying men to preach, or building huge church buildings? Or is the work of God caring for the needy, and ministering to the sick and helpless?

Paul now addresses the subject of money, for seek after money and make it their trust. He says that godliness with contentment is great gain. The best riches we could have are a relationship to God through Jesus Christ, and walking in daily fellowship with God. This brings peace to our hearts, and supplies our every need. But many will not find these riches because they are too busy searching for the riches of this world. We are reminded that all that we could gain in this world is futile, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything from this world. If we have food and clothing we are to be content. I wonder how many of us could admit that with the provision of food and clothing we would be content? We know that the human heart is covetous, and we always desire more. This sinful lust for more shows that we neither love nor appreciate what God has given to us. There are many dangers for the rich, because they fall into temptations and snares. Foolish and harmful lusts drown men in destruction and perdition. Notice that what man wants most of all, wealth, is that very thing that God says will destroy us. We learn that the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Some will run after money, and run away from the Lord because of greed, and pierce themselves through with many sorrows. Money is not the answer to our problems, and it can take us far from God, bringing much sorrow. Many of you will not like hearing this, and will reject this teaching. What I am saying is not an opinion, it is the word of God, so we do ourselves no favors by ignoring what God is trying to say to us. Money is to be our servant, and we are not be it's slave.

Timothy was to flee away from the lust for money, and pursue a life of righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience and gentleness. Here are the things which God values, and God fearing people can acquire these virtues, even if they are the poorest of the poor. Timothy is called to fight a good fight, for the Christian life is not only an uphill battle against the lust of the world riches, but also many enemies seek to destroy the Christian. We are to lay hold on eternal life, which means to run after all that God wants to give to his children, living the fullest Christian life possible. God did not save us so that we would have no impact on the world, living for selfish desires. Timothy had a good testimony as a believer and servant of Christ, and Paul wants to see Timothy make the very most of his Christian life and service. He urges him passionately in the sight of God, the giver of all life, and before Christ Jesus who made a good confession before the governor Pilate. We all must make our confession and present some testimony to the world declaring who we are and what we believe. Timothy was to keep the commandment to live a godly testimony without spot and blameless until the coming of Christ. Paul now speaks of the coming king and his glory, calling him the only blessed Potentate, king of kings, lord of Lords, who alone has immortality, and dwells in unapproachable light. No man has, or can see Him. To Him, Paul says, belong honor and everlasting power.

He closes the letter by reminding Timothy to instruct the rich not to be proud, or trust in uncertain riches. The rich are to be ready and willing to share their riches, so that they store up a good foundation for the time to come, laying hold on eternal life. The Christian life is about sacrificing for others, and storing up treasures in heaven. Where are your treasures, in heaven or in this world? Be sure you are making the right investment that will last beyond the grave. The first step to that investment is to turn to Jesus in faith, and ask Him to forgive your sins and give you eternal life. Why not make today the day you find the contentment that comes through faith in Jesus Christ.

"for the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." 1Timothy 5:4

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we learned about godliness with contentment and that running after money leads us towards destruction, and not the happiness that we think. Someone might ask the question, "Is money evil?"

From the comments made in today's lesson from 1Timothy 6 we might make the conclusion that money is an evil thing, for those who seek after it fall into many snares and sorrows. We heard how men will drown themselves in destruction and perdition due to the love of money. We must be careful to understand what is meant here by Paul. He is not saying that money itself is bad, but rather the love of money is evil. We know that money can captivate our hearts, and we learn depend and rely upon money. As we get more money, then we can buy more things for ourselves, and it tends to make us desire even more money. In fact if you watch some rich people, you will see that they are never content. They continually run after more and more. Sometimes rich people are so concerned with losing money, paranoid that someone will come and steal from them. They have built up this false security around money. They have reached a certain status, and think they can't live without all their comforts and luxuries. The love of money can become an addiction, like a sickness for some people. Now most of us have not gone that far in our love of money, but we all certainly believe we do not have enough of it, and would like to have more. Our hearts lack contentment, because we have not found contentment in Christ. This is the great evil of loving money. It is not money itself, it is that which weans our hearts desires away from Christ, and places our trust in something, or someone else rather than in God, who gives us all things to enjoy. It is ironic that the God, who supplies us with everything, is the very one we forget while pursuing those things which God has given to us. God does not want us to get consumed with money and things, but to trust in Him. He knows our needs, and is able to supply all that we need. We need to learn to be content with less, and patient when the money we have seems too small. Perhaps God allows us to have small money, so that we can trust Him more.

By this I do not mean to say that Christians should not work, or seek to support themselves and their families. The bible teaches us the value of work, and that a workman is worthy of his wages. The main concern here is not money itself, but our attitude towards money. Does having more money fill your eyes with lustful ideas. You see someone drive by in a big expensive car, wearing the best clothing, and say in your heart that is what I need, and what I will work for. This attitude is what is evil, for it suggests that what God has supplied to us is not enough, and that His love for us is not adequate. Some Christians have money, not because they have sought after it with an evil heart, but because it came to them through hard work, or perhaps through an inheritance. These are blessings, and the Christian who understands this will be pleased to use what he has for God's glory, and the furtherance of His kingdom. I have met poor Christians who are very greedy for money, and also rich believers who give generously to the work of Christ. It is not how much money we own that is the problem, but why we want money, and what we use money for. Paul told Timothy to speak to rich Christians and instruct them to share liberally, since they have plenty of resources to share with others. True Christians understand that all of Their money is provided by God, should be used for God's purposes, and not for selfish reasons. The bible does not commend poverty as a more desirable state, as though it is good to be poor. Neither does it say that being rich is evil, or a person who has money must be a bad Christian. How Christians handle money says a great deal about our faith and maturity in Christ. As a person grows in Christ, they will become increasingly aware that all they have belongs to the Lord. They will be glad to share their wealth for the benefit of others, and in particular for the Lord's work.

God expects us to be good stewards of what he entrusts to us. We should not waste money needlessly, or make bad investments. Another biblical principle is avoiding debt. Sometimes it is very difficult to avoid going into debt, but we would be wise to keep out of debt as much as possible. Some people go into debt, not because they have to, but because they cannot wait for God's timing and provision. They presume upon God to supply them, and pay their debts. We do not know what a day may bring forth, and if we lose our health or source of income, then we cannot honor our debts, and will bring shame to our Christian testimony. Some Christians will try to share some small from their wealth, but always fearful of giving too much, lest they leave themselves short of funds. However the point of Christian sharing, is to make a sacrifice, which means it will cost something. It is when we give sacrificially that we are best reflecting the sacrificial love of our Lord Jesus. Money is not evil, but can certainly be used for evil purposes, and has the effect of corrupting the heart. Very few people have the spiritual depth to handle riches in a godly way. Those who have learned how to share liberally, are those whom God will be pleased to increase in wealth, knowing that they will not use it selfishly, but for the benefit of others, and the glory of God.

"he who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much." Luke 16:10

LESSONS IN 2TIMOTHY



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“AND THAT FROM CHILDHOOD YOU HAVE KNOWN THE HOLY SCRIPTURES, WHICH ARE ABLE TO MAKE YOU WISE FOR SALVATION THROUGH FAITH WHICH IS IN CHRIST JESUS..”

2TIMOTHY 3:15

LESSON 197
Sharing in Suffering
2TIMOTHY 1

In our last lesson we concluded a study of 1Timothy, and thought about the dangers of seeking after riches. Today we begin a new study in the book of 2Timothy where we shall see Paul's final charge to his young companion, and fellow soldier for Christ. This letter is very personal, calling Timothy to be faithful to his ministry in view of a coming apostasy. He calls on Timothy to teach the word accurately, and preach whether convenient or not.

The first chapter of 2Timothy shows us the love and appreciation Paul had for Timothy's past heritage, tenderness of heart, and calling to ministry. He begins his letter with the typical address of a New Testament letter, highlighting the authority of Paul's commission as an apostle of Jesus Christ. It was not just his own decision to serve the Lord, but it was the will of God, according to the promise of life in Christ. It was this message of salvation and eternal life that he was to carry into the world. The letter is addressed to Timothy, whom Paul calls his beloved son, wishing God's grace, mercy and peace for Him. We find the blessing is both from God the Father, and Christ Jesus our Lord, which is another of the many confirmations of the deity of Jesus Christ.

Paul was thankful to God that he served God with a pure conscience, as his forefathers had. He remembered Timothy constantly in his prayers, hoping to see him, and was mindful of Timothy's tears, and sincere faith. We are not sure of the cause for Timothy's tears, but it does reveal the gentle nature of this beloved co-worker of Paul. Paul mentions that Timothy's faith was something he had seen and learned from both his mother and grandmother. These two women must have had a great impact on Timothy early years. Timothy's mother was Jewish, but his father was Greek. This may have created some conflict in the home, but we know that Timothy followed in his mother's footsteps and turned to the Lord in faith. We will learn in chapter 3 how Timothy had known the scriptures from his childhood, and how that prepared him to be used by the Lord as a Christian missionary. Christian mothers have contributed a great deal to the work of God, by loving their children, and nurturing them on the word of God.

Once again Paul tells Timothy to stir up his gift. He mentioned in his first letter, not to neglect his gift, but this time he wants him to stir it up. This means to fan into flame, as we might do with a fire that has grown dim. Spiritual gifts are given to each Christian, and are to be used for the building up of the church, and the glory of God. They are not to be put on display to feed our pride. We should all try to learn what our spiritual gift is, and then take time to stir it up by using it more and more in some aspect of Christian service. The more we use the gift, the more it will grow and become useful to the body of Christ. Timothy need not be shy or timid to use his gift, for God had given the gift to be used in the power of the Holy Spirit, and through love and a sound mind.

Paul tells Timothy not to be ashamed of the Lord's testimony, or Paul in prison, as though suffering were an embarrassment to their cause. Suffering was the very means that God's blessing and salvation would come and spread to the world. Thus Timothy should be willing to also share in these sufferings for the sake of the gospel. They were called by God according to his purposes, and not because of their personal accomplishments. This calling was by grace, and was prepared by God before time began. The gospel had now been revealed through the appearing of Jesus Christ, who brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. It is like when the lights go off in our room, and we can't see. We bring a light near, and everything becomes clear. That is what Jesus has done by the gospel for us. He has shone a light on the truth of God's salvation available to all people, so that eternal life can now be seen clearly, and gladly received by those who are willing to respond to God's call. Paul says that his calling also involved being a preacher, apostle and teacher of the gentiles. His mission was particularly aimed at the nations, and not to his own countrymen, the Jews. In his work as a missionary, Paul had to suffer many things, but this did not make him ashamed, since he knew the one he believed in, and he was fully convinced that God was able to keep what he had committed to him until that day. By this, Paul likely meant the keeping of his soul, until he arrived safely in heaven, although it may have some reference to his work as a missionary also.

Timothy is once again reminded by Paul to hold onto sound doctrine. He was to do this by his faith and love for Christ, and which came from Christ. Timothy was to keep the gospel and sound doctrine through the Holy Spirit. In other words Timothy needed to allow the Holy Spirit to guide and sustain him in teaching the truth, avoiding the potential dangers of imposing his own ideas into Christian teaching. All of Paul's Christian friends in Asia were turning away from the truth, and no longer had fellowship with Paul. He mentions Phygellus and Hermogenes in particular. This must have been very disheartening to Paul, but the Lord encouraged him through a brother called Onesiphorus. Paul desires the Lord's mercy to his household, because he came to Rome looking for Paul in prison, and was not ashamed of him, even though a prisoner. Paul says that he often refreshed him. What a wonderful testimony this man had, and what a great ministry to help this dear suffering missionary. Perhaps he brought him water, food, or reading and writing materials. Whatever he did we cannot be exactly sure, but we know that Paul really appreciated his attitude and kindly service, for it refreshed him at a time when he needed it most. It seems clear as we read these words that Paul, like the Lord Jesus, was a man who enjoyed a season of popularity, but near the end of his life many turned their backs on Paul and forsook him. He was likely misunderstood by others, and perhaps even fellow Christians could not understand why Paul always seemed to be in trouble with the authorities. Perhaps they thought he was a trouble maker. They may have wanted to live in quietness, and not associate with Paul, since that could put

them in a dangerous position. Living for Christ, as Paul did, meant the loss of friends, comforts, and being misunderstood. At least he had young Timothy, who like a son served with him, sharing his heart and mission. It would be great if we were like Timothy, seeking to encourage a missionary. We all need examples like Paul, and Paul's need Timothy's to encourage them in their battles for the Lord.

"who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began." 2Timothy 1:9

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we introduced the letter of 2nd Timothy, which was Paul's final New Testament letter. He wrote to encourage Timothy to be faithful in teaching the word. In the first chapter he speaks of their calling in Christ by God's grace, which would include suffering for the gospel. Someone might ask the question, "How can I stir up God's gift in me?"

In today's lesson we heard Paul speak to Timothy about his spiritual gift, calling on Timothy to stir it up. We explained that to stir up means to fan into flame, such as we might do to a fire that is growing small and losing heat. A fire needs to be maintained with fuel and oxygen to keep burning. Often we see ladies fanning their coal pot to keep the coals burning, and the food cooking. You must not only fan the flame, you have to add some more coals to replenish the supply of fuel for the fire. This illustrates for us some things we must do to keep our spiritual gift active and effective. We need to add fuel, by feeding our hearts on the instructions of God's word. As we fill up on God's word we will have the spiritual resources that enable our gift to be used most effectively. It does not really matter which spiritual gift it is, we all need that constant source of spiritual fuel to ignite our hearts for God, motivating us to serve in the church. Just as a fire needs more oxygen, and is fanned, so the Christian needs some place of ministry when the activity of the Holy Spirit can operate. It is not going to help me to sit in my room on Sunday morning, while the Christians meet. I need to gather with the church in order for the Holy Spirit to use my gift in some ministry for others. Once we discover our gift, we need to exercise it in some ministry. The church might not have a particular ministry that suits your gift, but that does not mean you are excused from being active in Christian service. Perhaps God gave you that gift, so that you would start a ministry in which that gift can effectively operate. Let's take for example the gift of mercy. If there does not appear to be any active ministry in the church which could utilize this important spiritual gift, then you could begin a ministry of visitation at the hospital. As you visit the hospital, and find patients suffering from various illnesses, you could come along side and offer prayers and encouragement through God's word. As you develop this ministry you can invite other believers to join you, and train them to do this also. By this means not only is your gift given a sphere in which to operate, but the church sees an important part of the body of Christ operating in mercy, and they are instructed to follow this good example. All gifts need a sphere of ministry in which to operate, so you can ask yourself the question, "what is my ministry in the church?" If you have no ministry, then your gift certainly cannot be active. The first thing to do, is to seek some way to serve in the church. When looking for an opportunity to serve try to think of doing something that is best suited to your particular spiritual gifting. If you are not sure what your gift is, then don't be too concerned, for it is while you serve, that your gift will become evident, or perhaps others will have the spiritual discernment to recognize it for you. Spiritual gifts can operate within a variety of ministries, and so any service for the Lord will be an effective way to stir up your gift. Ideally our gift and our ministry will line up very neatly, and will become effective in building the body of Christ. If a bible teacher is given a ministry in teaching, he has the ideal place for which his gift can be stirred up and used. However if someone with the gift of exhortation is asked to work in an evangelistic outreach, he need not be discouraged or think his gift will not be of much use. Exhortation will be used by the Holy Spirit in the work of evangelism, when calling on sinners to repent and believe the gospel. Therefore ministries do not always have to match perfectly to the spiritual gift. The most important thing to remember, is to be active for the Lord. The Lord cannot help you to find your gift and build it up, if you are not willing to pitch in and help in the spiritual labors of the church. Of course one of the great setbacks we have in today's church is the fact that we rely too heavily on one man to do our spiritual labors. He teaches, preaches, evangelizes, visits the sick, counsels, disciples, and shares with the needy. We call him the pastor of the church, and do a great disservice to our Lord by following such an unbalance, and unscriptural pattern for the New Testament church. Every Christian should be active and serving in ministry. We should endeavor to get involved in some ministry in the church in one way or another, even when others don't seem to be doing so, or no one is encouraging it. We must do so because it is God's plan for all Christians to serve and use their gift for the edification of the church. So stir up your gift by working for the Lord. You can ask your spiritual leaders about opportunities to serve in the church, but do not be surprised if they cannot, or are not willing to offer you ministry opportunities. Often churches are not well prepared for such a request. There are churches that endeavor to serve the Lord in many ways, and offer many opportunities to minister. If your church does not have opportunities, I would suggest that you make those opportunities for yourself.

"As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." 1Pet 4:10

LESSON 198
Approved unto God
2TIMOTHY 2

In our last lesson we heard Paul encouraging Timothy to be faithful to his calling, and be willing to suffer for the sake of the gospel. Today in chapter 2 Paul will further encourage Timothy to be a good soldier, to teach others, being a diligent and accurate student of the bible so that others would recognize that he was approved unto God.

Paul calls on Timothy to be strong in the grace of Christ Jesus. By this he probably means to live in the enjoyment of God's grace as a means of motivating him to endure through hardships. He also wants Timothy to teach other men, so that they will also teach others. We see the cycle of Christian teaching is to continue and be passed on from generation to generation through men training other Christian men. Paul taught Timothy, and Timothy was to teach others, so that they could also teach others and so on until our present day. Timothy needed to endure hardships as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. Soldiers are not concerned with the affairs of life, they just carry out their duties to their leaders. This same principle is to be followed by Christian servants. Their task is of such great and eternal value, that nothing should be allowed to interfere with their work. An athlete who wants to get his prize or crown, must compete according to the rules, and a farmer who works hard will be the first to enjoy the crops when they are ready. Christian service then has some comparisons to the occupations of a soldier, athlete, and farmer. Each must be dedicated to his purpose, avoid distraction, and work hard to achieve the desired goal. Paul wanted Timothy to understand these things, and says that he should take time to consider carefully his teachings.

Paul reminds Timothy that Jesus was from the seed of David and raised from the dead, and therefore Paul had been called to suffer. Some thought Paul was an evil doer, and was imprisoned for the gospel's sake. However, he says, the word of God is not bound. God's word cannot be stopped or contained. It will go forth and accomplish all that God intends it to do. This is a great comfort to believers especially when they meet opposition or persecution. We know that no matter what men might do to us, they can not hurt or hinder the effect of God's word. It was for this reason that Paul was willing to endure suffering, so that those who were elect may obtain salvation through Christ Jesus. The elect are those who receive Jesus as their Savior, and are thus given all that God has for children, with eternal glory.

Paul delivers another one of his faithful sayings: *'If we be dead with Him, we shall also live with Him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him: If we deny Him, he also will deny us: If we believe not, yet He remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself.* To be dead with Him, is to forsake all other pursuits in life and set Christ as the supreme object and goal of our lives. All Christians will make it into the glory, but those who were willing to suffer with Christ will be given unique places of authority with Christ to reign. Timothy had to take all these teachings from Paul and faithfully present them to the church in Ephesus for their instruction. He was also to warn men not to strive over words which did not profit anyone, but only did harm to the hearers. Timothy must be a diligent student of God's word, so that he can accurately divide things that needed to be clearly explained. This would demonstrate to everyone that he was approved unto God as His servant. There was plenty of babblings going on in the church which were idle and profane. These kinds of babblings unfortunately were only going to increase with more ungodliness, and become like a spreading cancer through the church. He mentions two men, Hymenaeus and Philetus who were responsible for this kind of harmful babbling. They were trying to teach that the resurrection had already happened, and by this they had overthrown the faith of some. While the Devil is always busy trying to destroy the faith of believers, God's foundation will stand, with this seal, "the Lord knows who are His". We are not able to correctly judge whether a person's faith is genuine, because faith is only visible by the works it produces, and these can easily be misread for different reasons. God can see our hearts and knows our motives, and the genuineness of our faith. Paul says that all Christians were to depart from iniquity. In other words do not let these evil babblers lead you astray into their apostasy. Rather they should cleanse themselves of any association with evil men and evil doctrine. This will make them a vessel of honor that the Lord can use. Some houses have nice expensive dishes, and also some old cheap dishes. The good dishes are used for special occasions with those we want to honor, but the cheap dishes will not be used for noble purposes. The Christian who can keep himself pure from evil influences will be like a vessel of honor well suited for the Lord to use. Therefore Paul encouraged Timothy to flee from youthful lusts, and pursue righteousness, love and peace, joining all those who call on the Lord from a clean heart. This meant that Timothy was to avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, because they only cause divisions. It takes great self control to see an argument and restrain ourselves from wanting to be part of that argument, to show we know better. Much of this type of arguing is simply due to pride in men's hearts. Godly believers will seek peace and not conflict.

The servant of the Lord is required to be a man of peace, who does not quarrel with others, but is gentle to all, able to teach and patient. This humble disposition of character will enable him to offer correction to those who are quarreling. The correction might be used by God to lead them to repentance, so that they know and follow the truth. When they come to their senses they can escape the snare of the Devil, who has been taking them captive to do his will. It is much better to love others, and lead them to Christ for salvation, then to try an argue and prove a point. We might win the argument and lose the soul. Let me ask you if you have turned your life over to Jesus in faith? Have you asked him to be your Lord and Savior? Why not make today the day when you receive the free gift of eternal life. The Devil will try to convince you that you are okay, and that you are not worse than others, and therefore going to make it to heaven. This lie of the Devil is a snare that many souls have been caught in. But believe what the bible

teaches, and receive Jesus by faith today. Do not be deceived, the only way to reach heaven is through placing your faith in Jesus alone for salvation, and not trusting in any religion or efforts on your part.

"be diligent to present yourself approved to god, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." 2Timothy 2:15

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson Paul gives instructions to Timothy on how to be a good soldier for Jesus Christ, and the importance of avoiding arguments with men who only cause trouble to the church. He was also told to show himself approved unto God through his diligent study of God's word. Someone might ask the question, "What does it mean to *rightly divide the word of truth?*".

While Paul was instructing Timothy about his service for Christ, he tells him to be sure to diligently study the bible, so that all will recognize he was approved unto God, a workman that does not need to be ashamed. He adds that this involves rightly dividing the word of truth. The word of truth refers to the bible. For Timothy this would include all the old testament scriptures, and as many NT letters and gospels that were available to him. Since this was Paul's last letter, written in the late 60's, it is likely that much of the New Testament had already been written, with the exception of John's Epistle's, gospel and the book of Revelation. These were written much later around 90AD. But Timothy would have had most if not all of Paul's letters, perhaps the book of Acts, by Luke, and perhaps three gospels from which he could study. We are fortunate today to have the complete compiled 27 books of the New Testament. With the resources available to Timothy he was to study and make correct divisions in the word. Rightly dividing has the idea of cutting a straight line. This metaphor has to do with the accuracy of interpretation, and understanding things that differ in scripture. The first and most obvious division in the bible is between the Old Testament and the New Testament. It is important to understand that the bible has these two major covenants and the differences between them. The Old Testament was a covenant made with the nation of Israel. Promises made to Abraham and his descendants concerning the promised land are not for the church. However the New Testament is written for the church, founded by Jesus Christ and the apostles, and for their spiritual encouragement and instruction. The work of the Holy Spirit is different between the Old and New Covenants. Today in the church the Spirit lives inside believers, which never happened to Old Testament believers. In the Old covenant offerings were made on an alter in the temple in Jerusalem, but in the New Testament we accept the once for all time sacrifice of Jesus on the cross as our propitiation for sins. To fail to see the difference between the Old covenant and the New Covenant will cause Christians to become confused and practice things that God never intended. This is what happens in some denominations and cults, who mix Christian teaching with the teachings of the Law. The New Testament is quite clear that Christ has superseded the Law, and made the Law void, through his cross. This does not mean the Law did not serve a purpose. The Law taught about God's holiness, man's sinfulness, and the need for sacrifice to find peace and acceptance with God. However the Old Testament could never provide an adequate payment for man's sin, and thus God sent us Jesus Christ to pay for our sins, establishing an entirely new covenant. There are a host of things in the bible that need to be correctly divided in order to make proper sense of the bible, and practice it. Here are just a few things that need to be correctly divided for good biblical understanding.

1. Position verses Practice: The bible teaches us our position in Christ is perfect righteousness in the sight of God, however in practice we often fall short of acting righteous. A careful understanding of this difference will spare us from thinking we are sinless and perfect, or that we are not really saved if we happen to sin.

2. There are distinctions that need to be made in the New testament between the various works of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer, including the indwelling, baptism, and filling. To confuse these will cause believers to seek after more of the Spirit, which they already have and simply need to acknowledge and cooperate with.

3. There is also a need to understand the difference between the church, Israel and the Kingdom of God. Each are specific people and periods in which God will uniquely work. These could be overlapped or misapplied, so that Christians take promises made to Israel for themselves, or confuse the kingdom of God with the church.

There are many other distinctions that need to be carefully understood when reading our bibles, and hopefully those who teach you the bible have studied carefully, and are able to rightly divide the word. There is an excellent book, written by William MacDonald called, "Here's the Difference" which helps to show these various distinctions in scripture, and I would highly recommend getting this book and reading it. This will help any bible student to see these various distinctions and save them from running into all kinds of biblical errors, and understanding the differences that God intends us to understand. We all know that an egg and chicken are different, and yet we know the one produces the other. The bible is similar in that various parts may relate to each other in important ways, but they are not the same, and need to be understood in their historical context, and applied properly by Christians living in this New Testament church age.

"Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. but after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor." Gal 3:24-25

LESSON 199
Inspiration of Scripture
2TIMOTHY 3

In our last lesson we heard Paul exhorting Timothy to be a good soldier for Jesus Christ, and avoid contentious babblers, giving his time to studying the word of God and rightly dividing it. Today we shall learn about a coming apostasy and the inspiration of the scriptures.

This is Paul's final letter, and he was already experiencing an apostasy to some degree, for he speaks of many who had abandoned fellowship with Him. These may have been believers who feared for their own lives, and wanted to distance themselves from Paul. Paul was facing possible execution because he was perceived as a trouble maker. There were also those who opposed Paul, and had turned away from faith in Jesus Christ. Paul speaks of the last days before Christ returns for His church, as being a perilous time of apostasy. The character of the age he describes can be applied to our present age. This might indicate we are living in the last days, and the Lord will be coming very soon. He says men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters and proud. This certainly sounds like our present time, especially in richer cultures where money and self are worshipped. He says that people will be blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers. There is a great sickness in the soul of man when he cannot be thankful, humble, obedient, forgiving, and kind. This speaks of man's condition without Christ, but Paul is describing the conditions in the church of the last days. This means the church will be governed and filled up with people who are not saved, people who do not know God, even though they profess to know him. These have a form of godliness but deny its power. If Timothy meets these in the church he should turn away from such people. Today we see many using the Christian religion to make money. They look like godly people, but their love is for money and self, and not God. We need to be so careful and discerning that we do not support such false prophets, hypocrites and apostates. They learn, but never come to a knowledge of the truth. Their pride and greed keeps the word sealed, and they cannot see the simple plan of God's salvation. They may even speak of Christ as Savior, but they know nothing of the experience of being saved from sin themselves, for they go on practicing their sin. Paul refers to the magicians that had tried to oppose Moses in the presence of Pharaoh with their sorcery. They were just like these modern apostates that resisted God's truth, not saved, and having corrupt minds. They will not progress, and their foolish ways will be exposed for all to see, just as those who opposed Moses. People can play religious games, corrupting God's people for a time, but eventually God will hold them to account, and all will see their evil and false ways.

In view of corruptions in the church, and a future apostasy, Paul warn Timothy to be careful to follow the doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, patience, love and endurance he had seen in Paul's life. Paul was not a teacher in word only, but a living example of what it means to be a follower of Christ. He wanted Timothy to learn more than just his words, watching his actions, learning to emulate his faith and life. Paul reminds Timothy of the many persecutions he had to face, particularly in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra. The Lord had delivered him out of every persecution. He tells Timothy that everyone who wants to live godly in Christ will suffer persecution. This is a promise. If we are not suffering for our Lord, it means that we are not living godly as we are supposed to. The Christian life was not intended to be soft and easy, as you might conclude from some of the beautiful church buildings, and soft pews we find in many places. We have made church meetings a place of gathering to hear a nice sermon, after which we go home and eat a nice meal and take our rest on Sunday afternoon. This is not the Christianity envisioned by Paul here, either for himself, Timothy or any that wish to please the Lord. If you want to live the Christian life which God intends then you must be willing to confront sin and sinners with the gospel, and passionately confront your community and culture with the Lordship of Christ. This will be rejected by many, and will result in you being persecuted. Paul concludes this thought by saying that evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. This reminds us of our modern televangelists, who gather thousands to their healing rallies, and pretend as though God's power is working through them. They pose as God's anointed servant, and people flock to them for healing and miracles. Not only do they deceive their audiences, but they themselves are deceived into thinking that they are God's servants, but they are just puppets in the hand of the devil, ministering their corruption to the masses.

Timothy had learned much doctrine through Paul, and not just the word, he also learned through his example. Timothy also had an excellent heritage for he had known the scriptures from his childhood, which Paul says can make one wise unto salvation. The great object of scripture is to point us to salvation, and therefore points us to Jesus in whom we can find that salvation. Paul explains not only the power of the scriptures to make people wise to God's salvation, but also the source and value of God's word. When he says that all scripture is given by the inspiration of God, he means that God breathed these words, and they are from God himself, and need to be accepted as having divine authority. He says the scripture is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness. This provides men with everything they need to know God and walk in peace with God. The word is powerful to help and guide our lives if we value it, and make ourselves subject to it. The word will equip the man of God so that he is complete, and fully prepared for every good work. This means the bible is like a toolbox in the hand of the worker. He can take various scriptures, and apply them to the spiritual needs, and build or repair for God. The bible is a profound gift which God has given to us, and we should appreciate that we have such easy and free access to it. We ought to read it daily with a hunger and thirst to know God and obey Him. The greatest message ever told is found in the

bible, and it concerns Jesus who came into this world to die for your sins. Place your trust in Jesus today for the forgiveness of your sins.

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of god, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." 2Timothy 3:16

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson Paul spoke of a coming apostasy in the church, when men would love themselves and money more than God. We also learned that the bible was given to us directly from God, and is profitable to instruct and correct God's people. Someone might ask the question, "Who are the gullible women taken captive?"

Paul mentions these gullible women who fall prey to the false teachers, and are taken captive by them. Gullible means they are easily convinced to believe, having a lack of discernment. The spirit of gullibility is very prevalent in the church today. We see such widespread error, and false teachers everywhere spreading their poisonous doctrine. It staggers the imagination to see people flocking to these churches, and following these false teachers. These men are clever, and know how to impress their gullible audience with their spiritual façade and promises of deliverance or prosperity. It is interesting to notice that most of these churches that make grand promises of personal deliverance and breakthroughs are comprised of women. It is not to say that women are less intelligent than their male counterparts, but we know that women are more easily deceived, because they often want to believe the best, where men do not offer their trust to others so readily. It is also a fact that in many cultures women lack the same education opportunities as men do. This leaves women dependent upon men for teaching them, and leaves them more open to deceivers. A woman, due to her emotional makeup, tends to think with her heart, whereas men tend to think more with the mind. Men are guided by logic, and women by their emotion. This is just God's unique way of distinguishing what it means to be male or female. There are many advantages to God's design, in that a family needs both the gentle compassionate heart of a mother, but also the wisdom and discernment of a father. The two go together and make a beautiful balance. Eve should have consulted with her husband before taking the forbidden fruit, but she acted independent of her husband. The Devil did not pose his temptation to the man, but to the woman, for he knew her weakness in that she was much more susceptible to being deceived.

Cultists, and false teachers, know that if they can convince anyone to follow them and support their ministry, it is normally the women who are so easily convinced, and so they target women. In this passage here in 2Tim 3 we see how these false teachers even crept into their houses, finding them when, and where, they are vulnerable. Today we have some cultists doing the same, going around from house to house, while the men are out working, and seeking to convince the women to follow their religion. This is how some of these religions grow rapidly. It is the same trick that Satan used to cause the fall of man in the garden of Eden. So there is some lessons we can take from this to protect our families and churches from these false teachers. Women should learn to always bring spiritual matters to their husbands, before making any decisions or contributions to a preacher or church ministry. The man is the head of the home, and he supposed to be the spiritual leader. He helps his family to know the truth and follow it. So when a man approaches a women to teach her the word, she should be bold enough to insist that he can only come to teach when her husband is present, so that she can have his approval or consent. Also men must protect their wives from false teachers, by going with their wives to any church or religious meeting. Far too often men allow their women to go to church with the children while they stay at home. This means he is not fulfilling his responsibility as the spiritual head of his family. Another important thing to do, is for the man to teach the word of God in his home to his wife and children. It is the word of God that will provide the wisdom and discernment to recognize false teachers when they come knocking on the door. Men bear the responsibility to teach and protect their families. The leaders of the church should also be men who teach sound doctrine, so that all the people of God will be protected from false teaching.

With so much false doctrine, and so many preachers promoting these false teachings, it is imperative that we all invest our time into studying God's word carefully. Just looking at the character of the false teachers in this passage in 2Tim 3 will give us the discernment to know these false teachers when we see them. They have a form of godliness, meaning they can appear godly, but the real spiritual power is not in them. They might preach a nice sermon about loving God and your neighbor, but you know very well, that they are rich, and doing almost nothing to assist the poor. Perhaps they can preach on holy living, while they themselves are involved in adulterous relationships. The hypocrisy is evident, and so we know they are not God's true servants. They are self-willed, proud men, who love themselves and money more than they love God. They are educated, but do not know or preach the simple plan of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Their ministry is all about them, and you hear very little about Jesus, or Jesus is just a mantra repeated over in prayer to invoke some spiritual power or deliverance. If they knew Him, they would emulate Him with humble hearts. Don't be gullible and fall for these false teachers, but follow Christ and learn of Him in God's word.

"As his divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us by glory and virtue." 2Pet 1:3

LESSON 200
Keeping the Faith
2TIMOTHY 4

In our last lesson we considered Paul's warnings to Timothy about false teachers that will infect the church in the last days. We also learned about the inspiration of scripture, and its sufficiency to equip us for every good work. Today we will listen to Paul's final words delivered to Timothy prior to his execution. He will call Timothy to preach the word, be watchful, and fulfill his ministry. He speaks of his own Christian service, the Lord's faithfulness, and friends who abandoned him.

2Timothy is said to be Paul's final letter, and history reports that Paul was executed by the Romans sometime before AD 70. Paul knew that his time of departure was close at hand, and he says so prophetically to Timothy in this chapter. He may have heard his sentence handed down, and so he knew that unless the Lord intervened he was soon to face his execution. As he considers his final words to share with young Timothy, he has his hope in this promising young preacher and evangelist. He wanted the work of the gospel to continue strongly after his own departure, and feels Timothy is the one who can do the job. So in his final charge to Timothy, in this his final letter, he gives Timothy important instructions on how to be faithful to God, and the gospel of His grace.

Paul charges Timothy before God and Jesus Christ, reminding him that the Lord will soon judge the living and the dead at his appearing, and in his kingdom. This makes Paul's words so much more forceful and urgent. The urgency and importance are directed at the instruction to "Preach the word". This is the great job of the servant of God, and of every elder overseeing a gathering of believers. It is God's word that needs to be communicated effectively to God's children so that they can know the truth, and be transformed by it. Preaching the word also includes sharing the gospel with unbelievers, and so he needed to be ready at all seasons to share the word with whomever he should encounter whether Christians or otherwise. Preaching involves calling on others to respond to God's truth as revealed in scripture. This will involve convincing, rebuking, exhorting with patience, and teaching. Preaching should be aimed at changing people. The unbeliever needs to repent and believe the gospel, and Christians need to overcome sin and follow the path of righteousness. The preacher should understand just how to apply the word of God to the various spiritual needs he will encounter.

Paul says a time will come when men will not endure sound doctrine. When men change the preacher and preaching to suit their own interests, they will gather to hear those preachers who tickle their ears with pleasant sounds. There are no end of preachers who want to scratch the itching ears of the masses, for men love to think they are some great person, and that others need their wisdom. Of course receiving a nice salary also helps to motivate them. Those who make the Christian message popular and comfortable for their own interests are doomed to hearing fables, and being led away from the truth. In view of these dangers, Paul calls Timothy to be watchful. This means not only to be prayerful, but also to be aware of the spiritual dangers facing God's people, so that he can intervene with the word of God, and rescue them from apostasy. He says Timothy should endure afflictions, because the work of God will bring about opposition from many sides, and sometimes discouragement as you witness the sin and unfaithfulness of people. Timothy was also expected to do the work of an evangelist. It appears that most of Timothy's responsibilities were in teaching the word, since Paul frequently calls Timothy to teach and preach to the church. But any servant of Christ must also be willing and available to do the work of evangelism. This keeps the preacher in touch with the spiritual needs of others in the community, but also keeps his heart warm to the gospel of God's grace. Not only is evangelism good for the preacher, it is good for the sake of the gospel, as more hear and turn to the Lord. Timothy must set the example so that all the Christians will learn and follow him. Lastly he calls on Timothy to fulfill his ministry. When God assigns a task to his servants, He has in mind a particular work that needs to be finished. It is very important to work until the job is complete. This reflects God's own faithfulness to us, and is another way to convey that the truth of the gospel is at work in our lives.

Paul will speak about his personal circumstances in the remainder of this chapter. This would have been important to share with Timothy, who was a close companion of Paul in the work of the Lord. Paul says that he was ready to be poured out as a drink offering. This meant he was now ready to surrender his life to God through death. As he faced his execution, he saw this as his opportunity to worship God, as was done by the Jews in the old testament when they poured out a drink offering over the sacrifice that was being given to God on the altar. He testifies that he has fought a good fight, finished his race and kept the faith. At the end of the Christian life, this is what will count the most. He says a crown awaits him for his service, and also for all who have loved and served Jesus. He wanted Timothy to come and visit. He mentions Demas who loved this world and left him, and others who had also departed from him. Only Luke was with him as he wrote this final letter. He wanted some personal items from Timothy particular reading and writing materials, mentioning Alexander who did him much harm, perhaps having destroyed some of his writings. No one had stood with Paul when he faced his first trial before the Roman authorities, but he harbors no resentment towards them, for the Lord had stood with him, and delivered him out of the lions mouth. He is confident the Lord can, and will, deliver him from all evil, and bring him safely into the heavenly kingdom. He sends his greetings to Priscilla, Aquilla, and Onesiphorus, and mentions some others who had traveled, along with greetings from several Christian friends. Again he calls on Timothy to come to him before winter. It maybe that Paul knew his execution might be in the near future, and he wanted to have a last visit with his dear son Timothy before he made

his final steps towards his eternal rest in the glory. It is sad that so many were unwilling to stand with Paul, even though Paul was prepared to give up his own life for the sake of the gospel. Sometimes the work of the Lord can be a lonely journey, but thank God for the companionship he knew with Timothy, and especially his closeness to the Lord Himself. I hope you are as ready to meet Jesus, as Paul was. Why not trust Him as your Savior today?

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." 2Timothy 4:7

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson Paul gives his final words to young Timothy before he departs from this world. He charges Timothy with the important responsibility of preaching the word of God. He also speaks of many Christian friends who had departed from him when he was ready to face his trial. Someone might ask the question, "What does it mean to 'keep the faith'?"

Paul mentions that he had fought a good fight, finished the race, and kept the faith. We might easily understand these metaphors of the Christian's experience as referring to being faithful to the cause of Christ throughout our Christian lives, and fulfilling all that Christ has called us to do, but what exactly is meant by keeping the faith. Is faith something we could lose, such that we need to possess it tightly, not allowing it to grow legs and flee.

We might read here and think to ourselves, that we must somehow hang onto our faith in Christ as though we might lose eternal life when our faith grows dim. It is important to understand that when a person comes to faith in Christ God changes them and makes them entirely new. They are a new creation - what the bible calls being born again. Once a person is born, they cannot be unborn. Becoming a Christian is not the same as registering at a school, only to later decide you no longer want to attend that school. We are not simply joining a club where we can quit anytime if it no longer suits us; though some people treat Christianity in that way. When we commit ourselves in faith to Jesus Christ, he commits Himself to us forever, and makes us entirely new, so that we can never lose our salvation. Faith can grow weak, and suffer shipwreck, when we give way to sin. We can spoil our Christian testimony, and grieve the Holy Spirit, but we can never, ever be lost, for we are kept by the power of God unto salvation. What God begins in us, He will see through to the end.

So what is it that Paul meant by keeping the faith. Well it was not his personal faith in Christ that he had to maintain, although to some extent that is certainly true. He is talking about upholding the Christian faith. This meant that he had been faithful at sharing the true gospel with others, and had never been guilty of compromising the truth of the gospel. He had been careful to teach all the doctrines of the Christian faith. He did not give way to false doctrines that might have made him popular with his audiences. Having been true to preach the word of God, when it was convenient, and even when it was not convenient, he demonstrated that he wanted to please God and not men. Plenty of men who preach willingly compromise the truth of the bible to suit their own purposes. I recall asking a well known radio preacher if he thought it was biblical to ask his radio audience to support his ministry. He admitted that it was not biblical, but that it did work well for getting support for his ministry. He was being honest with me, but dishonest to God's word. He knowingly compromised the truth of the bible, because it made sense to him and worked well for his own purposes. I think most preachers are guilty of pleasing their audiences, tickling their ears, or using methods in their ministry that are contrary to God's word. Those who preach the word, should be the most careful to observe the word of God, obeying its' teachings without compromise. Every time someone decides that they are wiser than God, and deviates from His word, they send out a message that the word of God is not that important, and we can change it to suit us when and if we want to. Nothing could be further from the truth. In today's chapter we saw the important charge given to Timothy to preach the word. That means to share God's word, not men's opinions. This means studying to know exactly what God has said, and what he means, and therefore what we are supposed to do in response. There can be no compromising of God's word in the slightest degree, or else we would be guilty of not keeping the faith.

Paul made sure that he always taught only what he understood was from God, His inspired words. At times this would make him very unpopular. His Jewish brethren often hated him for speaking about Jesus as their Messiah, for they had rejected and crucified Him. The gentiles often gladly heard Paul, but many mocked him, and also rejected his doctrine. The Romans had to deal with Paul because he appeared to some as a trouble-maker, and when jailed and tried, he made his appeal to the highest Roman authority to spare himself from being handed over to the blood-thirsty Jews, who sought his death. All the time Paul remained faithful to cause of the gospel, and always taught the word of God clearly. One day Paul knew that he would stand before his Lord and master and given an account of His service, and he wanted to be able to acknowledge that he had kept the faith. We all share this important responsibility to know, understand and teach the word of God faithfully to others. We must never be guilty of changing God's word out of ignorance or convenience.

"for I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to these things, god will add to him the plagues that are written in this book." Rev 22:18

LESSONS IN TITUS

Byzantine church at Agia Roumeli, Crete



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“FOR THIS REASON I LEFT YOU IN CRETE, THAT YOU SHOULD SET IN ORDER THE THINGS THAT ARE LACKING, AND APPOINT ELDERS IN EVERY CITY AS I COMMANDED YOU.”

TITUS 1:5

LESSON 201
Appointing Elders
TITUS 1

In our last lesson Paul gave his final charge to Timothy, to preach the word. He spoke of his soon departure from this world, and how he had always been faithful to gospel. Today we commence a study in the book of Titus. Titus was a fellow servant of Paul, whom he had left in Crete to help the churches. Crete is a large narrow island 50Km south of Greece, which is about 250Km long and 20 to 30Km wide. Crete has a long history, was governed by the Romans when Paul wrote to Titus, and was populated by people who were called gluttonous and lazy.

We cannot be certain if Paul made a personal visit to Crete, for this is not mentioned in the New Testament, but he did pass by Crete on a ship bound for Rome, after which he was shipwrecked near Malta. Perhaps the Christian churches on Crete were established by the Cretan Jewish believers who were in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, and had heard the gospel through the preaching of the apostles. Whatever the case, the churches on Crete were of concern to Paul, and he wanted Titus to help establish these churches with leadership, and encourage the Christians to be busy doing good works.

Paul opens this letter referring to himself as a bondservant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ. To understand that Jesus is Lord over everything, including our lives, means to understand that we owe him everything, and should be guided by His will, and not our own. It is therefore appropriate to call ourselves **slaves** of Jesus Christ and live in a manner that reflects this truth. As an apostle Paul was sent by the Lord to the nations to preach salvation through Jesus Christ, and build up the body of Christ. His service was for the sake of those, who by faith in Jesus Christ, would be recognized as God's elect, when they acknowledged the truth as seen by their godliness. To these was given the hope of eternal life. This does not mean that eternal life was something they only hoped to one day attain to, but rather that the eternal life which all men hope for, and was promised by God even before time began, is to be found and secured through faith in Jesus Christ, and this truth is sure because God cannot lie. The gospel was brought to light at just the time God choose through the preaching of His word. Paul was committed with the trust of the gospel, through the command of God our Savior. This term **God our Savior** refers of course to Jesus, who is our Savior, but also God. Titus presents many of the clear statements that support the deity of Jesus Christ.

Paul's instructions to Titus are to set in order the things that were lacking, and to appoint elders in every city. Titus' job of appointing elders, shows the great confidence that Paul had in this man, and in his spiritual maturity. Titus may have included the church in helping to recognize who their elders were, similar to when the apostles called on the church to appoint godly men to oversee the care of widows in Acts 6. We should be careful and wise not to designate power to individuals for the selection of elders, when it could potentially be done impartially or unwisely. In the multitude of counselors there is safety (Prov 11:14). Paul provides a list of qualifications for elders, so that Titus will have a standard by which to judge the worthiness of men to be recognized as elders. This list is almost identical to the list given in 1Tim 3, with only slight variations. Again the emphasis for elder qualifications is found in his godly character. When appointing an elder it was, and is, important to consider the man's character, work, actions, reactions, attitude, example, experience, and testimony. This summarizes the various qualifications that are listed, as we do not have the time to consider each one. There are 5 qualifications which are emphasized that are mentioned in both 1Tim 3 as qualifications for elders as well as deacons, and then repeated in Titus. These five are that he is blameless, husband of one wife, not given to wine, not greedy for money, and ruling their children and house well. This speaks of his reputation as a believer, his relationships with the opposite sex, his restraint against evil influences, his regard for wealth and possessions, and his respect for, and commitment to, godly order and authority.

When Paul speaks to Titus of the elders ability to handle the word of God, it is in the context of correcting and rebuking insubordinate men, idle talkers and deceivers. There were Jewish teachers in Crete who were teaching for the sake of making money, and they needed to be stopped through the faithful teaching of God's word. Paul quoted a Cretan prophet who characterized his own people as liars, evil beasts and lazy gluttons. Paul affirms this assessment of the people of Crete, and which had influenced the Christian churches. He calls upon Titus to rebuke them sharply so they would be sound in doctrine. We notice here that the relationship between a persons behavior and their doctrine. If a person behaves in a bad way, it reflects badly on their teaching also. Being a faithful servant for Christ will sometimes put a man in the awkward position of having to confront evil behavior, and use even a sharp rebuke to call people to the right pathway. This would not make the work of God very popular, since this might create tensions, even opposition and persecutions. Titus was to warn these Jewish teachers not to listen to Jewish fables and the commandments of men who are not of the truth. Our teaching must be centered in God's word, and not culture or men of great influence. It is easy to fall into the trap of following men who are highly esteemed by the world, but men who do not know the Lord. To those who are purified by the gospel, their life and doctrine are also to be pure. Those who do not believe the gospel are defiled by sin, having their minds and consciences also defiled. They might profess to know God, but their works reveal that they do not know Him, for they behave abominably and disobediently. They are disqualified from doing anything good for God, because their lives are so contrary to the Lord's character. Being a leader in a local church can be a very difficult job, because a man must be prepared to deal with all kinds of people, and some of those people can be challenging to love and correct. Perhaps we wish that these people did not attend our church, but God allows them among us to test our patience, love and willingness to correct

their wrong behavior. These trouble-makers need to hear the gospel and come to faith in Christ. How about you, have you trusted in Jesus as your Savior? You can pray today, and ask the Lord Jesus to save you.

"For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you." Titus 1:5

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson Paul instructed Titus to set things in order for the churches of Crete, and to appoint elders in every city. We learned that to be an elder in an assembly requires men of the highest spiritual and moral character. Someone might ask the question, "What is the function of elders in the local church?"

Paul had given a very similar list of qualifications for elders in his first letter to Timothy. These lists teach us a great deal about the character, and experience of these men, but do little to help us understand their work. In Timothy we learned that elders were men who had to be able to teach, and love people. This teaches us that elders primary work involves people and the word of God. In fact, the work of elders can be summarized by this statement, 'Feeding the flock of God with the word of God'. This is confirmed for us by two other important passages that address elders and their work. In Acts chapter 20 we find Paul meeting with the elders of the Ephesian church. He warns them of some men who will come into the church as wolves in sheep's clothing to do harm to the church. He calls on the elders to 'feed the flock of God', also reminding the elders that the church was purchased through the precious blood of Christ. It is important for elders to know the value God places on His beloved children, so that they will also devote themselves to their spiritual care and protection. This protection and nurture is provided through careful and systematic teaching through God's word. Peter also speaks to elders and calls upon them to Shepherd the flock. Shepherding brings before us the imagery of the shepherd who watches over his sheep, protecting them, leading them to water and good pasture. So being an elder means to not only teach God's people from the bible, it also means to take an active interest in their lives to ensure that they are healthy and sheltered from spiritual dangers.

If we were to compare various scriptures that teach about elders and spiritual leadership, we would discover the following are also aspects of the work of elders.

1. They are to pray for God's people.
2. They are to resolve doctrinal disputes for the church, providing exhortation and correction as needed.
3. They are to oversee the flock – meaning they should be aware of all those in the fellowship, and their spiritual health.
4. They are to lead the Christians by their own godly example, just like a shepherd who goes before the sheep.
5. They are to protect Christians from false doctrine and divisions.
6. They are also to recognize and commend Christians into Christian service.
7. They are to show hospitality, caring for the interests of visitors, strangers.
8. They are to be spiritual leaders in their own homes, training their family and setting a godly example.
9. They are to go and visit needy people, such as widows, the sick, discouraged, and lost or wandering sheep.

There are many passages in the bible which will equip elders to serve the church effectively and inspire them to love and serve as their chief shepherd, the Lord Jesus has done. Two passages that come to mind that are helpful for understanding the nature and work of elders are Psalm 23 and John 21. Psalm 23 is well known to almost everyone, and speaks about the care of the Good shepherd who provides, protects, restores, leads, abides with, comforts, corrects, feeds, anoints, faithfully sharing His goodness and mercy. In John 21 Jesus is restoring Peter after he had denied Him, and asks him three times to confess His love for Jesus. With each confession he calls Peter to feed and tend his flock, namely the people of God. This means that to love Jesus sincerely, we must love God's children, and look after them by feeding them the word of God. It should be apparent that elders love God's people, and that is the reason they are diligent to study and preach God's word. It is not enough to be knowledgeable in the word, or have the admiration of those under their care. They must be men who sincerely love the people, because Jesus loves them, and they desire to share God's blessing.

You might be saying in your heart, I have not met any man who shows this kind of love and devotion to the people of God. But let us not be too hard on these men who have volunteered themselves to serve the Lord. Often their work goes with little appreciation, and we do not see all that they do when we are not watching. Perhaps they spend hours in prayer for us, or they visit people when we are not even aware of it. We may not see when they witness, disciple, or counsel others. No one man can fulfill all the work that is required of elders. God in wisdom has appointed a number of elders to oversee each local church. We have failed when we set one man to oversee the spiritual care of the whole church, for that was never God's idea. Let the work be shared, and let the church appreciate and respect those men who devote themselves to our spiritual health.

"shepherd the flock of god which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly." 1Pet 5:2

LESSON 202
Learning by Grace
TITUS 2

In our last lesson Paul was instructing Titus to set in order things that were lacking in the Cretan churches, and to appoint elders in every city. Today we continue into chapter 2 and will learn about how older men and older women are to behave as believers. We will also learn what God's grace teaches us about how we should live in this world.

After providing qualifications and instructions about spiritual leadership, Paul will now call on Titus himself to teach the Christians how to behave in a manner that agrees with sound doctrine. He will address different groups of believers, and he begins with the older men. The older men have the greatest responsibility, since the church will look to them for wisdom, and a godly example. Therefore they are to be sober, reverent, sound in faith, love and patience. To be sober does not simply mean to avoid the abuse of alcohol, but rather to have a serious mind. When tending to the spiritual care of the church a man must not undermine the importance of spiritual matters, by behaving in a foolish or light-hearted way. These older men are expected to show a good example in their Christian conduct and character so that others can learn and follow Christ properly.

The older woman are also exhorted to be reverent in behavior, not slandering, or drinking alcohol. The bible does not forbid the use of alcohol, as it can be of medicinal help, as was recommended to Timothy for his stomach problems. But Christians would be wise to avoid using alcohol, due to all the sinful behavior associated with it's use. The older women are also expected to teach good things to the younger women. They should advise them how to love their husbands and children, to be discreet, chaste, looking after their home, being good in behavior, obeying their husbands, so that that the word of God will not be blasphemed. This important passage in the New Testament helps us to understand, that while women are not given a place in the church for publicly teaching the word of God, they are certainly given the important responsibility of teaching younger women. Their teaching has to do with character building, and being a good wife, mother, and homemaker. Perhaps this sounds less appealing then preaching from the pulpit, but God's instructions for Christian women is to train young women for domestic responsibilities. The care and nurture of families is very important in the sight of God, and promotes godly living. Paul calls on women not to slander, and this is said because he knows that women frequently fall into the Devils snare, and are tempted by gossip, and speaking badly about others.

After addressing the need to instruct older men and women, Paul turns his attention to the younger men in the assembly, and says Titus is to teach them to be sober-minded, and show a pattern of good works. A pattern is something that is followed continually. When men prove faithful in their good works, they prepare themselves for serving and leading in the local church. The young men need to demonstrate integrity, reverence and incorruptibility when teaching others. Their speech should be good so no one can condemn them, and those who oppose them will be put to shame, for they have nothing evil to say about them. This reminds us of the example of Daniel in the Old Testament, for no one could find anything to charge against him in his character or behavior.

The last group Paul wants Titus to exhort are bond servants. They are to be obedient to their masters, pleasing the Lord in all their behavior, and not answering back. The bible does not institute slavery, but it recognizes the reality of slavery, and tells Christians not to live in rebellion against the system in which they find themselves. The Christian must be humble and accept his lot in life, whether rich, poor, a worker or employer. All rebellion against any form of authority is rebellion against God, and has no place in the Christian life. Servants are not to pilfer, this means to steal from their masters. There might be a temptation for employees who get small pay to take from their boss, because they feel they are being cheated. Stealing is never proper for a Christian, and if he is being treated unfairly he should leave the matter before God in prayer. God is just and fair, and can intervene for us. When servants, or any Christian shows good conduct, they will adorn the doctrine of God. This means to make God's word attractive to others.

Paul uses this principle of good Christian conduct to make further comments about the gospel, saying that the grace of God, which has made salvation available for all men, is that which teaches us to deny ungodly behavior, and the lusts of this world. Grace teaches us to live soberly, righteously and godly in the world in which we live. It also causes believers to be looking forward to when Christ shall appear in all His glory. Here Christ is called our great God and Savior. This statement is so unmistakably a support to the doctrine of the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ. Here then are two indications of the power and work of the Holy Spirit in those who profess to be followers of Jesus Christ. They have learned by God's grace to live godly lives, and to live with the constant hope of Christ coming in glory.

The reason that Jesus gave himself for us, and redeemed us, was to save us from being lawless sinners, and to purify us as His own special people who have zeal for doing what is good in the sight of God. So let us ask ourselves, are we living a life of purity before God? Are we turning away from sin, and setting an example for others, showing that we are different from the rest of the world that loves their sin? Are we people who love to do good works? Have we been passionate about God's kingdom, and finding ways to serve the church, and to bring pleasure to the heart of God. When grace has entered into our lives, it is supposed to teach us, and cause a dramatic change in our behavior, so that no one will mistake us as just one in the crowd. Christians should stand out from the crowd through their godly and sober conduct. With all these instructions for the church, Paul calls on Titus to exhort, rebuke with all authority. Also, just as he had said to Timothy, Titus should not allow others to despise him. Titus would prevent others looking

down on him by setting forth a good example of how to live godly. He must not just talk about godliness, he also had to live it in front of all the believers. I wonder if God's grace has been teaching you how to live godly. The first step is to receive the free gift of eternal life by placing your trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior.

"Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age." Titus 2:12

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson Paul was calling on Titus to teach the older men and women how to live godly and serve the needs of the younger believers in the assembly. He also calls the younger men and servants to adorn the doctrine of God. Someone might ask the question, "Is it wrong for women to work outside their homes?"

This question might seem strange to many, for we know that many women must work outside of their homes, and take jobs to support their families, just as their husbands do. Let us consider what the scripture is teaching us here in Titus chapter two about the work of Christian women. Certainly a Christian woman is expected to work, but according to the bible here primary sphere of work is in her home. She is to learn to love her husband, and children, and be a keeper of the home. This is what God has prescribed and instructed for a Christian home that honors his name. Surely someone will argue that it is not always possible for a woman to stay home with her children. Her husband might be without work, or his work might not pay adequately to support the family. She feels compelled to work to help support her family. Then there is the woman whose husband has died or abandoned her. She also is forced to work outside the home to supply her own needs and the needs of her children. Clearly, wisdom and common sense would teach us that some women must work outside of their homes. However, let us be certain we understand that this is not what God has planned as the ideal for women. It is only an unfortunate necessity, and may have some bad consequences, as she cannot fulfill all of her God given responsibilities to care for her home and children.

Many families have made compromises to the biblical pattern, not because of need, but because of a desire to have more prosperity for the family. When both mom and dad work and bring home money it means that the family may have more things, and nicer comforts to enjoy. It can also mean that the children will be cared for and trained by others rather than by their own parents. God has given the responsibility of training and nurturing children to their parents. This responsibility needs to be taken very seriously by Christian parents, for God will hold them accountable for how their children are raised.

The question has no quick and easy answer, for some woman will be forced into a situation where she must work in support of her family. There are those, however, whose love for money or status in society causes them to neglect their domestic responsibility. Let's make note of some important biblical principles that will guide families to know what is the best choice when it comes to women working outside the home. The first principle, that can guide families in making decisions about mothers working outside the home, is whether the decision is because of a need, or a love for money. Christians should never be driven by the love of money. Sometimes our hearts deceive us, and we think we need more money, but actually we are just coveting and greedy for more, when we had enough to begin with. Another thing we can ask is whether the pursuit of work has more to do with personal ambition, or genuine love and care for our families. A godly woman is, or should be, motivated by a love for her husband and children. This love may compel her to find ways and means to make additional income to support her family. This should be a decision made from her interest in providing the needs of her family, and not a desire to keep up with rich neighbors, or to have status in society by driving a big car, or wearing the best clothes. A simple question to ask ourselves is whether the need to work has more to do with a love of family, or love of self. God has given a nurturing, giving spirit to his daughters of faith. This leads them to make many personal sacrifices to care for their families. A careful look at the godly wife portrayed in Prov 31, will teach us that she is a woman who is not lazy, and does not shy away from work. Her work however is all centered in her love and care for her family, and not for personal gain, or career advancement.

There is a false teaching going around in churches today that says God wants to bless us with personal success and prosperity. This suggests that God is more interested in our comfort in this world, than in our need to be forgiven for sins, and transformed into giving and compassionate people. This has influenced many people to think they can live a good Christian life, while pursuing after the riches of this world, justifying their greed and love of money. This is Satan's lie, and will only lead down a path of destruction and misery. If women fall into this trap they will desire to get more money, and this will lead them into all kinds of business opportunities, which can take them away from their most important work, which is to nurture their family. Don't let the lies of Satan cause you to think that God wants you to be rich and prosperous in this world. That is not God's main concern in our lives. He can bless us when we work hard and live righteously, but there is no guarantee that godly people will not suffer from poverty and lack of opportunity. Sometime God uses our misfortunes for our spiritual good.

"For the love of money is the root of all evil..." 1Tim 6:10

LESSON 203
The Kindness of God
TITUS 3

In our last lesson we heard Paul instructing Titus to exhort the older men and women in the churches, as well as the younger men and servants. We also discovered that the primary sphere of work for Christian women is in their homes caring for their families. Today we shall conclude our study in Titus by considering the kindness of God in salvation, and our need as Christians to perform good works.

The chapter continues with instructions for what Titus was to teach servants. They, and all Christians, are to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, and be ready for every good work. Servitude and submission should be the character of every Christian. When we see displays of pride, and resistance to authority, we can be sure that it does not come from the Holy Spirit, but rather is from the sinful nature within us. Also we are not to speak evil of others, but to seek after peace, be gentle, and demonstrate humility to everyone. A Christians relationship to others is an indicator of the reality of their relationship with Christ. Before we became believers we were foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving lust and pleasure, living in malice and envy, hateful. This list may not be something we would want to admit to, but when compared to the righteous standard of God, we all were guilty of such ungodly behavior.

God in mercy saw how wretched we were, and in his kindness and love sent us our Savior. He saved us not because of any righteous work that we have done, but purely by His mercy. This was accomplished by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit. The transformation of the new birth involves the cleansing power of the Holy Spirit, who makes a new creation within those who believe in Jesus as Savior and Lord. This new life will form new affections and desires. A child of God is drawn into fellowship with other believers, takes keen interest in learning the bible, and talking with God in prayer. The new life will also involve purging out old sins. The Holy Spirit has been poured out in abundance. This does not mean that some get more of the spirit than others, but rather that God is generous in providing salvation, and the Holy Spirit, to as many as will place their trust in Jesus. When we become a Christian God justifies us by His grace, which means we no longer have any sins charged against us, and we stand before God clean, as if we had never sinned. We also become heirs of eternal life.

This teaching about the nature of the new birth through the work of the Holy Spirit is something that Titus should constantly affirm so that the believers will be careful to maintain good works. Good works are mentioned many times in the book of Titus, as the responsibility of believers. It was perhaps a necessary exhortation to the Cretan churches who were characterized by laziness, being proud contentious men. This reminds us of the importance to continually preach the gospel, even to believers, since that will help us to live godly lives, and keep us busy for the Lord. There were some who wanted to spend their time in foolish debates, arguing about genealogies, and matters of the Law. But these debates and contentions were of no spiritual value. If Titus should have to confront someone about their contentious behavior, or dividing of believers, he should do so once and twice, but the third time he is to be rejected. Some men will not heed godly counsel, and just continue in their prideful spirit, causing difficulty for the church. Such men need to be dealt with. Grace and patience should be shown, but if they persist, and will not fall under submission and godly counsel, they should be rejected. This might mean that as a Christian they are not given any room to teach in the assembly, but it more likely means that they would be put under discipline by the church, and put out of the church fellowship. Creating divisions in the church is something God hates. In fact a warning in 1Cor3 says that anyone who destroys the church, God will destroy him. The older translations refer to this person as a heretic, and this is commonly understood as a person who holds doctrine which contradicts sound fundamental teaching of the word. However the word simply means a man who causes divisions. He is characterized by turning people away from peaceful fellowship. He sins by dividing God's people, and is condemned by his own conscience.

Paul will close this short letter by asking Titus to travel and meet him at Nicopolis, as Paul had hoped to spend the winter there. This city was a port city in Western Macedonia (Northern Greece). We do not know why Paul was to spend time in this city, as he does not mention any church in this city, nor is there any other record of his traveling there. Perhaps someone had invited him to go there to stay and share the gospel. Paul planned to send either Artemas or Tychicus, to inform Titus of his plans, or perhaps to relieve him of his post, so that he was free to travel and see Paul. Titus is also instructed to help both Zenas the lawyer, and Apollos, in their traveling expenses. Zenas was likely an expert in the Old Testament scriptures, and why his called a lawyer. Apollos was a well respected bible teacher. These two men should be honored as men serving with Paul in the gospel, and therefore were to be helped by the Christians with their needs, when they traveled to and from the Cretan churches.

Paul instructs Titus to tell those who belong to Christ to maintain good works. Once again emphasizing the importance of keeping busy by working for the Lord. It is a shame for any Christian to be unfruitful. We are all expected to produce something good in our lives that will please the Lord, and promote the growth in the church. Paul finishes with a greeting from all the brethren with him. He also greets all those who loved him in the faith, and wishes God's Grace to be with them all.

Titus is a short letter filled with practical instruction for the church about leadership, roles and responsibilities for Christians, especially the need to keep busy with good works. I wonder if you have been doing good works for the Lord? Ask yourself what service you are doing for Christ? If you discover that you are not really doing much for God's

kingdom, then why not find something that you can do in service for Christ. If nothing else you can tell others how they can place their trust in Jesus Christ for the salvation of their soul.

"and let our people also learn to maintain good works, to meet urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful."

Titus 3:14

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we heard exhortations to humility and servitude, avoiding divisive men, and maintaining good works. We also learned about the God's kindness that brought us salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. Someone might ask the question, "How should we deal with a heretic?"

In today's lesson Paul instructed Timothy to warn heretics with at least two warnings before rejecting them. As discussed in the lesson, we learned that the old English term for heretic means a man who is divisive. Though the word reject is not explained for us we can discern something of its meaning by the context. If the brother in question will not listen after two warnings, continuing to divide God's people through his actions or teachings, then something must be done. The idea of rejection suggests not allowing the person either a place in ministry, or fellowship with the church. The meaning could be either, but more likely has to do with putting this person out of the fellowship. Before the person is rejected we should notice that they are to be warned not just once but at least twice. This shows us the need to extend grace to a brother. It is not always easy for people to agree and get along, due to the sin nature in us that gets in the way, and tries to govern our behavior. We need to remind our own hearts, how wretched we are in the sight of God because of our sin. Before we are ready to condemn someone else for their conduct, we should think carefully about ourselves and realize that we are also just sinners saved by the grace of God. We really don't have any authority of ourselves with which to govern other people, or tell them what they can think or believe. In the church however, the people belong to the Lord, and those who are mature in the faith have an obligation to ensure that the Lord is obeyed, and His name honored. This does not mean that men can pit their opinions against one another. We are all subject to the word of God, and must comply with sound teaching. When a man, or woman, decides to divide the church, by undermining the elders, or drawing away disciples after themselves, we know they are serving their own selfish interests, and are not serving God.

When we meet a person who is divisive or contentious, we should be careful not to make any hasty conclusions. Perhaps the brother in question, is helping the church to see a problem doctrinally or morally in the church. We might think they are acting contentiously, but in fact, they are only seeking to make the church aware of a serious problem that needs to be addressed. There is nothing wrong to contend for the faith, and in fact that is what we often hear Paul doing as he writes His letters to the New Testament churches. Jude exhorts us to earnestly contend for the faith. Therefore just because a man is passionate about his convictions, and makes them known, with a desire to see the church obeying and following Christ, does not make that brother contentious or an heretic. What we must discern is whether the brother is purposefully seeking to destroy the church, by turning people against the leadership, or drawing them away to himself to form a party or sect. It is this sectarian spirit that is devastating to the church, spoiling the testimony and character of the church.

When people look at the churches and see so many denominations and divisions in the church they conclude that the Christians can't even agree among themselves, and therefore they reject the gospel message. We do great harm to the gospel's effectiveness, when we make divisions in the church. This is why it is so wrong for the church to divide into groups or denominations, marking ourselves as distinct from others by our doctrine and practice. While we might not agree on all points of doctrine, we can still accept one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. We should do all that we can to express the truth that we belong to one universal church. In heaven there is no Catholic, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Anglicans, Baptists and Pentecostal. All those who belong to Jesus Christ by faith shall be one body in heaven. Those who identify their Christianity by what church or denomination they belong to have missed the mark. Those who have their sins forgiven through the work of Jesus Christ dying on the cross belong to one church. Let us not divide that which Christ died to unite.

When we think about heretics, we might be thinking about people who hold false doctrine, but the truth is that heretics are people who willfully divide God's church. We are also guilty when we support denominational distinctions that divide the church up into various groups. It would be refreshing to see the Holy Spirit convict us of our divisive ways, teaching us to remove all our denominational separation, and just call ourselves Christians, or followers of Jesus. It would allow Christians to have more fellowship in Christ, and speak with authority about the love of Christ at work in our lives.

"Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."

1Tim 6:10

LESSON IN PHILEMON

[Papyrus 87](#) (Gregory-Aland), recto. The earliest known fragment of the [Epistle to Philemon](#), believed to date to the late 2nd or early 3rd century.



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“I APPEAL TO YOU FOR MY SON ONESIMUS, WHOM I HAVE BEGOTTEN WHILE IN MY CHAINS, WHO ONCE WAS UNPROFITABLE TO YOU, BUT NOW IS PROFITABLE TO YOU AND TO ME. I AM SENDING HIM BACK. YOU THEREFORE RECEIVE HIM, THAT IS, MY OWN HEART.”

PHILEMON 10-12

Put that on my Account!

PHILEMON

In our last lesson we finished our study of the letter written by Paul to Titus, where he gave instructions concerning appointment of elders, roles in the church, and learning to practice good works. Today we shall look at the short letter of Philemon. Paul, writing to his Christian friend Philemon, appeals to him to show kindness to his run away slave Onesimus. Onesimus had come to Paul in Rome, and had become a believer. Paul, now sending him back to his master to make amends, desires that he be received as more than a slave, but a beloved brother in Christ.

Paul includes Timothy in his greetings to Philemon, and refers to his friend Philemon as dearly beloved, and a fellow-laborer. Paul mentions others who were of the same church, Apphia and Archippus. He notes that the church met in Philemon's home. This might indicate that Philemon was a wealthy man, because he had a home large enough to host church gatherings, and it appears he also had servants, such as Onesimus under his care. The early Christians did not feel a need to build church buildings for the first 3 centuries following the birth of the Christian church. They managed to meet together in homes, and it is well worth our considering the advantages of a smaller gathering, where the informal setting of a home is more conducive to personal spiritual care, and brotherly love. Big church buildings maybe nice to look at, but are very expensive, and may work contrary to the nature and work of a local church, as designed by our Lord Jesus Christ, who said – "I will build my church"; and he was not talking about a physical building, but a spiritual building that includes all believers..

After greetings, and wishing God's grace and peace for Philemon, he tells Philemon how thankful he is for the Christian love and faith which he demonstrates to all believers, and how he always remembered Philemon in his prayers. Paul must have had a long prayer list, frequently mentioning many names in his writings for whom he prayed. Paul was not lazy in prayer, and made sure to remember all of his Christian friends throughout the churches. We would be of great help to the people of God if we also labored in pray for them.

Paul wants to ask Philemon to receive Onesimus, his run-away slave, in kindness and love. He said he could have boldly asked for Philemon to respond with kindness, but he rather beseechs him because of their love and respect for each other. Paul also refers to himself as Paul the aged, and prisoner of Jesus Christ. This was aimed at stirring Philemon's affections and respect for his senior brother, who was suffering for God's kingdom. Paul noted that Onesimus had once been unprofitable, but now had become profitable. This was due to the fact that Onesimus had become a believer when visiting Paul in Rome. Paul says that he had begotten Onesimus while in bonds. This phrase means that it was Paul who lead Onesimus to place his trust in Jesus as his Savior. What a joy it must have been for Paul to have turned this run-away slave from the despair and fear of his circumstances, to the freedom and peace that is found in Jesus Christ. Paul was so willing to plead for Onesimus, because now he was much more than a sinful man, and fugitive from justice. Now he was one of God's beloved children, and so Paul is willing to seek his welfare, and reconcile him with his former master. Paul is even willing to take upon himself any debts that Onesimus may have caused to Philemon when he ran away from his master. This shows us the grace of God, had taught Paul to also show grace, and generosity towards others. Paul had wanted to keep Onesimus with him, for he was a help to him. However Paul did not feel it was right to keep him unless he had Philemon's approval, since Onesimus was Philemon's responsibility. Paul sent Onesimus to Philemon, likely holding this very letter that he wrote, and calls on Philemon to receive Onesimus as more than a slave, but as a beloved brother in Christ. Now Onesimus, though still a slave to his master, had the lofty position, given him by the Lord, of being equal with his master in his status as a child of God. This did not dissolve the master/slave relationship, but it did change both men from within, so that they would treat one another as brothers, with love, kindness and respect. Paul says that Philemon should receive him as he would receive himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ. This is quite a gesture of grace and humility by Paul, as he identifies himself so fully with Onesimus, whose station in life would be considered the least.

Paul now helps Philemon to consider the circumstances of his run-away slave in the light of God's purposes. He says that perhaps Onesimus desertion was the means of his finding salvation. Therefore to be returned to Philemon's care, no longer just a servant, but much more, since he was a brother in Christ. This made Onesimus a better person, a better worker and servant to his master, and Philemon would benefit from all that had happened. It might have seemed quite unfortunate when his slave ran away, perhaps even taking some of his property, but now he voluntarily returns to submit to his authority and serve him, and this turns out better for Philemon.

As Paul appeals to his friend Philemon, he reminds him that he also owes his life to Paul, perhaps because Paul was also instrumental in his becoming a believer. Paul had confidence that Philemon would do the right thing, and even do more than what was expected for Onesimus. Paul felt confidence because he knew the heart of Philemon, and his obedience to Christ that would teach him how to treat Onesimus. Paul also asks his friend to prepare some lodging for him, as he hoped to soon visit Colossae and stay with him. He knew his brother Philemon desired to see him and had prayed that God would grant this request. This very short letter written by Paul to Philemon ends with greetings from the Christian friends with Paul, including Epaphras, who was also from Colassae, Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, and Lucas. He concludes by wishing the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. The letter of Philemon has several lessons for us, but perhaps the greatest is that a new relationship with Jesus changes our relationships to one

another, so that we behave as godly, loving brothers and sisters. Christians should never use their position, power, or economic status to oppress or cheat fellow brothers or sisters in Christ. Do you love the children of God, treating them as your own family? Why not join God's family today by trusting in Jesus as your Savior?

"If then you count me as a partner, receive him as you would me." Philemon 1:17

Today's Bible Question:

In today's lesson we heard Paul plead with Philemon to show kindness and love to his run-away slave, Onesimus. We also learned that Paul was willing to pay Onesimus' debts; and becoming a Christian does not erase our social standing. However it does include us in God's eternal family, where we are treated equal with all of God's children. Someone might ask the question, "Does the bible support the practice of slavery?"

When we read about Paul's appeal to Philemon to restore Onesimus, who had been his slave, we are left to wonder if, in Paul's mind, slavery was an accepted practice by Christians. Many have attacked the bible on this very point, saying that the bible supports slavery. When we today think about slavery, we are almost invariably relating it to the atrocities that were inflicted upon African slaves in the USA and Europe over the past centuries. This gives the whole idea of slavery a very evil and bad image to most of us, and so it should. But to be fair, that is not the same type of slavery Paul was talking about when writing his letter to Philemon, or the slavery as mentioned in the Old Testament.

The bible does not condone slavery, nor is there any commands or instructions that God's people should enforce slavery upon others. The bible acknowledges that slavery is, and has always been, part of human society. The slavery that we referred to though, is not necessarily an evil system of oppression and bigotry. Slavery is one person being sold for the purpose of serving his master, which can be similar to an employer/employee relationship, where the slave had his own rights as well. This idea of slavery is much closer to what the bible refers to when it is speaking about slavery, than the tyranny of the slave trade of recent history. The bible is honest about the reality that in any human society there will be poor people, and the way that society chooses to handle poverty, is to have the poor serve those who are wealthy. This is not what the bible would teach is the right thing, but simply acknowledges the conditions of society within a fallen creation. Poor people are forced to surrender their freedom, and work for their master, so that they can be supported. Slavery was a welfare system to aid the poor, at the expense of their personal freedoms.

The bible in almost every instance that it mentions slaves, always is instructing God's people how to treat slaves with dignity, and personal freedoms and rights. This was in sharp contrast to what the world would teach about how to treat the less fortunate. The bible seeks to defend the poor and helpless, and recognizes, that while sinful men live on the earth, the condition of human slavery will always be with us. Everything that we learn about God's redemption of his ancient people Israel, and his salvation offered to all men through Jesus Christ, speaks of God's desire to offer freedom to all men from the bondage of sin. God is not for slavery, but he does address the reality of slavery, because it is part of human culture. We might think that slavery has left us long ago, and fortunately the evil system of white slave traders treating Africans like animals has ceased more than a century ago, but slavery still exists among all cultures in a different sense. There are always those who rule over us, just as parents rule over a child. When we give ourselves to our employer to serve the company, we have become a servant, and in some sense a slave to the authority we are placed under. Sometimes that unfortunately takes away some of our freedoms, and means we have to suffer the bad treatment of our bosses and supervisors. However most people are willing to subject themselves to these circumstances, because of their economic needs. So we are all in service to some authority, and not all authority is good, especially those who do not know the Lord Jesus. Philemon was a Christian, and Onesimus was his servant, and as a brother in Christ was likely treated with love and respect, and provided for. This is not an evil system, but a system, which under Christian influence can help feed and employ many poor and needy people. Christians will always want to advocate freedom for every individual, but freedom that is guided by righteousness, and dedicated to God's glory. Paul referred to himself as a slave of Jesus Christ, and willingly offered himself to serve His Lord and Master. As Christians we should be so glad to call ourselves slaves of Jesus, for He is the best Master of all, and His rule over our lives ensures us the best care and blessing that we could possibly attain.

The bible would teach us that we are all slaves to sin and Satan, and from this we need freedom. It is Jesus Christ, our great redeemer, that has paid the price to redeem our souls back to God. He offers freedom from the oppressor, and from the corruptions of sin, but not freedom to live as we please, with no boss, and no authority to govern us. Grace teaches us that we are redeemed to serve a new master, one who loves us, and provides for our every need and eternal joy. Like the Jewish slaves of long ago, we should be ready to say, "I love my master, and want to serve Him forever." I hope you are also willing to acknowledge Jesus as Lord, and you His slave.

"but if the servant plainly says, 'I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free.'" Ex 21:5