

A LETTER TO YOUNG CONVERTS (Part 2)

Study 1

YOUR SANCTIFICATION

Read

1 Thessalonians 3: 11 - 4: 12

Paul's life was bound up in the well-being of his converts. We have already seen illustrations of this in the letter we are studying - the first letter Paul wrote. We have noticed the expressions he used to convey his care for them. First **a nursing mother** in **2: 7**. Then his **fatherly concern** in **2: 11**. Also we noted that their stability as Christians was a cause for the very life of the apostle in **3: 8**. Then, of course, there was his earnest desire to meet them. (**2: 17**)

Putting all of these things together, we can appreciate something of the involvement of the great apostle with his converts. We can understand, too, how in the first verse of the reading, he prays that God will direct his way to them. With the previous disappointments of not being able to reach them, it was best to leave this with the Lord. We can learn here the value of knowing the guidance of the Lord in our lives. God's best for His children sometimes comes disguised as disappointment, loss, or even failure. The only way to find peace at a time like that is to exercise simple faith in the Heavenly Father's unchanging love and wisdom, knowing that He never makes a mistake. Whatever desires we may have, it is always safest to wait for God's direction before we move, for even our best-laid plans need not necessarily be God's way for us. I wonder if Paul ever did reach the Christians at Thessalonica again!

It could be that you will find this passage difficult to study. Even to analyse it is not easy. You will notice that three times Paul speaks of increasing or abounding. (**3: 12 & 4: 1 & 10**) This makes us realise that he does not want these believers to stagnate or become complacent. They were doing well and he was delighted, but they could still do better. If you are a young Christian, not very old in the spiritual life, beware that you do not become self-satisfied with your progress. You can **never** say that you have 'arrived' at a point where there is nothing else to gain. It would make an interesting study for you to go through Paul's letters and see what he says about 'going on' in the things of the Christian life. Similarly, with the natural life, if we do not grow, we become stunted and useless. But, we can ask ourselves - 'In what does Paul want the Thessalonians to increase and abound?' The two main truths of this passage are 'love' and 'sanctification', and both have to do with the practical aspect of living. Look at each truth separately and see what we can learn from them.

1. **LOVE.** **3: 12** tells us the direction in which their love should abound and increase. There must be love within their own fellowship. They must love one another, for Paul realised that they would get very little love from outside. In fact all the signs were that increasing hostility would be

theirs from those who hated the gospel. How necessary then, that among themselves, there should be a warm-hearted relationship.

We are reminded of the atmosphere of a family when we talk about Christian love. Notice that in **4: 9** he describes it as **brotherly love**. He deals with the matter very tactfully, saying that he really need not write to them of this as there was plenty of love amongst them already. Also, their love extended beyond their home borders to Christians all over Macedonia. This was wonderful! It combined with their faith of which Paul spoke in **1: 7-8**, making a very effective testimony. Yes, there was plenty of love there - yet Paul calls for more; "**increase more and more**", he says in **4: 10**. What an important lesson this teaches us about our relationship with other Christians. When we give of our love to others, we are obeying, not only the desire of Paul or any other apostle, but most important the word of the Lord Jesus. "**A new commandment I give to you**", He said, "**that you love one another**" (**John 13: 34**). In the fellowship to which we belong, we should contribute our part in creating an atmosphere of love. Consequently, Paul can go on to speak of love to all men. (**3: 12**) Men can only tell that we belong to Christ when we love each other and then overflow in love and compassion towards them. Look at **John 13: 35**.

2. **SANCTIFICATION.** (**4: 3**) Perhaps you wonder just what this word means. If you look at holiness in **3: 13**, and then think of the word 'saint', e.g. in **Colossians 1: 2** you are dealing with words which have the same root. When Paul speaks of the sanctification of these believers, he is referring to the need of purity in their lives. They must please God in their walk. (**4: 1**) More than that, in this they must "**abound more and more**," just as in their love. Notice the importance of it; God's will was their sanctification. In other words, He had set them apart to be pure and clean for Himself. This contains a tremendous lesson for us. For young Christians it has never been easy to live a clean life. But today, with its permissiveness and loose sexual attitudes to life, many are finding out how easy it is to become soiled by sin. Here Paul tells them to abstain from these evils. (**4: 3-8**) Our bodies ('vessel', in **verse 4** means 'body'), should be viewed as something sacred, which belongs to God. Later, when Paul was writing to the Corinthians, he pointed out to them very clearly this fact. "**Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.**" **1 Corinthians 6: 19-20**. See also, **1 Corinthians 3: 16-17** and **2 Corinthians 6: 16**. We should be careful, too, to guard our minds against impure and unclean thoughts which pave the way for these wrong deeds that dishonour God. God's call is to holiness. (**verse 7**) To despise this call, or to treat it casually is to despise God, who gave us His Holy Spirit. (**verse 8**) Think about these two points carefully. LOVE and PURITY! Both ideas are being despised in our world today. Instead

of LOVE we have LUST. Instead of PURITY we have PERMISSIVENESS. Paul's desire puts a finishing touch to our lesson. He wants God to **"establish your hearts, blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints."** (3: 13)

Next lesson we study the Coming of the Lord!

Study 2

THE COMING OF THE LORD

Read

1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18

We are now going to study something of the meaning of the coming of the Lord for those who belong to Him. This is a very wonderful truth and is based on a personal promise from the Lord Jesus Himself. Before He left them, He said to His disciples, **"I will come again and receive you to myself"**. (John 14: 3) This meant much to them and gave them hope and inspiration for the future. In all of Paul's letters this great event is mentioned. Yet it is a truth that has caused much concern and raised many problems. 'When?', 'How?' and 'Where?' questions have been asked down through the centuries. We still wait for the fulfilment of His promise. It is the certain hope of the Church today! Although the coming of the Lord is mentioned in every chapter of this letter, we have, as yet, not looked at it very closely. Each time it is mentioned in a different connection. Let us put these together and see what they mean.

1: 9-10 has to do with **SALVATION**. Notice that here when Jesus comes again it will be as the Deliverer from the wrath to come.

2: 19-20 is linked with **SERVICE**. This is a wonderful reference and tells us that when Jesus comes, all service we have done for Him will be reviewed and there will be joy because of those who have been won for Christ. Paul counted the Thessalonians among those who were his **"Crown of rejoicing"**.

3: 11-13 has to do with **STABILITY**. We have looked at the meaning of holiness already. Here Paul desires that they shall be established in purity of life and that this shall continue until Jesus comes again.

4: 13-18 connects it with **SORROW**. We shall look further into this in our present lesson. Misunderstandings had crept in among these Christians and Paul wanted to comfort them.

5: 23 has to do with **SECURITY**. Paul thinks of all the perils that surround them as Christians and the dangers of the way, and he desires that they shall be kept blameless until Jesus comes.

Look at these carefully and you will learn quite a lot about the meaning of the Lord's Coming for Christians. Now we look at our passage in more detail. It could have been that the young converts at Thessalonica were rather perplexed about the nature of the Lord's Second Coming. Perhaps there were some there who thought that now they were Christians all they had to do was sit down and wait for Jesus to come again. **4: 11-12** could well have been written because of this. Also there were those there who seemed to feel that if Christians died then they missed the special blessing of Christ's coming. To them, no doubt, there was a thrill about the occasion which they did not want to miss. Or

perhaps the fact that some of those whom they loved had died without seeing the Second Coming of Christ, which added to their sorrow. It was all very perplexing.

Notice how Paul begins in **verse 13** - he says in effect, *'I don't want you to be ignorant or mixed up about those who have died'* - this is what asleep means here. He did not want them to have sorrow without hope. The sad thing about people who do not know the Lord Jesus as Saviour is that they are without hope for the future. The teaching of these verses makes very clear that Christians have every cause for hope and confidence because Jesus is coming again. Let us ask five questions and find for ourselves the answers in this passage.

1. **Where** will the Lord come? Not to earth - notice this. There is to be a time when He will return to the earth; but when He comes for His own it will be in the air, **verse 17, "to meet the Lord in the air"**. In a seemingly impossible way, all believers in the Lord Jesus will be caught up together. Just as a magnet attracts to itself particles of metal, so the Lord Jesus will attract to the air all who belong to Him.

2. **How** will it happen? It will happen by the design of the Lord Jesus. Just as someone by arrangement goes out to meet his friends, so the Lord Jesus will descend from Heaven and come into the air to call believers to meet Him in the air. Notice that there will be **"a shout"**, **"the voice of an archangel"** and the **"trumpet of God"**. If we belong to the Lord Jesus we shall hear the command which will bring us to Him.

3. **Who** will go? Notice there are two classes of people who will meet the Lord in the air. The **"dead in Christ"** will go first. (**verse 16**) These will be Christians who have died and they will be raised up to meet those who **"are alive and remain."** (**verse 17**) It could well be that we shall be among the latter - just as the Thessalonians thought they would be among them. Yet Paul makes very clear that to die was not to lose the joy of Christ's coming. All would meet the Lord together in the air and be forever with Him. This is very wonderful to realise.

4. **What** will it mean? It does mean that every believer in Christ since the day of Pentecost, the beginning of the Church, can be sure of meeting the Lord when He comes. Not one will be missing. Also it means that once we are with Him we shall be with Him for ever. Everything will be complete and we shall enjoy His company without any separation. This provides a great source of comfort for all who sorrow because of the death of those they love.

5. **When** will He come? We end our lesson with an unanswered question. We know Christ is coming, but we do not know when. Make sure you are ready for His coming for it will all happen in the twinkling of an eye. See **1 Corinthians 15: 51-52** and if you are not ready, you would be left behind!

Study 3

THE HOPE OF SALVATION

Read

1 Thessalonians 5: 1-11

We, have looked at the importance of the Second Coming of the Lord. I hope that in your study of it you have realised how much it means to the faith of a Christian. When Jesus comes again we shall be satisfied that all that we believed about Him was indeed true. Perhaps some people that you meet say that it is foolish to believe in someone you have never seen. Humanly speaking they may have a point. But Christ is real to those who commit their lives to Him and one

day their faith will be vindicated, **1 John 3: 1-3** makes this clear. It also tells us that the inspiration to purity of life, such as we looked at in **4: 3-7**, is found in the fact that the Lord Jesus is coming again.

In the passage we now study, we are to consider a different situation altogether. Notice in **verse 2** the expression, **“the day of the Lord”**. What is meant by this? Let us consider it in the context in which we find it. Paul is speaking about times and seasons. He speaks in such a way as to imply that the believers at Thessalonica did not need to be reminded of the character of the times in which they lived. The chapter begins with **“But”**. They were going to know the joy of the Second Coming when Jesus came for them. Yet there were troublous times to come and Paul connected these with the **“day of the Lord”**. There is no doubt that the coming of the Lord in **chapter 4** involves only Christians, i.e. those who belong to the Lord Jesus. Only those who are His, will be caught up when He comes to the air.

What of those who are left behind? It is to them that **“the day of the Lord”** is applicable. This expression is used in the Old Testament and always had to do with the judgment of God. We can learn there that those who are left behind when Jesus comes, will be left behind for judgment. This is sad, but nevertheless, true. It warns us therefore of the seriousness of rejecting Jesus Christ as Saviour. If you want to see what the Old Testament says about the Day of the Lord look at **Amos 5: 18; Joel 1: 15 and 2: 1-3**. You will soon realise that while the coming of the Lord has to do with **comfort**, the Day of the Lord has to do with **condemnation and judgment**. This is an important distinction.

The **“day of the Lord”** has nothing to do with Christians at all. Notice what Paul says here. It will come suddenly, **“as a thief in the night”**. (**verse 2**) When the world outside is saying that everything is secure and peace is sure, then sudden destruction will hit them. (**verse 3**) Those who are of the night, or of the darkness **verse 5**, will suddenly face God’s judgment. This tells us that it is a serious thing to reject the light that God has given us in the Lord Jesus. To be in the dark means to face sure and certain judgment in the day of the Lord.

Before we go any further, let us stop and think of what this means in relation to those who do not know Christ as Saviour. In **John 8: 12** Jesus said that He is the **“Light of the World.”** Those who follow Him do not walk in darkness. This means that everyone has the opportunity to accept the Light which, embodied in the Lord Jesus, has come into the world. Now the world is a dark and dangerous place and it does not get brighter with the passing of time. If you know the Lord Jesus as Saviour, then you are in the Light and you can shine as a witness to Jesus in the darkness of this world. Remember that the judgment which will come to those who are not Christians is not because they have no light, but because they have refused the Light of the World - the Lord Jesus. Make sure your light as a Christian shines very brightly.

God wants us to be secure and happy in the world however dark and dangerous it is. Thus Paul teaches the Thessalonians, in **verses 8-10**, two very important practical lessons:

1. **The need of the ARMOUR.** To make sure that they are secure he tells them to be **“sober”**. This does not mean just to avoid being drunk, it means that they have to take life seriously and think carefully about the way they are living. There is a **“breastplate”** provided, of **“faith and love”**, and there is a helmet they can take of **“the hope of salvation”**. The breastplate would make us think of that which guards

the heart, and the helmet, that which guards the head or mind. **Heart and mind.** The heart to love and the mind to serve; both need to be kept safe. God does provide means by which we can meet all the attacks of those who would seek to destroy our faith, our love and the hope of salvation. Think about this! If we read His Word and pray we shall learn more about this.

2. **The APPOINTMENT or PLAN of God.** However dark the days may be and however great the difficulties in our Christian lives, God’s plan is that we shall be saved; that we shall come through it all! This is the meaning of **verses 9 & 10**. He wants us to be happy Christians, enjoying the prospects of the wonderful life before us. To many people today, life has no purpose or prospects at all; it is dark and dismal, full of depression. Notice especially **verse 10**, the Lord Jesus **“Who died for us”**. We need to come back to this again and again, for it is the central point of the gospel message. No greater love is seen than this, in that He died and rose again that whether we live or die we shall be His forever - we shall live together with Him. This is what we want to know as the **hope of salvation**. Remember, especially if you are a young Christian just beginning to find out what trusting the Lord Jesus really means, God will never fail you. He will keep you safe and happy until you meet the Lord Jesus face to face. No wonder He says **“comfort each other and edify (or build up) one another.” (5: 11)** with these great facts. We can, and must, do this.

Study 4

CLOSING EXHORTATIONS



1 Thessalonians 5: 12-28

We are coming to the end of the letter Paul wrote to the Thessalonian Christians. It is a very full letter and we have had to pass over quite a few things that he mentions in the course of his writing. I hope you have enjoyed your studies and that you have learnt some things that have helped you in your Christian life. This last section may seem to you to be rather disjointed but there are some important things here that have meaning for us and our study would be incomplete if we did not look at them.

Verses 12-24 deal with matters which affect the Church as a whole. Much of their content could be applied to individuals too, but if we take them in context they refer to these Christians in their relationships together as a local Church. We are going to go through them simply and see what they teach us.

1. **Verses 12-13.** Paul speaks of those who **“are over you in the Lord”**. He is thinking of those who were elders, those who worked for the Lord among them for their good. They admonished, or perhaps we can say, sought to direct them in right ways. They were those who carried the responsibility of caring for those in the local Church. Notice they **“laboured”** and this word means they worked hard at great cost to themselves, for the good of these believers. Therefore they should be loved and respected for the work they were doing. This is very important. If you are a young Christian in a local Church, it is your responsibility to recognise those who are your teachers and guides. Make sure you pray for them and follow the good example they set. Paul always taught the importance of Godly leaders in the Church, and also the value of recognition of their work before God.

2. **Verses 13-16.** The essentials of caring for other Christians are presented in these verses. **“Be at peace among yourselves.”** Discord is dangerous and division among believers brings sadness to the Church. Look at each of the phrases here and consider what they mean. **“Comfort”, “uphold”, “be patient”** - there is kindness and thoughtfulness in each of these words. The world we live in is hard and often cruel and cold-hearted. It is difficult to keep up in the ‘rat-race’ of prosperity and materialism so that those who fall behind are soon left without consideration. How necessary to learn the lessons of caring for and sharing with, one another.

3. **Verses 17 & 18.** Here are three great ideas which make for satisfaction in Christian living. **Rejoice - pray - give thanks.** Not grumbling and complaining - kicking against the things that happen. Notice these three things should be evident in everything and at all times without ceasing. We have to learn the lesson of accepting the things that happen to us without complaining because **“this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you”.** (verse 18) People who live by these standards are always much easier to get on with because their lives are right with God. Make sure that you are not a grumbling Christian. Let others know that you are satisfied with the Lord Jesus and what He does in your life.

4. **Verses 19-22.** These verses refer to the teaching and ministry in the Church. What Paul is saying is that as we listen to the teaching of others we should **‘prove’** or **‘test’** it by what the Bible, the Word of God, says. If it is sound and good then we must not **‘quench’** or **‘despise’** it, but **‘hold fast’** to that which is worthwhile. If we find these teachings to be false or evil, then we must abstain from them and have nothing to do with them. This is a most important point to grasp. There is much error being spread today and we need to be ready to refuse anything that is contrary to the Bible’s teaching. Remember that in the Bible we have the truth.

5. **Verses 23 & 24.** Here, Paul seems to gather everything up together. He thinks of his converts and then he thinks of God. He turns from what the believers can do for others and for themselves and he thinks of what God is able to do for them. Two things he desires, which are important, that God would sanctify them or make them pure and holy. This is the first and we have already looked at this idea in **chapter 4.** But then he desires that God would keep them totally; in body, soul and spirit; until the coming of the Lord. Can He do it? Of course He can - **verse 24** means just that. God is faithful and He will do it. Think about this wonderful prayer with which Paul ends his letter. All the way through life **“the God of peace”** is able to keep us, right to the end.

Verses 25-28. Conclusion. **“Pray for us”.** When we began our studies in this letter we noticed that Paul always prayed for his converts. Yet he also needed the prayers of those he loved. Prayer is always a two-way exercise. We pray for each other. Paul had his problems and he suffered very much for his love for Christ. Throughout his difficulties it must have been a great comfort to him to know that he was remembered in the prayers of those whom he had led to the Lord Jesus.

So with greetings to all he ends his letter. What would you have felt if the letter had your name on it? **Verse 27** means you can share it - Paul wanted it to be read to all. We are still reading it today! Make sure you take heed to its teaching.

Questions

Study 1 YOUR SANCTIFICATION

1. a) What was one of the chief concerns in Paul’s life?
b) Give one illustration of this.
2. Why is it always safest to await God’s direction in our lives?
3. In which two things does Paul encourage the Thessalonians to grow?
4. Give two reasons why Christians should love one another.
5. a) Why should a Christian view his body as sacred?
b) How will this affect his or her life?

Study 2 THE COMING OF THE LORD

1. How can we be absolutely sure that the Lord Jesus will come again?
2. Why is the coming of the Lord so important to every Christian?
3. Why did Paul refer to the Thessalonians as his **“crown of rejoicing”**?
4. Who are the **“dead in Christ”** and what will happen to them when Jesus comes?
5. a) Where will we meet the Lord when He comes?
b) Why is it so important that we should be ready for His coming now?

Study 3 THE HOPE OF SALVATION

1. What does the **“day of the Lord”** mean?
2. When will **“sudden destruction”** come upon the people?
3. a) How can we witness for the Lord Jesus in this world?
b) What is the central point of the Gospel message?
4. Describe the **“armour”** spoken of in this passage.
5. What is the **“hope of salvation”** in the context of this passage?

Study 4 CLOSING EXHORTATIONS

1. What should our attitude be to those who are **“over us in the Lord”**?
2. How, according to Paul, are we to treat the (a) disorderly, (b) fainthearted, (c) weak?
3. Why should a Christian not grumble or complain?
4. How should we test the worth of the things taught us by others?
5. Give three reasons why we should pray for one another.