

May 1, 1994

"Serving And Waiting"  
I Thes. 1

Couples Class  
Wendell Alford,  
Teacher

I. Thessalonica, where the first believers lived to whom this letter was sent, was established by Cassander, King of Macedonia, and named for his wife, Thessalonice. She was the half sister of Alexander the Great, and her graces Cassander, no doubt, sought as a favor to his own position. The time of the city's founding was BC 316 when Alexander the Great had been dead only about eight years, and his power was still a real factor in Macedonia. Thessalonica became the site for one of Paul's missions established on his second missionary journey. At that time Paul was accompanied by Silvanus (Silas) and Timotheus (Timothy). Very likely this occasion was the first time the Gospel had been heard in this metropolis which by this time had a population of about 200,000. It was a prominent seaport and capital of Macedonia, a Roman province, and was located on a main passage from Rome to the East. Many Jews lived there and were the main religious force against Greek polytheism (paganism). A number of these Thessalonian Greeks had become dissatisfied with attempting to serve so many Greek gods. The three missionaries arrived at Thessalonica shortly after having been jailed and beaten in Philippi. They witnessed in the Jewish synagogue at Thessalonica, and some of the Jews believed that Jesus was indeed the Savior (Messiah). Those who did not believe attacked Jason in whose home the missionaries were staying. Because of a fear for Paul's life, the new believers sent him away to Berea, but the Thessalonian Jews came there also and stirred up the Jews against Paul. Silas and Timothy stayed in Berea while Paul was forced to leave for Athens farther south, Acts 17. An amazing factor in the establishing of the Thessalonian mission was that Paul was there only three weeks, Acts 17:2. So hungry were these people (including many Greeks) for the Gospel that the new believers became very firm in their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

II. After a brief stay at Athens, Paul went to Corinth where he stayed for about a year and a half. While in Corinth he wrote the first letter to the believers at Thessalonica. Generally, the letter was intended as one of encouragement to the infant believers there, and a major point which Paul used to encourage them was to emphasize the need for patience to serve until the Lord Jesus returns to establish the Kingdom of God. The time of writing of both letters was during the year AD 51-52 which makes them among the earliest of the New Testament books and the beginning of the New Testament Canon. Not long (a few months) after the Thessalonians received the first letter, Paul received word that some misunderstanding had developed about the first letter concerning Jesus' return. Paul, still in Corinth, immediately wrote and sent to Thessalonica the second letter to further expand the teaching. This fact lets us know that Paul was ever concerned about and therefore kept aware of what was happening to the new believers where he had been. No doubt he was thinking about how effective his prophesying and teaching had been, but also how well the believers were following the Holy Spirit's leadership in his (Paul's) absence. To understand fully Paul's relationship with these dear believers, one must keep profoundly in mind

the severe persecution being meted to this small, new group of believers. Paul himself had been driven away from them after only three weeks, and the Jews were trying to annihilate this new "sect of Judaism." The Jews put it: Turning the world upside down!

III. An amazing revelation in this very first chapter is the maturity of teachings of Paul early in his missionary activities. The two persons of the trinitarian Creator, the Father and the Son, are declared in vs. 1, and the third and only other person of God is noted in vs. 5, the Holy Spirit. Paul assures the Thessalonian believers that, because of their trust in Jesus, they are indeed in God the Father, in the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Spirit, i.e., the believers assembled there at Thessalonica at that time were united to their loving Creator God through their faith in Jesus. The letter was sent from all three missionaries, Paul, Silas, and Timothy with their prayers that they will sense God's grace and peace through the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul discloses that he, Silas, and Timothy continually thank God for all the Thessalonian believers in their prayers. The "you all" in the KJV is a significant translation, I believe, because it makes clear that both the believers who were Jewish as well as the Greek believers were included. The missionaries were especially recalling how conscientious the Thessalonians were in applying their newfound faith to their lives; how their labor for Christ was motivated by unadulterated love; and how they were exercising patience brought about by their hope in the Lord Jesus Christ, all just as God the Father wanted. They were persuaded that God had chosen and elected them as beloved brethren (made them to become children of God's family), cf. Col. 3:12-17. Paul reminded the Thessalonians of the power of the Gospel to change the lives of those who had believed his message when they became followers of Paul's testimony. How glad they were to learn that God himself had forgiven their sins. Believing that Good News filled them with joy as the Spirit gave evidence of the truth even though some of the local people rejected the Gospel for being false teaching. Their faith was so pronounced that word of it spread freely throughout Macedonia, Achaia and even beyond so extensively that Paul was hearing from others about them.

IV. In vs. 9 Paul notes how the Thessalonian believers' lives demonstrated positively how they had turned to God from idols. There was no "reformation" before conversion to faith, but the faith came to recreate their spirits as the Spirit that was in Jesus Christ came to indwell them. Their becoming believers meant that they had turned (repented) from their sins (idols) to the hope of God's promise through faith in Jesus Christ. Living with this faith motivated them "to serve the living God, to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from among the dead, even Jesus, which (resurrection) delivered us from the wrath to come." Here Paul touches for the first time in the letter upon Jesus' return to earth. They were to serve as they waited for that return. As William Miller said in the hymn: "We'll Work Till Jesus Comes"

O land of rest, for thee I sigh! When will the moment come?  
When I shall lay my armor by and dwell in peace at home?  
We'll work 'till Jesus comes, and we'll be gathered home!

MA

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"Serving And Waiting"  
I Thes. 1

Couples Class  
Wendell Alford,  
Teacher

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*Thessalonica*  
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*... of Philippi II*

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May 8, 1994

"Gentle Witnessing"  
I Thes. 2

Couples Class  
Wendell Alford,  
Teacher

I. In Chap. 2 Paul becomes very retrospective and reviews with the Thessalonians his brief witnessing to them before being chased from them for his faith in Jesus as the Messiah, spiritual Savior. He, Silas, and Timothy had faithfully shared God's message with the Thessalonians and their changed status (believing and accepting God's love through Jesus Christ) proved the effectiveness of the three missionaries' service, how that service was not in vain. Paul in vs. 1 summarizes his first visit there as "our intrance (first coming) to you" (KJV), "was fruitful." Again, Paul relates how he and the other two missionaries had been mistreated at Philippi but had remained bold through God and true to his mission assigned to them in spite of the struggle (suffering) which ensued. Paul's exhortation (advice) he characterized as without deceit or error and complete or without alloy. This statement is similar to the reaction of the Berean Jews when Paul witnessed to them just after the Thessalonian episode. The Berean Jews searched the Old Testament Scriptures regularly (daily) to ascertain the missionaries' message. They believed that Jesus is indeed the Savior based upon that evidence as presented to them. In fact, it was the word received back at Thessalonica that the Berean Jews had become believers, that the Thessalonian Jews went to Berea to hamper Paul's service in expanding the Kingdom of God, Acts 17:10-15.

II. Paul's message was not given that he would gain something personally from the joy and sense of well-being enjoyed by the new believers. His intent and motive were pure and unadulterated. The message was from God to accomplish God's purpose, not to gain popularity or monetary advantage. The message was given without guile, i.e., Paul did not exercise trickery or methods of unreasonable coercion. He did not attempt to cause the Thessalonians to make superficial decisions for Jesus as Savior. If the Spirit of God is to lead and empower the hearers to accept the message of God about Jesus Christ, the message itself must agree with the Spirit's leadership. The message must not be "unclean" or presented as a mixture, pure and error. [The Good News must be of pure iron (strength), not iron mixed with clay (weakness) as was Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom in Dan. 2, especially vs. 42-45. The ultimate test of whether one's interpretation of God's Word is correct hinges upon whether that interpretation is pleasing to God, and only the abiding-within Holy Spirit can determine such. Paul's apostleship authorized him to proclaim and codify (make permanent God's Word) as was not assigned to anyone else following those who authored the New Testament as we have it today.] In vs. 4 Paul makes clear that his proclamation was a special allowance of God's trust and not tradition (human determination). Please note Paul's careful difference at I Cor. 7:3-6 and II Cor. 8:1-9. The test of Paul's declaration was by the Lord himself.

III. A further examination of the message of Paul was that he had not weakened his (God's) position through flattery or covering up a subtle means of self-advantage. In vs. 5 Paul stated that the

Thessalonians knew that truth, and so did God know the honesty of his message. At no time to anyone did he seek to be especially honored or favored as one assigned to be an apostle (with a unique, special commission from Jesus Christ). His gentleness was as conspicuous as that of a nurse (nanny or nursemaid) for her own children. Not only did Paul know the intricacies of the needs of new believers, but those believers were "babes" in Christ resulting from God's work through Paul's own witnessing. They were his own spiritual offspring, so to speak, as God had caused them to respond to the missionaries' testimonies. So intent was Paul's concern for the Thessalonians' relationship to God that his own spirit melded with theirs, vs. 8. He was so jealous of their new kinship with God through Jesus that he would not even live from the benefits of their labor (physical support), i.e., he supported himself by his own labor. In vs. 9 Paul explains explicitly the arrangement he meant. He worked with his own hands during the day just as did his hearers, and at night he served others by sharing his faith in Jesus Christ. He labored day and night to demonstrate his sincerity which amply and favorably impressed the Thessalonians, both Jews and Gentiles, that the missionaries were not there for personal gain. The apostle reminded the new believers that God was pleased with both the message given to them and also the response to God's Good News. Now that they were citizens of God's Kingdom, their new lives were being lived to please not just the bearers of God's message, but God, whose message they bore. Paul had begged, encouraged, and urged them to follow God's leadership for their spiritual welfare even as a father does his own children for their temporal welfare.

IV. Paul reminds the new believers that, not only are they new citizens of God's Kingdom, but they are also to reflect God's glory by the example of their lives among others. Continually Paul gave God thanks for the Thessalonians' understanding that Paul's message was not really his own but the Word of God which empowered them to do God's will. Their lives followed the pattern of other believers in congregations back in Judaea and other places where withstanding persecution was a regular portion for leaving Judaism or idols to serve the living God. Especially the Jews who trusted Jesus as God's Savior were considered unworthy and outside of God's family. Paul himself was instructed not to speak to Gentiles about Jesus as God's Savior. [A leader who had been humiliated by crucifixion could not be God's Messiah, for God had promised his people, the Jews, a leader like David who was a valiant, military conqueror and who would rule with raw strength and physical might. NO! The people of God were to be militant, not meek, to inherit the earth. God's people were to be served by others, not servants, but see Isa. 53 and Matt. 5:1-12.] The one whose influence in the world that holds back the full fruition of God's pleasure in the earth is the same one who drove Paul from Thessalonica after only three weeks, Satan, vs. 17. And who will finally destroy completely this arrogant one? God, who began by sacrificing his only begotten Son, Jesus, for all believers' spiritual rebirth, will exclaim, "Enough!" That same Jesus will return to earth and finalize his glory in the trusters of all ages in Jesus as Savior, vss. 19-20. "While on others he was calling, the gentle Savior did not pass us by, but heard our humble cry." Let us work gently, for the night is coming.

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"Gentle Witnessing"  
I Thes. 2

Couples Class  
Wendell Alford,  
Teacher

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May 15, 1994

"Mutual Encouragement"  
I Thess. 3

Couples Class  
Wendell Alford,  
Teacher

I. When Paul composed this letter to the believers at Thessalonica, his chief theme was to be the nature of the events to happen when the Lord Jesus returns to keep God's promise to all believers of all time. The person who, centuries later, divided the letter into chapters and verses was wise, I believe, to end each of the first three chapters with a mention of that central theme. Please note 1:10, "and to wait for his Son from heaven," in 2:19, "in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming," and in 3:13, "at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints (believers)." The promise of eventual relief from persecution from earthly pressures and tensions has occurred throughout the ages from God to his faithful. When God destroyed the earth with water in Noah's lifetime, God saved eight persons, Noah and his family. This destruction was due to the unGodliness of mankind which "was great in the earth, and that every imagination (intent) of the thoughts of his (mankind generally) heart was only evil all day every day. - - -But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord," Gen. 6:5,8; I Pet. 3:20. When Jesus instructed his disciples (and us) about his coming again, he referred to the evil of mankind on the earth in Noah's day and the recurrence of such wicked conditions just before he returns, Matt. 24:36-39. Noah worshiped Jehovah God when the flood receded, and God covenanted with Noah that never again would the earth be destroyed with water. The rainbow is the symbol of God's perpetual covenant with humankind because of Noah's righteousness. Later, when God's own people (the Jews) disallowed God's Law and will by turning from him to their neighbor's idolatry, God punished the Jewish nation by allowing them to be taken from the land they loved (and where they assumed God's only presence to be) and to become captives of the Babylonians. In the process of taking Israel's leading families and artisans, the invaders completely destroyed their beloved Jerusalem where valiant David created a fortress, and where his son, Solomon, later ruled the entire area with glowing splendor. At this crucial time in Israel's history, God commissioned his prophets to promise the Israelites that if they would turn again and love their God by being his people in deed as well as in name, he would restore their grandeur in the earth. These promises were stressed during times of severe persecution. The two prophets who most vividly relayed these promises during persecutions were Ezekiel and Daniel, especially as they relate to God's final restitution of all mankind's evil against God. In Ezek. 36-39 the terrible persecution which Israel is to endure is noted. The enemies of Israel will come against her, but God will utterly destroy her enemies. Israel will need seven months to bury the dead enemy forces. Ezek. 39:12-13. Daniel refers to a time of trouble for the nation of Israel when "there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book (elected), Dan. 12:1b." See also Rom. 11:25-36.

II. The term which theologians use to designate that division of

systematic theology having to do with the doctrine of last things such as death, resurrection, second coming of our Lord, end of the age, divine judgment, and the future state is "eschatology." The Old Testament teaches a future resurrection and judgment day, Job 19:25-27; Isa. 25:6-9; 26:19-21; Dan. 12:2-3. The New Testament interprets, enlarges, and completes the Old Testament eschatology. The New Testament stresses the resurrection, Rom. 8:11; I Cor. 15, the second coming of Jesus Christ, Matt. 16:27; Lk 17:30; I Cor. 1:7; 4:5; I Thess. 2:19; 3:13; 4:13-18; II Thess. 1:7-10; 2:1-6; I Pet. 1:7; I John 2:28, the final judgment for the unsaved (unbelievers), Rev. 20, and the righteous (believers) entrance into heaven, Matt. 25:31-46. One can see from these references that the two letters of Paul to the Thessalonians has a conspicuous contribution to the learning of the return of Jesus Christ for those of us who are and all those who have ever trusted Jesus as God's Savior.

III. Finally, we come to this third chapter of Paul's (God's) letter to the new believers (and us) at Thessalonica. In chapter one Paul stressed the spiritual salvation which these new believers had experienced through newfound faith in Jesus, and in chapter two he charged them to engage in kingdom service by withstanding the persecution to deny the Lord who saved them and witnessing to those who were yet unbelievers. In this third chapter Paul discusses what could be formally characterized as "sanctification" or maturing in God's grace as God's children. The great Apostle Paul knew that the religious climate prevailing in Thessalonica could mean his own death if he returned there. Therefore, when he, in his deep love for them, could stand the uncertainty no longer, asked his trustworthy fellowlaborer Timothy to return and encourage them. The tribulation which the Thessalonians were suffering was the reason, I believe, why Paul thought the appropriate explanation was to assure them that Jesus would return to earth to bring the ultimate blessings which would compensate for all the misery they were enduring, make all their pain minor compared with the glory to come. When Timothy returned, he told Paul how the Thessalonian believers were standing by their faith in spite of the opposition. Paul now tells them in this letter that their perseverance was an encouragement to him, too, for he was undergoing persecution for his faith in Jesus. The encouragement was mutual, and Paul expressed his prayer for them that they would respond to the Lord's leadership and grow in their love for one another and even for those outside the believing fellowship. The goal for them was that they become well established in their faith, unblameable in holiness (righteous separateness) before God the Father. The "unblameable" in vs. 13 corresponds to the "perfect" in vs. 10. These terms refer to the spiritual condition of individuals who are complete (flawless) in God's sight, i.e., "before God," vs. 13. This does not mean the "sinless perfection" to which some refer and which they attempt to attain by doing good works or keeping the law, but rather the completeness which God himself makes for one who trusts God's only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, and his blood (life) shed for the remission of that truster's separation from God (sin), Rom. 3:21-31; I Cor. 1:29-31; II Cor. 5:21.

Jesus paid it all, All to him we owe;

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Wendell Alford,  
Teacher

I. When Paul composed this letter to the believers at Thessalonica, his chief theme was to be the nature of the events to happen when the Lord Jesus returns to keep God's promise to all believers of all time. The person who, centuries later, divided the letter into chapters and verses was wise, I believe, to end each of the first three chapters with a mention of that central theme. Please note 1:10, "and to wait for his Son from heaven," in 2:19, "in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming," and in 3:13, "at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints (believers)." The promise of eventual relief from persecution from earthly pressures and tensions has occurred throughout the ages from God to his faithful. When God destroyed the earth with water in Noah's lifetime, God saved eight persons, Noah and his family. This destruction was due to the unGodliness of mankind which "was great in the earth, and that every imagination (intent) of the thoughts of his (mankind generally) heart was only evil all day every day. - - -But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord," Gen. 6:5,8; I Pet. 3:20. When Jesus instructed his disciples (and us) about his coming again, he referred to the evil of mankind on the earth in Noah's day and the recurrence of such wicked conditions just before he returns, Matt. 24:36-39. → Noah worshiped Jehovah God when the flood receded, and God covenanted with Noah that never again would the earth be destroyed with water. The rainbow is the symbol of God's perpetual covenant with humankind because Noah's righteousness. Later, when God's own people (the Jews) disallowed God's Law and will by turning from him to their neighbor's idolatry, God punished the Jewish nation by allowing them to be taken from the land they loved (and where they assumed God's only presence to be) and to become captives of the Babylonians. In the process of taking Israel's leading families and artisans, the invaders completely destroyed their beloved Jerusalem where valiant David created a fortress, and where his son, Solomon, later ruled the entire area with glowing splendor. At this crucial time in Israel's history, God commissioned his prophets to promise the Israelites that if they would turn again and love their God by being his people in deed as well as in name, he would restore their grandeur in the earth. These promises were stressed during times of severe persecution. The two prophets who most vividly relayed these promises during persecutions were Ezekiel and Daniel, especially as they relate to God's final restitution of all mankind's evil against God. In Ezek. 36-39 the terrible persecution which Israel is to endure is noted. The enemies of Israel will come against her, but God will utterly destroy her enemies. Israel will need seven months to bury the dead enemy forces, Ezek. 39:12-13. Daniel refers to a time of trouble for the nation of Israel when "there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book (elected), Dan. 12:1b." See also Rom. 11:25-36. Matt. 20:16 also above at Matt. 19:30

Feb. 11-7  
 Flood receded in Nov. 5:4 + at Gen 8:20  
 Homeward  
 Religion on TV (discuss)

x  
 x

II. The term which theologians use to designate that division of systematic thelogy having to do with the doctrine of last things

such as death, resurrection, second coming of our Lord, end of the age, divine judgment, and the future state is "eschatology." The Old Testament teaches a future resurrection and judgment day, Job 19:25-27; Isa. 25:6-9; 26:19-21; Dan. 12:2-3. The New Testament interprets, enlarges, and completes the Old Testament eschatology. The New Testament stresses the resurrection, Rom. 8:11; I Cor. 15, the second coming of Jesus Christ, Matt. 16:27; Lk 17:30; I Cor. 1:7; 4:5; I Thess. 2:19; 3:13; 4:13-18; II Thess. 1:7-10; 2:1-6; I Pet. 1:7; I John 2:28, the final judgment for the unsaved (unbelievers), Rev. 20, and the righteous (believers) entrance into heaven, Matt. 25:31-46. One can see from these references that the two letters of Paul to the Thessalonians has a conspicuous contribution to the learning of the return of Jesus Christ for those of us who are and all those who have ever trusted Jesus as God's Savior.

III. Finally, we come to this third chapter of Paul's (God's) letter to the new believers (and us) at Thessalonica. In chapter one Paul stressed the spiritual salvation which these new believers had experienced through newfound faith in Jesus, and in chapter two he charged them to engage in kingdom service by withstanding the persecution to deny the Lord who saved them and witnessing to those who were yet unbelievers. In this third chapter Paul discusses what could be formally characterized as "sanctification" or maturing in God's grace as God's children. The great Apostle Paul knew that the religious climate prevailing in Thessalonica could mean his own death if he returned there. Therefore, when he, in his deep love for them, could stand the uncertainty no longer, asked his trustworthy fellowlaborer Timothy to return and encourage them. The tribulation which the Thessalonians were suffering was the reason, I believe, why Paul thought the appropriate explanation was to assure them that Jesus would return to earth to bring the ultimate blessings which would compensate for all the misery they were enduring, make all their pain minor compared with the glory to come. When Timothy returned, he told Paul how the Thessalonian believers were standing by their faith in spite of the opposition. Paul now tells them in this letter that their perseverance was an encouragement to him, too, for he was undergoing persecution for his faith in Jesus. The encouragement was mutual, and Paul expressed his prayer for them that they would respond to the Lord's leadership and grow in their love for one another and even for those outside the believing fellowship. The goal for them was that they become well established in their faith, unblameable in holiness (righteous separateness) before God the Father. The "unblameable" in vs. 13 corresponds to the "perfect" in vs. 10. These terms refer to the spiritual condition of individuals who are complete (flawless) in God's sight, i.e., "before God," vs. 13. This does not mean the "sinless perfection" to which some refer and which they attempt to attain by doing good works or keeping the law, but rather the completeness which God himself makes for one who trusts God's only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, and his blood (life) shed for the remission of that truster's separation from God (sin), Rom. 3:21-31; I Cor. 1:29-31; II Cor. 5:21.

*adj. & Adv.*  
*Dignity*  
*positive*  
*comparative*  
*superlative*

Jesus paid it all, All to him we owe;  
 Sin had left a crimson stain, He washed it white as snow!

Looking forward to Couples Class Annual Cookout at A. & A. Smith's place, May 17, 1994!

May 22, 1994

"Sanctification and the Deceased"  
I Thess. 4

Couples Class  
Wendell Alford,  
Teacher

I. The appropriateness of God's spiritual children's maintaining a high level of Godly ethics is continued from Chap. 3 into Chap. 4. In fact, the first twelve verses are given to righteous living by those identified with our Lord, Jesus Christ. The conduct of the new Thessalonian believers was especially important, because sexual standards and other moral standards were very low in the Roman Empire. The same low standards are evident in the world today. Our own country is not only low in societal sexual morality, but is a poor example in this area of thought and activity as the most powerful nation in today's world. God's Word makes his position clear as to how he would have his people conduct their sexual affairs; adultery, Exod. 20:14; bestiality, Lev. 18:23; fornication, I Cor. 6:18-20; homosexuality, Lev. 18:22, 20:13, Rom. 1:26-27; incest, Lev. 18:6-18; prostitution, Lev. 19:29, Deut. 22:21, I Cor. 6:15; and rape, Deut. 22:25-27. Paul urged the new believers to follow the leading of God (his Holy Spirit) in how to behave. We speak often of chastity as the result of self-control, but actually a believer has the power of Jesus' love to aid and empower him or her to make decisions which will please God. God's will is that believers be sanctified (mature spiritually) and that involves abstaining from sexual impurities vs. 3. One of the right choices in life for believers is to control ones sexual appetite, "possess ones body activities" in "sanctification and honor," vs. 4. Further, believers are not to pattern their lives as the Gentiles whom Paul characterized as given to wanton, unrequited lust, vs. 5. As believers we are called to honor Jesus who paid the price for our holiness (to become uniquely separated in thought and actions). Therefore, if we do not honor God in our living, we are rejecting God, not other people. Paul then encourages the Thessalonian believers to "be quiet," i.e., not to be busybodies who attempt to become other peoples consciences. Neither are they to be lazy and let others support them (their physical sustenance). Being upright as believers in the sight of nonbelievers is a proper way to display a Godly and winning testimony for the Lord.

II. Beginning with vs. 13 Paul turns from proper living standards for believers to a question or concern which apparently Timothy brought back from the believers in Thessalonica. Their understanding from what Paul had told them in his three-week stay with them was that Jesus was coming back to earth to relieve them of their persecution from the Jews and others. Since Paul had been with them, however, some of their members had died physically. How did their death relate to the Good News in Jesus Christ? Would those who had died be among those to be blessed by Jesus' return, or was their death the termination of their relation with the Savior? If this death disrupted the promise of God related to trusting Jesus, why the emphasis on living sanctified lives? [This same feeling of detachment Jesus sensed in the apostles when the Lord announced his departure from them on the night he was betrayed, John 14:1-3, 16-18. The apostles were evidently unaware at that time of the spiritual continuance of a person after physical death.

Jesus' answer introduced the truth that his departure was only a temporary arrangement, and, further, he would return in due time after which there would never again be a need for separation. Not only did he promise to return, but he also promised the coming presence of the Holy Spirit to be with them and all subsequent believers until he returns. The Holy Spirit did, in fact, arrive about fifty days following Jesus' return to the Father in heaven. That same promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit had been made through the prophet Joel at Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:14-18.] Paul at vs. 15 was in keeping with Jesus' communication about his return, for the apostle states clearly that he is really only repeating what he had received "by the word of the Lord." Since Paul had become a believer after Jesus' ascension, one needs to refer to the two instances when Jesus spoke directly with Paul through revelation. Jesus spoke with Paul on the road to Damascus at Acts 9:3-6, and we have that conversation in detail. However, the second conversation was over a period of about three years, Gal. 1:10-20. Paul was told by direct revelation from God the information which became for us a major portion of God's Word.

III. Paul wanted the new Thessalonian believers to know beyond any doubt ("not have you to be ignorant") about the disposition of those believers who had died (physically). They are not to be grieved over as those deceased persons who die not having placed their trust in God's Savior, Jesus Christ. Unbelievers have no such hope, but God's spiritually reborn children through faith in Jesus Christ, i.e., those who die believing that Jesus died and rose again will accompany Jesus when he returns for those believers who are still physically alive. A believer's spiritual status is not changed when he or she puts off the temporary, fleshly body. Those who do die before Jesus returns are said to be "asleep," because they no longer can communicate with those still physically alive, Lk 16:26, and vice versa. Those believers who die will be united with the believers who are still alive at the time God sends Jesus back to revisit the earth, because the Lord will bring those who have died before with him. When the Lord returns to earth, his coming (presence) will be given universal (worldwide) attention. Jesus himself will descend from heaven announced by the voice of God's chief angel (messenger) and God's trumpet. At that time those believers who have gone on before (died) will be with Jesus even before those who are still in the flesh. When both groups meet together with Jesus at this time, this begins the eternal union with the Lord's presence. Never again will we be separated from the Lord whose righteousness made us one with the God who made and loved us. We will have new bodies. Even those who are physically alive when Jesus returns will rise to meet him with new bodies which are to be made instantaneously immortal and incorruptible, I Cor. 15:49-53.

To Jesus Christ I fled for rest; He bade me cease to roam,  
And lean for succor on his breast 'till he conducts me home.  
I sought at once my Savior's side, no more my steps to roam  
With him I'll brave death's chilling tide, and reach my heavn'ly  
home.  
When he shall come with trumpet sound, Oh may I then in him be  
found;

114

May 22, 1994

"Sanctification and the Deceased"  
I Thess. 4

Couples Class  
Wendell Alford,  
Teacher

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Days: 12:1

Rev. 18

1 Cor. 5:24  
Foundation  
Eph. 2:11

Stanzas 2+3  
I'll be with  
Savior's side  
Suzanne Mies

Stanza 4  
The "Solid  
Rock"  
Edward  
Mies

To Jesus Christ I fled for rest; He bade me cease to roam,  
And lean for succor on his breast 'till he conducts me home.  
I sought at once my Savior's side, no more my steps to roam.  
With him I'll brave death's chilling tide, and reach my heav'nly home.

When he shall come with trumpet sound, Oh may I then in him be found;

Dressed in his righteousness alone, faultless to stand before the throne.



May 29, 1994

"The Day of the Lord"  
I Thess. 5

Couples Class  
Wendell Alford,  
Teacher

I. One of the reasons we are to study the Old Testament prophecy of Isaiah for at least the last six months of 1994 is the treatment of the "Day of the Lord" which Isaiah examines and foretells in Chapters 2-4, et al. This phrase, the day of the Lord, Paul uses in vs. 2 which relates to what he is telling the new believers about Jesus' return to earth on his second visit. Isaiah is known by many as "The Messianic Prophet," because the theme of his prophecy is that God will save the world through his nation (Israel) which was to become a Messianic Nation led by God's glorified Messiah, John 12:35-43. Understanding Isaiah's prophecy adds depth of meaning to what we are living through in 1994. In fact, Paul noted (or reminded) for the Thessalonian believers that they knew that the day of the Lord is to take place as a thief when those to be robbed are asleep and more vulnerable. Paul states that they (the Thessalonian believers) knew this fact about the surprise of the day of the Lord "perfectly." Either Paul had made this point for them during his short stay at Thessalonica, or else the Jewish believers of the assembly there were familiar with the Old Testament references to the day of the Lord, or both.

II. After relating Chap. 5 with our future study of Isaiah, we look at the last thoughts of Paul (and the Lord) in this first letter to the Thessalonian believers. There had been no change at the time of Paul's writing from the information Jesus gave his first disciples as he answered their questions concerning the destruction of the Herod Temple and Jesus' return for his believers, Matt. 24:27-36. Please note in vs. 24 of that passage the term "This generation" which Jesus said would not pass away before these events related to his return had happened. [I believe that the "generation" meant here is the same as the "generation" in Psa. 22:30. Jesus' special period of grace (during which time God's grace through Jesus Christ will prevail) will be a special time when God accepts all, Jews and Gentiles, who trust God's righteousness created by the shed blood (sacrifice) of his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, Lk 21:24; John 1:17; Rom. 11:5,25; Eph. 2:8.] Paul is telling the Thessalonians (and us) that no one knows the exact time when God the Father has reserved to his own private knowledge (Even Jesus does not know, Matt. 24:36.). The world's population in general will be as surprised when Jesus comes with the universal, unique announcement as the householder is when his or her home is broken into during the late night hours. The day of the Lord is a fulcrum of history as was the first coming of Jesus. The day of the Lord will begin as a period of sorrow and wrath on the earth as has never been before or will ever be afterwards, Matt. 24:14-22 (Dan. 9:24-27); Rev. 6:12-17. But Paul has already stated in the preceding Chap.3 that the believers will have been taken from the earth, both those who had died (physically) as believers and believers who are still in the flesh at the time of Jesus' return, vss. 13-18. In fact, the world will be of the opinion that finally political and economic peace has come to the earth (the Golden Age). But it is during this portion of the day of the Lord (which is to last seven years,

Dan. 9:24) that the Jewish nation will through bitter travail come to accept the Jesus as Messiah (Savior) whom their forefathers rejected so vehemently, Lk. 23:13,21; Rom. 11:25; Rev. 1:7. The "sudden destruction" which will come upon all the peoples on the earth in this day of the Lord will be like the birth pains of a woman preceding childbirth. No one on earth will be excluded from the physical and mental trauma and torment, see again Rev. 6:12-17.

III. Again, Paul reiterates the disposition of all believers during this calamitous period in vss. 4-11. Believers are not in darkness (without knowledge) so that the day of the Lord will not "overtake you as a thief." Because of your trust (faith) in God's Savior, Jesus Christ, you believers are God's children and thereby are enlightened to know that God has promised to save you from all such destruction. He is faithful to keep his promise in which you trust, I Cor. 1:9. God's promise does not excuse us believers from maintaining constant attention to what is happening in world affairs. We are not to permit ourselves to become drowsy during this time when the world's people are, in general, concerned about and given primarily to worldly, temporary matters. Others (nonbelievers) are asleep continually and not awake to the cloud of separation from God's will that pervades the political and economic affairs of mankind. We believers are to remain sober (self-controlled) and watch, or, as Jesus put it, "And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth near," Lk 21:28. We are to keep clothed in faith, love, and with our hope of salvation. Note carefully vss. 9-10, "For God hath not appointed us to wrath [the beginning of the day of the Lord], but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake [alive when Jesus returns] or asleep [physically dead before Jesus returns] we should live TOGETHER with him. This knowledge is to encourage and build each of us up in our faith and hope, vs. 11. [Emphases mine - WA]

IV. The importance of God's children living holy lives while still in the flesh is stressed again as Paul returns to living uprightly in vss. 12-22. He begs us to lean upon each member as he or she performs services which the Lord assigns to each believer. The Lord's work should be done harmoniously as each worker is to be esteemed for whatever the assignment happens to be. All workers are to be praised and encouraged for every accomplishment. Goodness is to be the priority both among members of the fellowship as well as toward those outside. Never give in to sadness or despair, but remember whether you live or die in the Lord, God's promise for final victory is absolutely sure. A believer is never to feel alienated from God, but in continuous communication with him. Give constant thanks to the Lord; give free reign to the Holy Spirit's leadership; be willing to hear God's will as expressed by others, but prove all information and heed all that God's Spirit confirms for you; and avoid everything that displeases the Lord. In conclusion, vss. 23-28, Paul assures them (and us) that the God who has called us to righteousness through Jesus Christ is faithful to keep his promise to us. The Lord's grace will be with us so that we will be with him during the entire day of the Lord!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

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*Search  
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