

UPLOOK

MAY-JUNE 2007

Assess the Need • Catch the Vision • Take the Challenge

IS THERE A PATTERN?

**THE PATTERN
CHURCH**

Gary McBride

**PASSION AND
PURITY IN
THESSALONICA**

Keith Keyser

**AMAZING
GRACE**

Colin Anderson

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Love has its own language, calling us from “Must I?” to “May I?” The Lord took Israel by the hand to lead them through the desert, but the church He takes by the heart. As with Israel in a future day, He wants to be “My Husband,” not “my Master” (Hosea 2:16).

Is There A Pattern?

Are we being too picky?

My wife has never asked me to tell her that I love her or to buy her a Christmas present. (In fact, she regularly insists I needn't buy her any presents at all. I am not fooled.) I would be a foolish man (in more ways than one) if I were to conclude that her declination to ask for such things indicated that she was disinterested in them, or that they were unimportant. On the other hand, there are things she has asked for that are, comparatively, trivial. “Can you pick up a bag of milk on the way home?” I hope my love outweighs the milk. The fact is that we cannot evaluate an action's importance based simply on whether or not our loved one requests it. (Although, after this, she may very well ask that I stop writing articles about her.) There are some things love doesn't ask.

Why is it, then, that when it comes to church function, so many feel that unless the Lord has given an explicit command, He has no preference, that we are free to do as we choose? It has been well said, “We act as if we are under law when we obey only what is prescribed.”

When we turn to the New Testament, we discover the Lord's letters of love to His church. Certainly there are commands. But the epistles are far deeper than that. Love ought to prevent us from automatically assuming that we have unrestrained license to do as we please whenever we are left without a direct command.

So it is that we take seriously the New Testament *pattern* for the church as well as its *commands*. The Bible is not a cold, lifeless rulebook. It is God's authoritative record. The Lord promised His disciples that He would build His church (Mt. 16:18); and, as we read Acts and the epistles, we have the privilege of learning how He did it. He appointed the apostles to lay the foundation and set the churches in order (Eph. 2:20). In particular, He designated Paul as the wise master builder (1 Cor. 3:10). The Lord then instructed us to follow the examples and traditions—i.e. the pattern—laid down by those apostles (1 Cor. 4:16f; 11:1f; Php. 3:17; 1 Thes. 1:6; 2 Thes. 2:15; 3:6f, 9).

Often we are told that the pattern wasn't authoritative; it was simply the church in its infancy, and the church was meant to grow and develop. But there are many problems with that claim. Not the least of which is that it is tantamount to saying that God gave His apostles a watered-down version of the church because they, presumably, couldn't bear the full-scale model. As we study the New Testament, we see that they collectively and consistently set an example for the form and functioning of the local church. As a rule, we ought to refrain from thinking ourselves wiser than the apostles.

One last word of warning. The sad truth is that, in practice, if we are willing to forego the pattern, we will quickly find reasons to ignore the commands as well. Dispensing with the pattern is rarely, if ever, the result simply of a desire to remain true to the Word. It often flows from a yearning to reshape the church to our liking. Once we head down that path, we will find it increasingly easy to jettison the commands (“They're cultural!”) along with the pattern.

So can we find explicit commands for every aspect of the church? No. Does that mean our Lord has no interest in how His bride behaves? No again. There are some things that love doesn't ask. There are things it doesn't need to.

A handwritten signature in red ink, appearing to be the initials 'JM' followed by a long, sweeping horizontal line.

U P L O O K

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UPLOOK magazine is intended to encourage the people of God in fidelity to His Word, fervency in intercessory prayer, labors more abundant, and love to the Lord. Believing in the practical Headship of Christ and the local autonomy of each assembly, this is not intended to be an official organ of any group or federation of local churches. The editor and authors take responsibility for materials published. For any blessing which accrues, to God be the glory.

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Wise Man?

We may be giving ourselves too much credit.

In 1735, the Swiss botanist Carl Linnaeus proposed an ingenious, shorthand way to name plants using one Latin word to designate the “genus” group and another to identify a particular “species” within that genus. Used together, the terms make up the unique “binomial” name of each plant species. The system has since been expanded to include bacteria, animals, and human beings. The two-word designation for humans is *Homo sapiens*, which literally means wise or knowing man. But have we named ourselves wisely? Surely we know a lot of information and we are intelligent, but is intelligence the same as wisdom?

The Eastern Gray Squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*) cannot pass a standard intelligence test but is often used as an object lesson of “wise” behavior because it stockpiles nuts in advance of winter when its food becomes scarce. The American Black Bear (*Ursus americanus*) is not a Rhodes Scholar, but it wisely prepares for winter by eating voraciously in the summer and fall, accumulating enough fat to sustain itself during its long winter hibernation. The female black bear breeds in the spring but delays development of the embryo until after beginning her winter hibernation, by which time she has put on enough fat to sustain both herself and her growing embryo.

To some extent wisdom includes the ability to act in the present to preserve the future good. But, like the examples above, much of animal behavior is unlearned and instinctive. It is this pre-programmed behavior we view as “wise.” By contrast, human beings, though highly intelligent, are not pre-programmed and so must learn wisdom by experience, insight, reflection, or even

by revelation. One writer wryly observed that wisdom and good judgment come from experience, but experience comes from poor judgment. One might reasonably conclude from this that animals are wise but unintelligent;

whereas, humans are intelligent but often unwise.

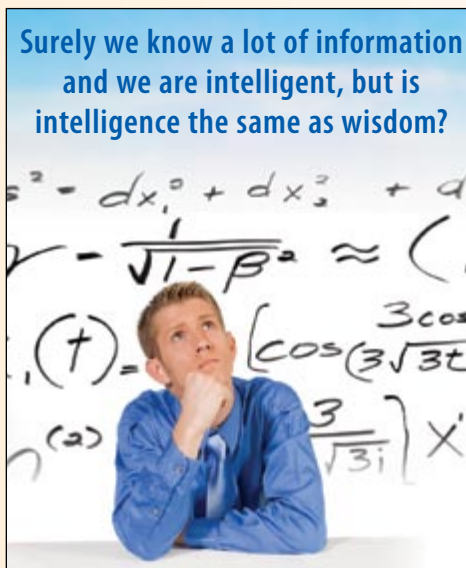
So, does “Wise Man” live up to the name? Do we use our intelligence wisely by planning now to supply future needs? Unfortunately, the answer seems to be no. Examples of intelligent people making unwise decisions abound. A recent *Frontline* episode suggested that most people do not plan for retirement, even though they know there is a time coming when they will be unable to work. Far more tragically, most people do not plan for their spiritual futures either. Choosing to ignore rather than accept

God’s present offer of salvation through Jesus Christ is the very antithesis of wisdom. It is foolishness on an eternal scale.

Bruce Sterling, imagining the future extinction of “Wise Man” in the year 2380 and writing as a non-human news reporter in the journal *Nature*, suggests the following epitaph on the fictional passing of *Homo sapiens*: “They were very, very curious but not at all farsighted.”¹ Thankfully, this needn’t describe believers. As Jim Elliot, the martyred missionary to the Auca Indians, wisely wrote in his diary, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.”

—MICHAEL G. WINDHEUSER, PH.D.

1 B. Sterling, “Homo sapiens declared extinct,” *Nature*, vol. 402, 1999, 125.





God (Still) Working in Sioux Falls

The concerted gospel effort in Sioux Falls (SF) this June was different in some respects from the outreach last year, but the one thing the same was the gracious hand of God outstretched in blessing. We know this was in direct answer your many prayers, so to those who interceded on our behalf we give our heartfelt thanks.

One difference between Good News SF '06 and '07 was the number who came. Last year about 220 joined in; this year there were about 60. Was that discouraging to those involved? Not at all! One factor was that we had two earlier outreaches in Alabama where many who would have otherwise attended SF invested their vacation weeks there. Another factor was the great news that other gospel efforts were ongoing (or soon to occur) in places like Fargo, ND, Markham, ON, Grand Junction, CO, as well as in Quebec, North Carolina, and Michigan where many believers were otherwise engaged. Praise the Lord!

Another encouragement was to see several who were reached in last year's SF outreach now helping in the assembly's gospel work. All in all, the Lord opened doors for us, and changed the weather reports so we could work. Quite a number professed Christ as Savior and many contacts have been made that will be followed up in the ensuing weeks. Please pray on for the local believers there. Some of those open to a spiritual discussion include several who have been exposed to JW's, a Hutterite family who have been excommunicated from their colony, and the local Muslim imam.

If you want more info on the outreach, you may visit www.uplook.org

CAMP HOPE BIBLE CONFERENCE

The saints at Silica Bible Chapel, Sacramento, CA extend a warm invitation to people of all ages, with a focus on young adults, to their 5th annual Camp Hope Bible Conference Jul 10-14 at Mount Hope Conference Center located just outside of Oroville, CA. Camp will be provided at no cost. The messages on the theme "Arise and Shine!" will be based on New Testament assembly principles. **Contact:** Hyung Lee 916-849-2562 Email: hyung_l@yahoo.com or Heather Harris 916-612-5492 Email: silicayouth@hotmail.com www.silicabiblechapel.com

BUCKIT WEEK IN MARYLAND

Held in a hotel in Maryland Jul 22-27, Buckit Week (Bible University - Christian Knowledge - Intensive Training) is neither a conference nor a camp. Rather it is intensive classroom and hands-on training in key doctrinal areas. Jabe Nicholson and Craig Shakarji will be the main teachers. See www.buckitweek.org for details.

FAMILY CAMP IN COLORADO

Fellowship Family Camp will be held Aug 12-16 near Estes Park, CO in the beautiful Rocky Mountains. The speaker will be Tom Wheeler (TX). **Contact:** 970-351-0570 or 970-356-0817.

UPWARD BOUND

Upward Bound will be held again this year from Aug 12-19 (the Bible conference at Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, ON) and continuing through Aug 19-24 (canoeing and camping trip in Algonquin Park, ON). Speakers expected are: Brian Russell (UK), Charlie Tempest (ON), Dennis LeBlanc (NB), Craig Shakarji (MD) and Sandy McEachern (NS). **Contact:** 902-830-1305 email: sandymceachern@hotmail.com

SHORT TERM MISSION IN QUEBEC

Join with the Baie Comeau Assembly for distribution of John 3:16 texts from Aug 12-18. Both French and English speaking believers are invited to assist with the Good

News Breakfast, make new friends, enjoy Bible studies, singing, sports, swimming and camp fires. Cost for camping and meals are \$75/person or \$150/family. **Contact:** Donald Cox, 4026 des Outardes, Jonquière QC, G7X 9B4 Tel/Fax: 418-542-5092 email: lizdon4@sympatico.ca

MEN'S BIBLE STUDY SEMINAR

Pine Bush Bible Camp, in the Catskill Mountains of NY, is planning an intensive Bible seminar Aug 26-30 for men who are serious about the study of God's Word. "Highlights in the Book of Genesis" with Randy Amos starts with Sunday dinner and ends with breakfast on Thursday. The cost is \$95.00. **Contact:** Charles Myers 732-451-9444 email: Cvspeedie@aol.com After July 1st, call Pine Bush Bible Camp 845-361-1871

TWIN CITIES LABOR DAY CONFERENCE

Assemblies in Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN will be hosting, in the will of the Lord, their 96th annual Labor Day

FRONT LINES *continued*

Conference, Aug 31-Sep 3.

The invited speakers are Charlie Fizer (IA) and Keith Trevolt (KS). The conference begins Friday evening at 7:30 PM with prayer and ends on Labor Day at noon. A children's program, teen challenge, nursery, bookstore and housing will be available. **Contact:** Glen Ellis at 763-572-1379 or for housing, call Steve Schletty at 763-572-2589.

DEARBORN, MI CONFERENCE

Dearborn Chapel will hold its Annual Conference Sep 15-16. The speaker will be Jim McKendrick (MI) on the subject "Commitment." The conference begins Saturday at 4:00 PM. Dearborn Chapel is located at 4180 Monroe Blvd., Dearborn Heights, MI 48127. **Contact:** Ross Rainey 734-453-8585 or David Donnelly 313-618-4791

CAMP HOPE LADIES CONFERENCE

Camp Hope in Dahlonga, GA announces their annual Ladies Conference to be held Sep 28-30, in the will of the Lord. Nancy Rollinger will be the speaker. The conference begins Friday with registration at 7:00 PM and ends Sunday at 10:00 AM. Cost is \$50 per individual. **Contact:** Barbara Thorpe at 706-359-6297

Prophecy charts in multiple languages available from www.MonctonGospelHall.com
Detail of Chinese chart at right.

e-mail: sambarb@nu-z.net

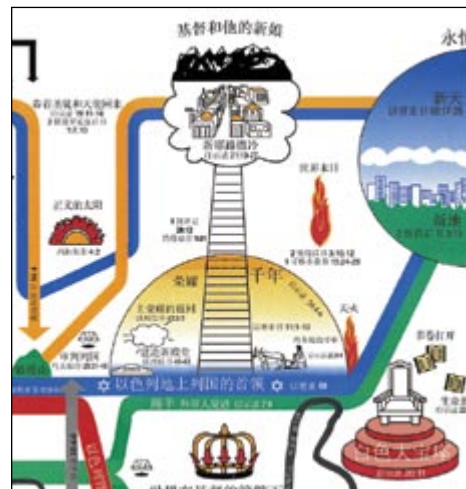
Camp Hope 770-536-4787 e-mail: camphopega@arilion.com or visit <http://www.camphopega.org> for a registration form.

MISSION SPRINGS, CALIFORNIA

The annual Pacific Coast Christian Conference will be held Oct 1-5. Please note the new location, Mission Springs, 75 miles south of San Francisco, CA in the Santa Cruz Mountains. The conference begins Monday with dinner at 7:00 PM and ends Friday after lunch. Speakers: Mike Fitzhugh (MI) and Bob Foutz (MI) **Contact:** Max Krieger 323-256-1992 or 323-788-5755 (cell) e-mail: maxnbethk@sbcglobal.net.

DIGITAL CHARTS

Recently, believers around the world have taken on the task of translating both the "Two Roads - Two Destinies" and "Biblical Prophecy" charts. Up to this point, the "Biblical Prophecy" chart has been translated into 40 languages. These charts are available in digital form at www.Monctongospelhall.com under the link "Resources", making them more accessible for evangelism work around the world. Audio teaching by



Jim Paul (ON) on the Prophecy chart can also be downloaded. For anyone who would like to undertake some translation work, a graphics only version is available. Please contact info@monctongospelhall.com if you would like to help in this effort.

Copies of the large 6 ft. by 12 ft. Prophecy chart (English only) and small versions of the English and French "Prophecy" and "Two Roads - Two Destinies" charts are also available for purchase. **Contact:** Richard Desrosiers email: rich4@rogers.com

HYMN BOOKS NEEDED

Heidelberg Bible Fellowship, a young, growing assembly in south-western Ontario is looking for copies of *Hymns of Worship and Remembrance* in good condition. If you have surplus ones that you are willing to make available, please contact Kevin Shantz at info@hbffweb.org or by phone at 519-503-1822.

RISE UP & LOOK

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

*The Lord is coming
Living in the Last days*

December 26-29, 2007
St. Louis, Missouri

18 different seminars will be offered plus 6 general sessions.

General Speakers:

Mr. Joe Reese Ontario, Canada

Mr. Alan Gamble Scotland

Mr. George Dawson New Delhi, India

Watch for additional information coming soon

HOME FOR SALE

A home is for sale on the Greenwood Hills Bible Conference grounds in PA. It is a newly renovated 2BR ranch with family room, spa room and includes all major appliances.

Contact: Howard Wooler,
7 Pine Way, Fayetteville PA, 17222
717-352-9463 Howard20@pa.net

SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES

Middle Eastern Bible Fellowship in Hazel Park, MI is an Arabic speaking assembly and is in urgent need for a couple to help with their youth ministry. There are about 25 senior high school and college students from seven different Middle Eastern nationalities who speak fluent English, in addition to over 80 boys and girls in the Sunday school program. The assembly is willing to help out financially any commended worker who has the burden to serve these young men and women.

Contact: Ata Mikhael
248-703-6565 (Cell) or 248-740-9057
email: ata6565@comcast.net



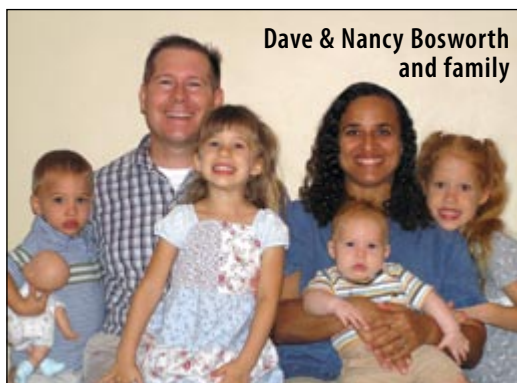
Believers Stewardship Services, Inc. is a ministry designed to glorify God by assisting Christians accomplish their financial and estate planning goals in fulfilling biblical stewardship. As it expands its nationwide ministries, *Believers Stewardship Services* is seeking additional Trust Officers. If you think that the Lord may call you to serve Him in this capacity, please review the position description and qualifications at www.believerstewardship.org or call Dave Allison at 888-338-7810.

COMMENDATIONS

Wm. & Lorna Hollensed

The saints meeting at Warrenville Bible Chapel, Warrenville IL commend brother Wm. C. Hollensed, D.C. and his wife Lorna to full time service with the Christian Chiropractors Assn., Inc.

Dr. Hollensed has made his living in the chiropractic field for many years. They have felt the Lord calling them out of private practice into an enlarged area of ministry. This new area of responsibility could take them throughout the U.S. as well as overseas as the Lord opens opportunities. Dr. Charlie and Lorna have been in happy and faithful fellowship at WBC for 20 years. They are both servants of the Lord in the true sense of the word. They have been in leadership roles and of great help to the assembly overall.



Dave and Nancy Bosworth
The saints who gather at Boulevard Bible Chapel, Pembroke Pines FL commend Dave and Nancy Bosworth to full time ministry in the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. This commendation would primarily include local area needs such as discipling of believers, visitation of the saints, organizing mission trips as well as an itinerant teaching ministry to area assemblies. Dave and Nancy will look to the Lord alone to supply their financial needs in this ministry as they are commended to the grace of God. ☝



ELDER HELPS *To feed, to take heed, and to lead*

Shepherding from the Good Shepherd (part 3)

Principle Number Three: The Good Shepherd volunteers to shepherd (Jn. 10:16-18).

This third principle is first suggested in John 10:16: *“And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring...”* The word for “must” (*dei*) carries the idea of an unavoidable and urgent necessity based on the very nature of things. The Good Shepherd cannot not volunteer. His nature, disposition, and personality all compel Him to corral the sheep. Thus, He volunteers to shepherd: *“...I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself”* (v. 17). Shepherding is His first choice out of a plethora of other invitations and options. He has no alternative “career” goals. There are no competing joys, amusements, or hobbies, for He lives to shepherd His sheep. To Him there is no greater joy.


Do we under-shepherds view our calling with the same joyful enthusiasm as the Good Shepherd? If given the option, we as elders might not consider shepherding our first choice. We might become disenchanted with the work as less stressful and more entertaining options entice us. Instead of finding great joy in tending the flock, we might find no joy at all. If so, then in spite of the circumstances that led to our discouragement, we must take responsibility for our paralysis. The secret to treatment lies in open confession to the Lord of our heart’s condition. He alone can restore us by allowing His soothing Spirit to tenderly bind and heal our wounds. Submissive honesty in our consciences is what is required of us if we are to experience His proven spiritual cure. His Spirit will do the rest as He remolds our souls.

The Saviour’s amplifies His pledge to shepherd still further as He states, *“I have the power to lay [My life] down and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father”* (Jn. 10:18b). The Lord Jesus Christ has been granted full command over the end of life, as well as the greater power of resurrection.

This is the highest authority any individual can have. With maximum resources in hand, He chooses to exercise them fully for the sheep’s welfare. He volunteers to invest all His wealth, up to, and including, His very life, for the sole purpose of tending sheep. There are no reserves to be spent. If examined, all of His heavenly storehouses would be empty.



Claude Dagenais / Stockphoto

Thus, as the lens of God’s Word begins to focus our thoughts, we must make full inspection of our hearts as shepherds. According to the Master Shepherd, the under-shepherd must lay all his assets (and liabilities) on the examination table. Exactly what are we holding back? Are we hiding behind the secret desire to end our “tour of duty” early so we might be free for our personal pursuits? Is our time and emotional energy unavailable for the Chief Shepherd’s service? Do we hold back some of our investments for ourselves? In short, do we daily lay down our lives for the sheep like the Good Shepherd did? 

We appreciate the comments and questions we receive. They help us deal with current needs. Please keep them coming to elders@uplook.org

Special thanks to Steve Price for contributing this four-part series on principles for shepherding from the Good Shepherd.

A Pattern Church

The fledgling saints at Thessalonica show us the way.

The author shows the practical steps taken in the Thessalonian assembly that are the secret of true spiritual progress.

What makes a local church a model to be admired or even emulated? Most would look at the visible signs of growth. For many Christians, the number of people meeting would be proof that the right things are happening. They would conclude that the programs would have to be good to facilitate and maintain growth. The preacher must be an outstanding communicator in order to attract and retain numbers. The facilities, finances, and fame all tend to be used as measuring sticks of success. People flock to large church buildings, convinced many of their needs will be met. Church leaders go great distances to attend seminars to learn the newest methods in developing a growing church.

The church in Thessalonica was considered a pattern for the people in Macedonia and Achaia. There is no mention of any of the above modern marks of success, such as the numbers attending or the programs offered. They were not likely to have had even a building, and no names are given to attract interest. The believers were an example because of the dramatic change that took place when they were saved. The saints in Thessalonica stand as a pattern

in three areas that would hardly be given notice in our modern world. Their conversion was obvious to all due to the outworking of repentance. Their consecration exhibited itself in their love of God and others. And their contemplation of the return of Christ became a visible part of their testimony.

The message of 1 Thessalonians 1 revolves around the actions implied in their work of

faith, their labor of love, and their patience of hope. F.A. Tatford expresses it,

*“How active and fruitful your faith has shown itself to be, how devoted and unwearyed your love, and what fortitude your hope in the Lord Jesus has inspired. In Thessalonica the devoted work was motivated by faith, the labor or exhausting toil was prompted by love, and the heroic endurance or patience was inspired by hope.”*¹

In verses 9 and 10 of the same chapter, the actions are expressed as “*turned, serve, and wait*” which amplify the meaning of “*work, labor, and patience.*”

Conversion

Their conversion was seen as a work of faith in that they turned to God from idols. The turn was not just intellectual but touched every aspect of their lives. It resulted in visible evidence or work that gave substance to their claim of faith.

The methods and means of a person coming to Christ often have a bearing on how the Christian life is lived out. These people responded to the preaching of the gospel and welcomed it, “*not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God*” (1 Thes. 2:13).

The gospel they heard conveyed the love of the Father, so that they recognized that they were “beloved” or loved of God (1 Thes. 1:4). There was also a corresponding work of the Holy Spirit giving power to the message. These people also came to know that once they were saved, they were in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and, as such, members of the elect. This thought of being elect has nothing to do with a process but rather enjoying position and privilege with all those



THE PATTERN CHURCH *continued*

Would Paul, writing today, be able to express thanks for our work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope?



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who are in Christ. As Dunlap says,

“In the New Testament, when the term ‘elect’ refers to the Christian, it is a collective term of endearment, dignity, and the high position the believer has in Christ.”²

They were so glad to have heard the gospel and so full of joy that they in turn “sounded forth” (1 Thes. 1:8) the good news. The Greek word for “sounded” is our word “echo,” so the imagery is that the gospel reverberated from them to all of Greece. Their faith was so obvious that the apostles did not even have to add to the testimony of these dear believers.

Consecration

Their consecration was seen as labor that flowed from love. When they turned to God from idols, it was to “serve the living and true God.” The word for “labor” is different than the word for “work” in that it conveys the idea of fatiguing work. They saw this type of effort demonstrated by Paul and his co-workers.

The lives of Paul and his companions were like an open book, so that Paul could refer to the example that was set. As Paul preached the gospel, he was careful to maintain a testimony that enhanced the message. The example demonstrated was replicated in the lives of the Thessalonian believers. These believers were faithful in their walk as followers of the Lord and also demonstrated their love by sounding out the message of the cross.

Contemplation

Their contemplation was seen in the patience or endurance produced by hope, and that they were looking for the return of Christ. There was a strong doctrinal basis for their hope. It was tied to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and included the understanding that they would not go through the Tribulation. Paul had taught them about the return of Christ and the judgment of God’s wrath that was to follow. Every chapter in 1 Thessalonians ends with a reference to the return of Christ, giving emphasis to the importance of this event.


Ryrie explains the words “to wait for His Son” (1 Thes. 1:10):

“the Greek word is a compound of the usual word for ‘wait’ preceded by a preposition which intensifies the idea, but which also means ‘up’ when standing by itself. The meaning is they were waiting up for their Lord.”³

There was a certain sense of expectancy and imminency. These truths so influenced their lives that they managed to demonstrate in daily living that they were heavenly-minded. The doctrine of the imminent return of Christ had a practical effect, so that the outworking of this truth became part of their testimony to the surrounding world.

Challenges

It is no wonder that Paul was continually thankful for the lives and testimony of these saints, and that he continued to pray for them. What joy they brought to the apostle’s mind as he remembered their faith, love, and hope, along with their standing in Christ.

One challenge for modern-day readers is to evaluate spirituality on the basis of God’s Word and to look for character and faithfulness in those who exhibit faith, love, and hope. Another further challenge is to consider what would be written of us individually or of our local church. Would Paul, writing today, be able to express thanks for our work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope? A third challenge relates to a question that has been asked: if it were illegal to be a Christian, would there be enough evidence in a court of law to convict us? It would be sad if the case were dismissed for lack of evidence. The believers at Thessalonica would have been easily convicted, and the prosecution would have no lack of witnesses to testify against them. Like Paul, their lives were an open book making visible to all the evidence of the transforming power of God through the gospel. A final challenge is the expression of our hope of the immediate return of Jesus. Can the surrounding world see our endurance and patience that comes from our faithful hope in the return of Christ? Are we standing, waiting up, and looking expectantly for the return of Christ to the extent that the prospect affects our daily living and shows clearly in our testimony? 

Endnotes

1 F.A. Tatford, *Paul’s Letters to the Thessalonians* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1992), p. 22.

2 D. Dunlap, *Limiting Omnipotence* (Port Colbourne, ON: Gospel Folio Press, 2004), p. 91.

3 C.C. Ryrie, *First and Second Thessalonians* (Lincoln, NE: Back to the Bible, 1959), p. 30.

Planting the Church at Thessalonica

Grace can make beauty flourish in the most unlikely surroundings.

Important lessons may be learned for gospel work today in examining the methodical way Paul worked in Asia Minor and Europe.

Paul and Silas had crossed over into Europe with the gospel in response to a vision which Paul had experienced. In this way, the gospel came to this large Roman province which ran across an area including much of northern Greece and beyond that into the modern countries of Macedonia and Albania. A man of Macedonia appeared in the vision inviting him to come over and help them. The first city entered was Philippi. An assembly was planted there under circumstances of violent opposition arising from a conflict between business interests and the gospel. Paul and Silas soon passed on to other Macedonian cities: Amphipolis, Apollonia, and Thessalonica.

Paul's strategy

Paul followed his usual practice of starting in a new center by approaching the Jewish synagogue if there was one. This made good sense, for in the synagogue he would find people whom one would expect to be waiting for the coming of Messiah, the Christ. At Philippi, there were evidently not enough Jews to form a synagogue—they needed ten adult males—so there were a few women who met at the riverside to pray. In Thessalonica, there was a synagogue, so Paul went there. For three weeks he presented the evi-

dence that Messiah had indeed come.

Paul opened the Scriptures and “explained and proved” from them that the expected Messiah was Jesus. No doubt he would have included those evidences which are outlined for us in the four gospels. The account in Acts chapter 17, however, emphasizes the vital Old

Testament witness for the sufferings of the Christ. The subject of His sufferings and rejection was not always understood by the Jews. Having dealt with His sufferings, Paul had, of course, to show that the Old Testament also established the fact of His resurrection. We remember that the cross was a stumbling block to the Jews.

Some of his Jewish hearers believed, but the larger number of converts were proselytes, converts to the Jewish religion from Gentile backgrounds. We also read of quite a few leading women believing. It is an interesting fact that many upper-class women in the Roman world accepted Christ in these early days of gospel preaching. There was, however, a hostile response from many Jews, who collected a rabble from the marketplace to cause a riot. Their aim was to bring the preachers before the public assembly of the city. When they failed to find the preachers, they dragged Jason, one of the believers, before the magistrates. Luke uses the correct technical title of these officials, as archaeological evidence has shown.

It is instructive to see on what grounds opponents of the gospel sought to have preachers convicted of offences against the state. In this case, they were accused of causing civil unrest, and, more seriously, of setting up the claims of one Jesus as a king in opposition to Caesar. It is ironic that as Christianity spread, the crucial issue which led to serious persecution by the Roman authorities in later times was precisely this matter: was Caesar the supreme authority, or could the authority of Jesus Christ be considered greater? In effect, these men accused the Christians of insurrection. Probably no other charge could have caused a Roman official more concern.

Such was the bitterness of these opponents

“...Take root downward,
and bear fruit upward.”
see Isaiah 37:31



PLANTING OF THE CHURCH AT THESSALONICA *continued*

of the gospel that they followed Paul and Silas to their next destination, Berea. Interestingly, the Bereans responded differently in that they studied the Scriptures to see if the preachers were really proving what they claimed to prove from the Word of God. Paul had to pass on from Berea, though Silas and Timothy were able to remain there for a time.

The eternal significance

So much for the historical facts. For a treatment of the deeper factors—the spiritual growth and warfare—we need to turn to Paul’s letter to the assembly at Thessalonica that he wrote some time later. He recalls the planting of the assembly as it affected the preachers and hearers. He declares that they had experienced the power of the Holy Spirit—accurate and eloquent preaching was not enough. More than that, they had seen what kind of behavior and values were characteristic of the preachers. Thus, when they responded, they were, among other things, becoming “imitators” of the preachers as well as of the Lord. What they were attracted to was reality. They observed Paul as he labored night and day, working to support himself and his co-workers, giving unstintingly to ensure their blessing. By the time this letter, 1 Thessalonians, was written, there were more Gentile believers than in the first few days or weeks. Their perception of what Christian living was like was gained from observing what kind of people named the name of Christ. Pioneering preachers have an awesome responsibility to represent the values of Christian living, putting flesh on the “theory.” One recalls seeing a missionary preach for months, then years, until the first convert was a young lady from next door to the missionaries. She had watched the missionary couple and decided that they really did mean what they said. At first she suspected that they must be playacting, for she had never met people whose values were so altruistic.

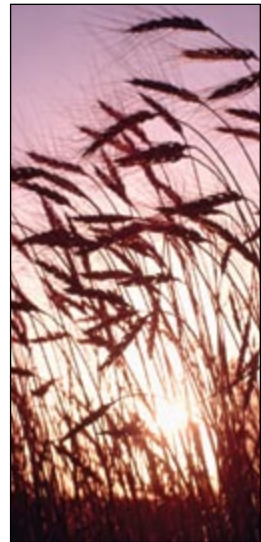
In the face of the sharp attacks which followed professions of salvation, reality was an utter necessity in Thessalonica. Sham could not

have withstood the heat. But not only did they stand under the pressure, they experienced deep joy. For this reason Thessalonica and Philippi held a special place of affection in Paul’s heart. He writes more about joy and affection in his letters to them than he does anywhere else. They were poor and persecuted. But they were real.

This genuineness was a vital basis for their gospel outreach. When they preached, people could see what a transformation had first taken place in their own lives. Their God was the living God, not just a name in a book. Before conversion, their gods were idols—unhearing, unseeing, unhelpful, powerless, and unworthy of their devotion. In the Old Testament, it is interesting to observe idolatry described as “turning aside to lies.” God is not only living, He is also true.

The Thessalonian believers turned to God to serve. There could be no thought here of deciding to believe and maybe later deciding to cease believing. God had given them new life in Christ through the new birth. They were captivated and “enslaved” to the living God. He deserved their devotion. They were His bondmen in joyful service. They could afford to be joyful, for they were waiting for God’s Son from heaven. They had a new and living hope. They could reflect that the One who had purchased their redemption had paid the ultimate price for it. It was for Him they waited. Before conversion they had had no hope, and no prospect except coming wrath.

This story of the coming of the gospel to Thessalonica presents us with a challenge. We dare not complain that we are living in a day when people are so far gone in godless materialism or hedonism that we cannot expect much response from them. Could it be that we make little impact because we ourselves are shallow people, lacking conviction? Paul preached with “much conviction,” fully persuaded of what he preached, or rather *Whom* he preached. Only God can save people, whether they appear to be decent citizens or hopeless wretches. He can save people, however low they have sunk. But are we perhaps the problem? 🕊



Only God can save people, whether they appear to be decent citizens or hopeless wretches.

The Preaching of the Church

Roots in the Bible bring fruit in the saints.

"...you received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God, which effectively works also in you that believe" (1 Thes. 2:13).

"And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the Word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified." Such were Paul's parting words to the elders at Ephesus (Ac. 20:32). He loved them and he loved that assembly. Although he would have rejoiced to remain to help in their spiritual growth, he knew that the Lord had a far better plan for that assembly than even the permanent, personal attention of an apostle: the Lord Himself would care for the church. It is important to notice *how* the Lord intended to do so: through "the Word of His grace." The presence of an apostle was a wonderful privilege. But the Scriptures are God's infinitely greater provision for the ongoing growth of

each and every assembly.

We see this principle at work in the assembly at Thessalonica. Two factors that stand out as we read through the letter are the extremely healthy spiritual condition of the church and the vital, prominent role of the Word of God. The link is not coincidental. When Paul came to Thessalonica, the Word was his tool of choice to accomplish God's work in an immensely hostile environment. Examining the role of the Scriptures in the founding and establishing of such a vibrant church reveals many principles that will help us if we desire to see the same work achieved today in a world that remains antagonistic to our Lord and His message.

How the Word was preached

The Word was preached in power and in the Holy Spirit (1 Thes. 1:5). Without the Holy Spirit we are impotent. If we desire true, lasting fruit, we must not only preach the Word but also do so in humble reliance upon the Lord. Is this our attitude? Do we take time to earnestly pray before, during, and after preaching?

The Word was preached with full conviction (1 Thes. 1:5). Paul's genuine conviction led to corresponding action. Our hearers can tell if we're serious. If we speak of the primacy of the world to come, but do so half-heartedly, or live in such a way that it's clear our hearts are set on this world, can we expect those who hear us to take our message seriously?

The Word was preached amidst much opposition (1 Thes. 2:2). Will we give up when there is resistance and opposition, or will we press on, demonstrating to those observing that our message is worth the cost?



Dan Spoelstra

THE PREACHING OF THE CHURCH *continued*

The Word was preached not to please men, but to please God (1 Thes. 2:4). There will always be the temptation to water-down the truth or gloss over certain parts in order to avoid offending others—even believers. It is helpful to consider whether the fear of man causes us to adjust what we preach. At the same time, this verse does not teach that anyone who is displeasing men is automatically pleasing God. Some believers delight in being offensive.

The Word was preached out of fond affection (1 Thes. 2:8). The goal of his instruction was love (1 Tim. 1:5). The ministry of the Word is not an impersonal work where “speakers” churn out messages by rote. True ministry will follow the example of our Lord and be motivated by love and compassion for the hearers.

The Word was preached with much effort and labor (1 Thes. 2:8f). It will cost us to be faithful in the Word. Time will be required for study, for preparation, for follow-up, and this will often be on top of the normal labor and responsibilities of life. Be prepared to sacrifice recreation and “free” time and sleep. Paul reminded the Thessalonians that he and his co-workers hadn’t merely imparted the Word to them, but had poured their very lives into that church. It required “*labor and hardship...day and night*” (v.9). If preaching and teaching the Word is a hobby for the speaker, then he should expect obeying the Word to be a hobby for his listeners.

How the Word was received

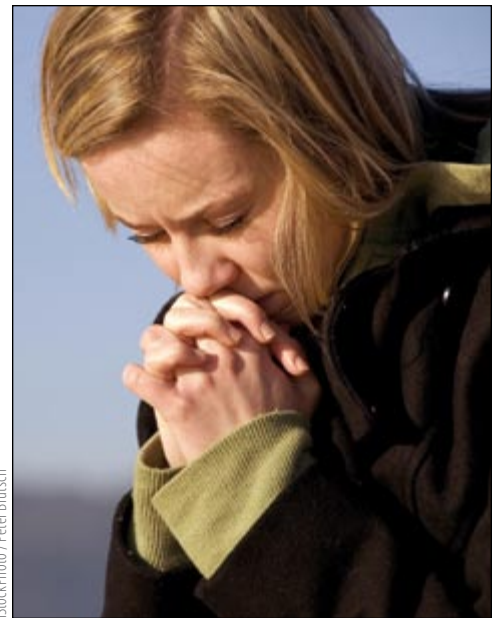
Those are some of the lessons for those whose privilege and responsibility it is to preach and teach. But for the Word to have its full effect in our lives, it needs to be not only faithfully preached but faithfully received. Much of the reason for the excellent spiritual results of the Word in Thessalonica is found in the response of the believers to the Word of God.

They received the Word with joy (1 Thes. 1:6). Even in much tribulation! Is this our response to the Bible?

Joy? Eagerness? Hunger? The Lord enjoins us to “*buy the truth*” (Prov. 23:23) because we will value it more if we sacrifice for it. You can be sure the Thessalonians paid a high price for the truth. But if we are raised in a Christian home, saved at an early age, and grow up in a Bible-believing church, we have been bombarded with the truth for as long as we can remember. This unspeakable privilege carries a hidden danger: the wealth of truth can cause us to take it for granted. Do we thrill to hear the Word of God, or do we endure messages as part of our Christian duty, watching the clock and praying about no loftier topic than that the message end on time? The Scriptures ought to excite us. If they don’t, we should get on our knees and confess this shortcoming to the Lord, asking Him to give us the spiritual hunger we lack.

They passed it on (1 Thes. 1:8). The Word of God “sounded forth” from Thessalonica throughout Macedonia and Achaia and beyond. This was largely through their godly example of eager acceptance of the Word. But, paradoxically, one of the best ways to get the most out of the truth is to share it with others rather than hoarding it for ourselves. The Bible is a treasure that grows as it is shared. Not every believer has the responsibility of public preaching. But passing on the Word to others in personal conversation is the responsibility of every Christian. It is as we do this (and prepare to do this) that we enter into the good of the Scriptures in ways that we never can just by listening. How active are we in sharing the Word with others? Do we witness to the lost? Do we instruct our children—not just formally, but constantly and naturally when we’re relaxing in our homes, when we’re walking by the way, when we prepare for sleep at night,

The Scriptures ought to excite us...



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...If they don’t, we should get on our knees and confess this shortcoming to the Lord, asking Him to give us the spiritual hunger we lack.

when we arise in the morning (Deut. 6:7)? When we meet with Christian friends, do we discuss the Scriptures—again, not just in formal Bible studies, but as part of our casual and natural conversation?

They recognized that it was God’s Word (1 Thes. 2:13).

They were not interested in the theories, ideas, traditions, or philosophies of men. The believers in Thessalonica were perpetually conscious of the fact that they were hearing the Word of the Lord. This knowledge made them hungry for it and promoted obedience to it, as well as a desire to pass on its riches to others.

They used the Word to help one another (1 Thes. 4:18).

“Therefore comfort one another with these words.” What an encouragement each of us would be in our assemblies if we were constantly looking for ways to take what we learn from the Bible and use that to help and encourage each other! Daily.

The results of the Word


Given the godly preaching and reception of the Word, is it any wonder that there were life-changing results in the church?

The Word produced joy (1 Thes. 1:6). Their society and persecution provided a great deal for the believers to be discouraged about—if discouragement was their goal. But they discovered the gospel to be more than sufficient to offset any trial the enemy could throw at them. In the midst of adversity, the Word shone brightly and was the balm and sustenance of the people of God.

The Word was effective (1 Thes. 2:13). This is God’s vehicle for the spiritual growth of his children. The Word “performs its work in you who believe.” Even if we don’t understand everything we hear or read, it is living and powerful, and as we sincerely take it in, we are edified, for “it is able to build us up.”

The Word strengthened and encouraged and comforted (1 Thes. 3:2; 4:18). The road Home can be long

and difficult. Our heavenly Father knows that we need strength and encouragement and comfort along the way. And He has lovingly provided all of these for us in His Word. If we find ourselves lacking any of these we ought to consider whether or not we are neglecting the channel by which He imparts them to us.

Do we desire the same spiritual fruit and growth that was so evident in the church at Thessalonica? Then we ought to emulate the lessons of preaching and receiving that were modeled for us by these dear believers. 



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Do we desire the same spiritual fruit and growth that was so evident in the church at Thessalonica?

CORRECTION NOTICE

It has been graciously pointed out to me that an editorial change I made to an article in the Jan/Feb issue of *Uplook* inadvertently misrepresented the author’s intended teaching. Regarding John 17:5 of our Lord’s high priestly prayer, Boushra Mikhael’s original words were, “Now on His way back to heaven He requests that His humanity would be glorified with that same glory which He had with the Father before the world was.” My apologies for any misunderstanding. —ED.

I AND II THESSALONIANS:

Although there is overlap in the truths taught in the Pauline epistles, each letter has a distinctive role to play. Paul was only a short time in Thessalonica before persecution advanced his travel plans. Therefore whatever he says that they already knew must have been on the apostle's list of the first things that should be taught to new believers, a helpful checklist for those involved in discipling recent converts.

BASIC BIBLE DOCTRINE

"For our gospel came...unto you... And you became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word..." (I, 1:5-6).

"For from you sounded out the word of the Lord..." (I, 1:8).

"Also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which you heard of us..." (I, 1:13).

"For you know what commandments we gave you..." (I, 4:2).

"Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions (transmissions) which you have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle" (II, 2:15).

PRESENT SUFFERING, COMING GLORY

"You turned to God...And to wait for His Son from heaven..." (I, 1:9-10).

"...No man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto. For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation..." (I, 3:3-4).

"But of the times and seasons, brethren, you have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly...But you, brethren, are not in the darkness..." (see I, 5:1-5).

"Remember ye not, that, when I was with you, I told you these things?" (see II, 2:1-5).



Paul's First Aid Kit for New Believers

EXAMPLE AND EVANGEL

"You know what manner of men we were among you" (I, 1:5).

"For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you..." (see I, 2:1-8).

"For you remember, brethren, our labor and travail..." (see I, 2:9-10).

"As you know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you" (see I, 2:11-12).

"For yourselves know how you ought to follow us: for we behaved..." (see II, 3:7-9).

WHOLLY HOLY

"Ye are witnesses...how holily and justly and unblamably we behaved...and you know how we exhorted...that you would walk worthy of God..." (I, 2:10-12).

"...We exhort you...that, as have received of us how you ought to walk and to please God..." (I, 4:1).

For you know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, even your sanctification..." (I, 4:2-3).

PRACTICAL LOVING AND LIVING

"Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope..." (I, 1:3).

"...Timotheus...brought us good tidings of your faith and charity..." (I, 3:6).

"But as touching brotherly love, you need not that I write unto you..." (see I, 4:9-10).

"...When we were with you, we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat." (II, 3:10).



Amazing Grace

We have received “grace upon grace,” “manifold” and “unsearchable riches” of His grace.

The author describes grace as a mighty river, inexhaustible in its supply. But this article traces one tributary of that flow, the present sufficiency of God’s grace.

We may ransack every dictionary in the world only to discover that there are no adjectives that adequately describe the grace of God. It is so multifaceted, versatile, all-inclusive, and all-embracing. By this we dare to mean that there is no circumstance that can put the true believer in Christ beyond its reach or rob him of the help he constantly needs. “Amazing grace” the once-profligate John Newton called it. John Bunyan wrote a weighty tome on the subject and titled it “Grace Abounding.” And every true Christian may sing from the heart with Robert Robinson, “O, to grace how great a debtor daily I’m constrained to be.”

More recently, Bernard Osborne has reminded us that the word “grace” is found over 160 times in the New Testament. He goes on to say that,

- In the past, grace provided salvation (Titus 2:11; Eph. 2:5, 8)
- In the present, grace pledges sufficiency (2 Cor. 12:9)
- In the future, grace promises satisfaction (Eph. 2:7)¹

This division of grace into its past, present, and future influence in the life of a believer is concise and helpful. Here I am focusing on His present grace. Yet we must not think that grace can be compartmental-

ized, or that it is possible to be blessed by God’s grace in the past and yet not be the subject of God’s present and future grace.

It may be compared to a river. Once the stream begins to flow, it flows on irresistibly over all obstacles until it reaches its estuary. “He which began a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Php. 1:6). Without a firm grasp of the grace of God, we

cannot become fruitful; we need to know it in truth (Col. 1:6). Let us think together through some of its aspects. As a starting point, we are all familiar with...

Grace and the gospel

Grace is something inherent in, and essential to, that liberating message. It is called “the gospel of the grace of God” (Ac. 20:24). Self-righteous people find it difficult to accept undeserved favor because it sets aside self-effort and the works of the Law. Perhaps, in order to make it easier for them to grasp the nature of this grace, we may use the acronym, “God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense.” But, while true, that does not do full justice to the word or the far-reaching effect of grace. Shortcuts on a journey will often get us to a desired destination more quickly, but in the process may rob us of a magnificent view. So it is in this case. God does much more than save perishing sinners and promise them a home one day in heaven, wonderful though that is. Those destined to be “forever with the Lord” are “born again”; they are “sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise”; He “abides with them forever” (1 Thes. 4:17; 1 Pet. 1:23; Eph. 1:13-14; Jn. 14:16). These blessings and all their tributaries are included in His saving grace.

But no one should think that mere gratitude for this undeserved outpouring of His kindness towards us will result in lives of total devotion. Ingratitude is part of our fallen condition. We need a...

Grace that motivates

We may easily sing,

After all He’s done for me,

After all He’s done for me,

How can I do less than give Him my best



*And live for Him completely,
After all He's done for me?*

But that chorus makes us ask, if this is the case, why is it that so few of us are living sacrificially for the Lord? The truth is we are not naturally thankful enough. Ten men were healed but only one came back to give glory to God and to thank His Son (Lk. 17:11-19). And the initial gratitude which we may feel at being freed from the penalty of our sins will soon wear off if it is not refueled by being taught in the Word and abounding in it (Col. 2:7). Only this will sustain a lifetime of devoted service. Paul was truly grateful for the grace of God shown in his salvation but also knew he had to give credit to the grace of God for a lifetime lived for the Lord (1 Tim. 1:12-14; 1 Cor. 15:10). It is the continual supply of grace that will inspire, motivate, and sustain believers in “giving their best” throughout their lives.

It might be appropriate at this point for some of us to get down on our knees and say, “Lord, I am by nature an ungrateful person. Much of my service lately has been perfunctory, done because I knew it was what my brothers and sisters would expect. I have gone along with the crowd and have been content with a mere show of devotion. I come to You for the ‘more grace’ You have promised to those who humble themselves” (Jas. 4:6).

But it is one thing to have it in our hearts to live for Christ and another to have the wisdom and understanding to do His will. Along with grace that motivates and inspires we need also...

Grace that instructs

It is His grace that enlightens us as to what the will of God is. Can there be a true Christian who does not struggle to know this? Often our difficulty lies in thinking of the will of God primarily in terms of what profession to follow, where to live, who to marry, etc. Scripture does not provide specific instructions for each individual regarding these things, only principles by which we may come to a decision. But it does speak to all believers, and with great clarity, regarding

our daily conduct: “...this is the will of God, your sanctification” (1 Thes. 4:3).

It is in these areas of holiness and separation that sinners need, not only motivation, but instruction. The grace of God provides both. “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age” (Titus 2:11-12).

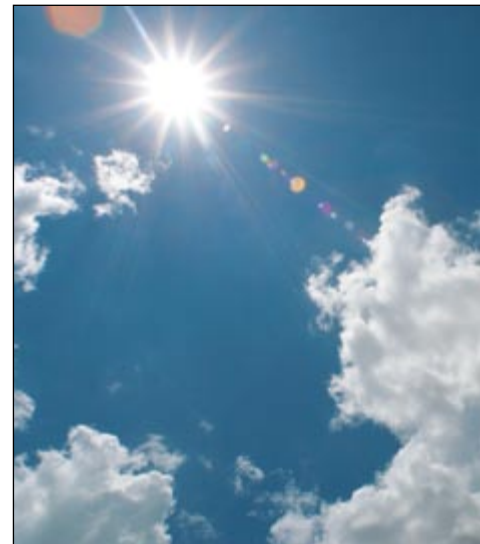
It will help us to understand how this happens if we remember that, along with written instructions, we have the Instructor Himself permanently dwelling within us. It is He who prompts us to love when our nature might tell us to hate, to give to others when nature might tell us to care for our own interests, to go on happily serving when nature might tell us it is time we got a break, etc.

That leads us to think of another aspect of our subject which is...

Grace that enables

We have thought of God's grace as proclaimed in the preaching of the gospel, of that same grace motivating those who believe to do the will of God, of that grace also that goes on to teach us through the holy Scriptures and by the Holy Spirit. But the opposition to such a life is exceedingly strong and we lack the power to overcome our formidable foes: the world, the flesh, and the devil.

We need to be sure that what God provides is more than equal to the opposition. His grace is sufficient in every area of conflict. Our recognized vulnerability to the world's allurements, our inability to subdue the flesh, and our susceptibility to the wiles of the devil should drive us to Him instead of relying on our native wisdom and strength. Confessed weakness and bold asking provide opportunity for His grace to be supplied (Heb. 4:16). But deliverance is not



Confessed weakness and bold asking provide opportunity for His grace to be supplied.

AMAZING GRACE *continued*

experienced by those who are self-confident. We must appropriate the grace that God supplies with the strength to will and to do what pleases Him. Even that spiritual giant Paul confessed that it was *“by the grace of God I am what I am.”* Before we gladly avail ourselves of such enabling grace, we have to come to the place where we confess, *“I am as a man that has no strength”* (Ps. 88:4). That is a bitter pill for anyone to swallow. Paul elaborates graphically on that experience in Romans 7: *“I know that in me (that is in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I do not find.”* Obviously we cannot rely on the strength of our wills to carry us along. Kate Wilkinson wrote,

*May the Word of Christ dwell richly
In my heart from hour to hour,
So that all may see I triumph
Only through His power.*

There is still more. The Scriptures show that we are surrounded by an...

All-encompassing grace


All who are justified by faith also stand in grace (Rom. 5:1f; 1 Pet. 5:12). That is, it is the position, territory, or sphere in which we are placed; it is the very atmosphere in which we live. His grace surrounds us as believers and (happily) we cannot go beyond its limits. Any of us may fall badly or fail miserably in some way, but even then the grace of God is present and encompasses us to bring about the necessary chastening to ensure our restoration.

Someone may object that these views of the grace of God promote antinomianism; that they have known of those who professed faith, persisted in living in known sin, and died unrepentant. We can only reply that it is unwise to let case histories determine or modify the plain teaching of Scripture. But I need to speak tenderly. Most of us have loved ones who provide an example of the case cited above. We have hopes that somehow things are better for them than we fear. Yet we all must remember that the Lord knows those that are His. The assurance, as

far as we are concerned, comes when there is a departure from iniquity (2 Tim. 2:19). Scripture plainly speaks of those who have superficial faith, those in whom the Lord put no confidence (Jn. 2:23-25). There were those also who believed in a way but afterwards left Him (Jn. 6:66). And the situation becomes more difficult when we know that true believers may go so far as to disown Him under pressure, as Peter did. Yet such cannot continue in sin. Why not?



They stand in grace. The discipline which they will surely now experience is a mark that they are true sons and not illegitimate children. Mere professors are not the subjects of such grace. That is why they justify their actions, persist in their evil, seem to have little concern, and no corrective discipline seems to overtake them.

So, if the Father has to teach those of us who *“believe to the saving of the soul”* (Heb. 10:39) by humbling experiences, He will do it. It is an expensive way to learn though. Better to learn the grace of God from His Word and gratefully accept it. I pray that we all may do so. As for me, I am still learning—but enjoying my lessons. 

Endnote

1 Bernard Osborne, “Grace,” in *Treasury of Bible Doctrine*, ed. J. Heading and C.E. Hocking (West Glamorgan, UK: Precious Seed Publications, 1977).

If the Father has to teach us by humbling experiences, He will do so.

Progress in Thessalonica

Their spiritual growth was evident to all. Is ours?

The author provides some practical keys to maturity by looking at the early growth of this persecuted church.

Paul the apostle wrote the first letter to the Thessalonian church while he was in Corinth. According to Acts 17, Paul spent approximately three weeks with the fledgling church. After his success in depleting the ranks of the synagogue by exposing them to the light of the gospel of Christ, Paul reluctantly left Thessalonica and headed to a safer place. But Paul left a piece of himself there and longed to see the newborn saints grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus.

Paul's love for the saints drove him to send Timothy to check on their spiritual progress. The epistle to the Thessalonians is Paul's response to Timothy's report to him. The letter bears witness to the progress of the Thessalonian believers. In the letter, Paul

writes of the evidence of the progress of the church and the effect of its progress. Arguably, the letter also contains an explanation for the progress of the church in Thessalonica.

One unique attribute of this letter is that there is no corrective language. The letter is filled with thanksgiving, encouraging words, and exhortative comments, but not one word of correc-

tion! While it can be certain that the church was not perfect, it is noteworthy that Paul was so pleased with the progress of the church that his focus was on the encouragement he received from them and on exhorting them to *"excel still more and more"* (1 Thes. 4:1). This fact should inspire any serious follower of Christ Jesus to examine the progress of this church and compare it to his own.

Evidence of progress

The church's progress began the moment the saints "heard the Word of God" from Paul and his traveling companions. Upon hearing that Word, they received it, and faith as well. More than that, they accepted it as truly the Word from God to be obeyed according to who God was, not merely the words of men (1 Thes. 2:13). This strong beginning is the foundation for the future growth of the church. Indeed, recognizing the Bible, all of it, as the very Word of God is a necessary ingredient for spiritual growth.

Their reception of the Word, even their reception of the Word as being from God, was not merely academic. The newly converted and taught saints did not sit around either the synagogue or their homes merely discussing the newly received truths, but in fact, they began to live it out. Individual spiritual growth and corporate progress require that the truth changes those who receive it. Too often lifestyles and customs affect the implementation of truth, rather than vice versa. It is worth remembering that Christianity is a life to be lived, not a theology to be debated. History proves that when the church is distracted with lofty theological arguments, true spiritual progress suffers. In contrast, when believers allow truth to change their lives, spiritual progress (even revival) follows.

Paul wrote that the church had *"became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea"* (1 Thes. 2:14). But they didn't stop there. After imitating the churches of God, they then became *"an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia."* True progress is evident when the Lord begins to use believers as examples in the lives of others.



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PROGRESS IN THESSALONICA *continued*

Effects of progress

As the Thessalonian church was growing and progressing in their relationship with the Lord, the effect of that growth began to spread far and wide. The church was praised for its relationship to God and to men. Their faith to God was as evident as their love towards mankind. The Holy Spirit inspired the following report about the saints in Thessalonica: *“For the Word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth”* (1 Thes. 1:8).

Paul also wrote, *“now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia”* (1 Thes. 4:9f). The Thessalonians’ testimony was so loud and so pervasive that Paul did not need to speak highly of them; they were already well-known and respected for their walk with the Lord Jesus. This is quite a challenge! Every local church, every believer, every ministry should ask itself, “Does our testimony speak as loudly as our marketing materials?”

In addition to having a good testimony, the lives of the believers at Thessalonica bore witness to true repentance and service to God. Furthermore, they lived with the return of Christ ever before them. Paul characterized them as awaiting, patiently awaiting, the return of the One whom they served. Living in the light of the imminent return of the Lord Jesus Christ is the result of a spiritually mature life.

One other effect of the Thessalonian church’s progress was that their current position was not satisfactory to themselves or to those that loved them. Twice Paul encouraged them to “excel still more” or to “abound still more.” Any believer that has progressed in his relationship with the Lord will undoubtedly recognize that there is still much work to be done.


Explanation for the progress

One might ask, “How is it that this new church held such a special place in Paul’s heart and,

though young in age, progressed so quickly?” The answer seems clear. While Paul spent a mere three weeks teaching the saints, he did not teach them “light” subjects. No, indeed, Paul taught them deep truths. Paul mentions in chapter 1, verse 4, the concept of election, and in each chapter the truth of the Lord’s return is mentioned.

In three weeks, Paul taught the saints truths that we rarely hear taught in our assemblies today. On more than one occasion, we have heard reports of biblical truths being set aside for the sake of expediency or to please a growing crowd. How do truths get set aside? Very simply: They are no longer taught as truth and no longer received as the Word of God.

Instead of teaching dispensational truths and typology, we spend our time exhorting the saints to attend prayer meetings and to “not neglect to meet together.” Instead of delving into the riches of Romans (topics like justification, sanctification, glorification, etc.), the saints are chastised to dress modestly—some young men must be told not to wear flip flops and shorts to breaking of bread, and some sisters must be asked to wear more clothing! As in Christ’s day, we ought to be addressing the deeper matters without neglecting these others (Mt. 23:23).

Until the deep truths of the Word of God are taught and subsequently received as the Word of God, our local churches will stagnate. There will be no sounding forth the Word of the Lord. There will be no setting a good example to others. There will be no evidence of faith in God and love for all mankind unless the saints are well-taught and lives are subsequently changed by the reception of the Scriptures and submission to the truths contained therein. 

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In addition to having a good testimony, the lives of the believers at Thessalonica bore witness to true repentance and service to God.

The Prospect of the Church

Living in the light of His coming.

As the world gets darker, the light should shine brighter. Is it in your heart?

We were greeting one another in the parking lot after meeting when a family pulled in to make a drive-by inquiry about what we believe. I was glad to tell them that we believe the Bible and preach the gospel. I went on to explain the gospel as I sought an opportunity to touch a soul. The wife waved me off and interrupted to ask, “What do you believe about the rapture?” “Oh, I said, it’s the next great event for the Church!” She said they used to believe that, too, but after studying more deeply they no longer believe the church will be raptured. I suggested they go back and read 1 Thessalonians again and not study it quite so deeply (tongue in cheek), but take it for what it says. I encouraged them to come by again soon to talk further.

Isn’t it great that we can read the Bible and take God at His Word? He says what He means and means what He says!

Some may think it unwise to explain the truth of the rapture to new believers, but I’m glad the apostle Paul did not follow their theory. Estimates are that Paul’s visit to Thessalonica was as short as three weeks to two months. In that little window of opportunity, Paul’s message of the glorious gospel caused these idolaters to respond to God’s grace.

In his first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul mentions the Lord’s coming five times. You’ll find it at the end of every chapter. Each time His coming is seen in a different setting, reminding me that the Lord’s coming should influence every area of my life. I want to live in light of His coming! It’s the glorious prospect of the church.

Salvation in light of His coming (1 Thes. 1:9-10)

We find that the testimony of the gospel bore much fruit among the people of Thessalonica. It came in power to save and transform their lives. Their testimony became known throughout every place and they became examples to the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The Scriptures declare their testimony as how they “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven” (1 Thes. 1:9-10).

Notice the order of their response. They turned to God from idols. There was no power to free them from idols without first turning to God. Then they began to serve the living and true God, as opposed to dead idols and false gods! But that’s not all. They were waiting “for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.”

The appearing of the Lord Jesus, who loved them and gave Himself for them, was foremost in their hearts. They longed to see Him and were saved in light of His coming! There was no longer room for idols in their hearts.

Serving in light of His coming (1 Thes. 2:19-20)

Paul and his companions were an example to these new believers. He reminds them of his and his co-workers’ labor and toil, night and day, so as not to be a burden to them (1 Thes. 2:9). What motivated Paul in his service, and what would motivate them to follow his example? It was the coming of the Lord! In 1 Thessalonians 2:19 Paul writes, “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?”

The Lord Jesus said, “I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is



THE PROSPECT OF THE CHURCH *continued*

coming when no one can work" (Jn. 9:4). Similarly, if we are going to serve the Lord, we must do so *now!* There is a reward for labor done for Him. The prospect for the apostle and the Thessalonians is the same for you and me. They served in light of His coming and had no time for kicking back or letting up!

Stability in light of His coming (1 Thes. 3:12-13)

This young work had a good start but needed encouragement. It needed the personal touch of a man of God who had been proven and could be trusted. Paul sent Timothy to establish and encourage them concerning their faith (1 Thes. 3:2).

Notice the importance Paul places on their faith (v. 2); his desire to know their faith (v. 5), the word he had received about their faith (v. 6), the comfort their faith was to him (v. 7), and his desire to supply what was lacking in their faith (v. 10).

Why was it important to show such care for this part of their growth? It was so that their hearts would be blameless in holiness before God the Father at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ (v. 13).

In other words, if we want to be established when He comes, we should be working toward this end now! Are there areas in our lives and local fellowship that need to be strengthened? This model church sought stability in light of His coming, and there was no time for being content with the status quo.

Sorrow in light of His coming (1 Thes. 4:13-18)

Sorrow is a very real experience in life, especially when loved ones go home to be with the Lord. Some of the believers at Thessalonica had tasted this sorrow. Paul writes to comfort them concerning those who sleep in Jesus. Even his expression, "asleep," gives comfort to hurting hearts. The sorrow caused by the separation of loved ones would be unbearable if not for the hope that we have of the coming reunion day. We sorrow, Paul writes, but not as those who have no hope. Our sorrow is hope-filled; the

world's sorrow is hopeless.

When will this reunion take place? The Bible tells us plainly that "*the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout...and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air*" (1 Thes. 4:16-17). Did you notice the way we'll be caught up? Together! Talk about an ecumenical movement.

The church will be taken out of this world and be forever with the Lord. That's every believer from "*every tribe and tongue and people and nation*" (Rev. 5:9). Someone has defined the rapture as the ultimate separation of church and state.

They were living in light of His coming and had no time for hopeless despair. We are not looking for a sign. We're listening for a shout. His voice we'll hear and His face we'll know.

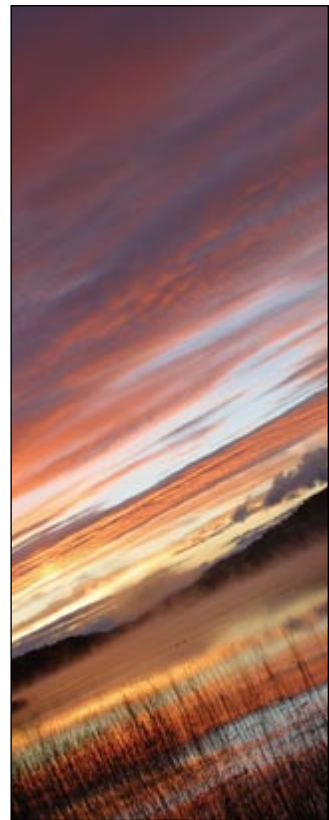
Sanctification in light of His coming (1 Thes. 5:23)

As Paul closes his letter to this model church he writes, "*Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely [wholly]; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (1 Thes. 5:23).

Their lives had been so affected by the Lord that they were set apart from the world and set apart to God. We, too, are set apart. We long to be wholly His and only His—all our being: spirit, soul, and body. We surely have been made alive in spirit by the Spirit of God who gives life. Our souls have been purchased by Christ's precious blood. Our bodies are set apart as well, awaiting the transformation that will take place at His coming. What a prospect is ours: the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13). 📌

*With such a blessed hope in view,
We would more holy be,
More like our risen, glorious Lord,
Whose face we soon shall see!*

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The rapture is the only ecumenical movement that will ever work. And it will work!



NEW LIFE IN HIM *From seed planting to fruit growing*

Help Wanted

Time to check our résumés.

What if the elders in our local assembly ran an ad in the newspaper that read something like this: “Help Wanted: seeking qualified Christians to prayerfully share in exacting work to edify others. Must be willing to submit to godly authority.” Would we apply for the job? Elders seldom talk about it, but they could use the help of every believer in the assembly in three areas:

Reducing premature criticism

Some time ago, a Christian brother shared that the qualifications for an elder (or overseer) are “so low everyone should have them.” It’s true! Every believer should aspire to the qualifications of an overseer, not just an elite few. 1 Timothy 3:2-7 and Titus 1:6-10 outline the non-negotiable prerequisites: blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, of good behavior, hospitable, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, patient, not a brawler, not quick-tempered, not covetous, rules his house well, has faithful children, not young and/or inexperienced in the faith, has a good testimony to the world, not self-willed, a lover of good men, just, holy, holding fast the Word, and able to exhort or refute those who oppose biblical doctrine. This is not to say that elders—or their families—are perfect! Nor are they exempt from the educational and corrective work of our Lord (Heb. 12:6-7, 11)—an overseer of the Lord’s flock and his family are subject to the same scriptural expectations and discipline as any other believer. However, there are Biblical guidelines in place for confronting sin in an overseer: accusations should not be received unless they are supported by “two or three witnesses” (1 Tim. 5:19). Such a safeguard protects the elder from backbiting, rumor, and innuendo that may originate from the personal animosity of some.



Sharing the load

Elders make time in their week to oversee and feed the flock (1 Pet. 5:2), counsel saints (Acts 20:17; 21:18), invite fellow believers into their homes (1 Tim. 3:2), visit those that are physically and/or spiritually sick (Jas. 5:14), recognize other believers’ God-given ministries (Acts 15:22-23), labor personally in God’s Word (1 Tim. 5:17), deliberate issues with others in the oversight (Acts 15:6-7; 20:17; 21:18), defend against doctrinal opposition (Titus 1:9-10), and make financial and administrative decisions on behalf of the local church (Acts 11:29-30; Heb. 13:17). It is easy to find faults in an assembly and bring them to the attention of the elders, but, before doing so, we must ask ourselves this: what are we doing to help? A preacher once compared the local church to a tree

saying, “There are two things that suck the life out of an assembly—suckers and dead wood.” Dead wood contributes nothing but added weight to a plant, while suckers deplete its vitality. God forbid that we cease to perform our God-given responsibilities as branches of the true Vine and debilitate the whole rather than contribute to its beauty and function. Instead, may we live to build up and encourage one another, working through problems ourselves—if possible—*before* involving the elders. We all need to be active in using our spiritual gifts to practically minister to one another (Rom. 12:3-21).

Submitting prayerfully

In many of the epistles, various “people-problems” are implied or specifically addressed within the context of the local church. Unfortunately, the overseer must address many problems among the saints such as self-will, anger, division, doctrinal wrangling, and so on.

HELP WANTED *continued*

Elders govern by example (1 Pet. 5:3; Heb. 13:7), from a scriptural base (1 Tim. 5:17), and from practical experience (1 Tim. 3:5). Their desire is to help fulfill the needs of the church (Acts 14:23; Php. 1:1; Titus 1:5), and this desire is God-given (1 Tim. 3:1; Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2). The end result of placing ourselves under the elders' authority is benefit for all. Hebrews 13:17 reads, "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you." It is easy to submit to the elders when we agree with their decisions but much more difficult when their course of action is unpopular, or

even when we believe it to be wrong. When we feel a problem has not been handled correctly, we should approach the overseer as a father, with meekness and respect, not with stinging rebuke (1 Tim. 5:1). In 1 Timothy 2:1-2, Paul exhorts Timothy to pray for those in authority. Whether we agree with them or not, our elders need our prayers!

May we answer the "help wanted" call in order to harmoniously work together with our overseers to the glory of God. 📞

—RANDY HORN



The end result of placing ourselves under the elders' authority is benefit for all.

The Other Overseas War *by John Bjorlie*

Volunteer soldiers in the greatest battle of all

After World War II, there was a surge in foreign missions. American servicemen came home from the war overseas and began preparing to go back to fight in another war. Some, like Milton Haack and Harold Preston, went to the Philippines. Others, like Roger Youderian, went to South America. We saw this happen again after the Korean Conflict. Former servicemen and women going back to serve as Christian missionaries in the spiritual conflict. And this happened after the Vietnam War.

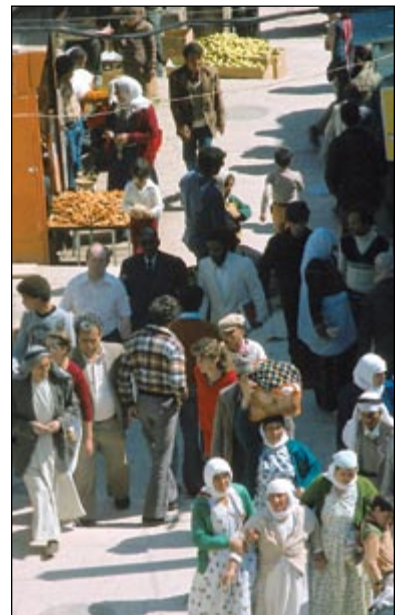
This is the upside to war: The cross follows the sword. There are places on this earth where people don't tend to take their vacations—places that have been long closed to the gospel. There are places that have not welcomed evangelical Christians, and especially American evangelicals. And there are places that American Christians have not placed as high priorities on their prayer lists. But places like Iraq are being prayed for now.

I have been receiving e-mail from a young Christian named Jonathan Stockeland. He is a Marine serving in a fireteam in the Anbar province of Iraq. In his e-mail, he asks for prayer. And he gets it. I read his e-mail and I pray that he and others like him will be preserved and raised up to one day return to the forsaken villages of Iraq to fight in the war that has no discharge.

I guess I'll just end with saying life is Kulesh Zien (very good). I still have high spirits most of the time, and thank you so much for your prayers. Ask me about that too when I'm back home and I'll tell you when I saw the hand of God very clearly present over here. It's pretty awesome. Well, Ma'as allama (have a good day)!

—Jonathan Stockeland
Isaiah 40:8

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There are places on this earth where people don't tend to take their vacations—places that have been long closed to the gospel.

Church Practice in Thessalonica

Learning to draw lines.

Our God is a God of distinctions. From creation to the consummation of all things, God's hand moves with order and precision, unveiling patterns, progressions, and lines of demarcation.

To fathom, even to a limited degree, the depths of God's wisdom and savor the beauty of His ways, the Bible student must "rightly divide" the Word. If we fail to do so, our view will be distorted, our position unbalanced, and our interpretation faulty.

What do we mean by the practice of the church? Is it the doctrines, the ordinances, the traditions, or the customs? What is the distinction between "practice" and these other terms? Webster defines practice: "to do or engage in frequently or usually; to make a habit of..." These terms as used in Scripture can be distinguished in the following way, illustrated in Acts 2 and 1 Thessalonians 1:

- Church doctrine – the teaching of the apostles (Acts 2:42; 1 Thes. 1:8)
- Church practice – the example of the church (Acts 2:44-45; 1 Thes. 1:7)
- Church custom – the unique experience of the church (Acts 2:46; 1 Thes. 1:6a)

The subject of church practices is as vast as the book of Acts and the New Testament epistles. Fortunately, our study here will be confined to 1 Thessalonians. I do recommend, however, that for a more exhaustive study, one would do well to read from Acts through Revelation 3 and note the many church practices therein. How often have we said of our assembly gatherings that we are following the pattern of the New Testament church as revealed in Scripture? Yet a casual study of the practices of the early church may indicate that we still have a long way to go.

The above terms have many overlapping elements. Note 1 Thessalonians 1:6: "*And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the Word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost.*" These saints had the unique

experience of being in the presence of apostles who had known the physical presence of the Lord. These were the men they were privileged to follow as together they followed the Lord. The teaching of the apostles' and their walk of faith enabled the believers to follow the Lord in the truth of God.

Obedience demanded

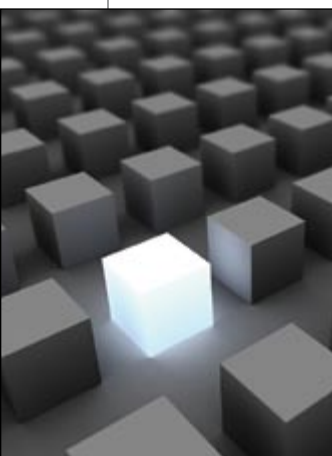
As we consider the doctrine, practice, and customs of the church, we see a graduated level of adherence. Church doctrine leaves no room for deviation. The message of the gospel is preached without variation: "*But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts*" (1 Thes. 2:4).

Church practice, however, may involve a limited variety of acceptable options, implemented as needed for the occasion and exercised with discretion and godly wisdom. Paul's example in Thessalonica was to support himself financially rather than burdening the church with his needs (1 Thes. 2:9). Yet, at other times, he followed his counsel rendered to Timothy in 1 Timothy 5:17-18.

An example of church custom can be found in 1 Thessalonians 5:26: "*Greet all the brethren with an holy kiss.*" The holy kiss was pure and chaste. It was "a kiss of charity" (1 Pet. 5:14), a token of Christian fellowship, and still common in many countries today.

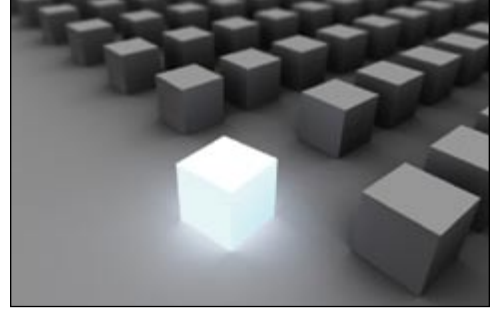
So we have:

- **Church doctrine** – absolute, non-negotiables
- **Church practice** – the example set by the early church with some flexibility while still honoring the principles of the New Testament
- **Church custom** – an experience unique to the first century believers and not a mandate of Scripture



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CHURCH PRACTICE IN THESSALONICA *continued*



Making distinctions

Many transitional issues of the early church have a profound effect on the process of rightly dividing doctrine, practice, and custom. The Bible student must take into consideration such factors now foreign to present-day church order. These issues include, but are not limited to:

- The transition of Judaism to Christianity – a church of Jewish converts
- The coming and indwelling of the Spirit in stages
- The exercise of “sign gifts” no longer present
- The presence of apostles, discontinued with the first generation

But none of these transitional factors ought to be used to explain away clear New Testament church doctrine. For example, there are three church ordinances: the Lord’s Supper, believer’s baptism, and the two-fold ordinance of the headcovering (uncovered heads of the males and covered heads of the females). Within the keeping of each of these ordinances, we can see a blend of all three elements: doctrine, practice, and custom. With each one, there are the clear biblical teachings and divinely appointed principles behind the symbols of the ordinance. These doctrinal truths are essential and absolute, independent of man’s creative tampering and societal changes. The ordinances cannot be dispensed with in order to appease our culture. But the practice of the ordinance from assembly to assembly around the world may reflect a measure of variation without violating the biblical truth of the ordinance itself. As well, a variety of local customs prevails today involving these three important church ordinances; however, none of these should have any impact on truth of Scripture or the preeminence of Christ. With just a little thought given to this, such variations and distinctions will readily come to mind.

In summary, consider the inter-relationships:

- Doctrine sets out the boundaries of our practice
- Practice shows the reality of our doctrine
- Voluntary customs should not violate our doctrine

Practices to emulate

Our attention is now drawn to the practice of this church in 1 Thessalonians. There is much practical instruction to the saints. Assuming their obedience, these teachings would soon translate into their church practice. We will refrain from making that reasonable

assumption and address only what we know was their actual church practice as recorded in this letter.

The assembly in Thessalonica was not perfect. There were things lacking (3:10) and room for growth and improvement (3:12; 4:10). But in spite of its imperfections, the church was a great example to surrounding testimonies in Macedonia. Many of its practices are a real encouragement to our own local assemblies today:

1. The saints followed the godly example set forth by the apostles (1:6; 2:14). We would do well to give heed to the teaching of godly men of past generations, whom God has used for His glory.

2. They recognized the stamp of divine authority on the Word of God and allowed the teaching of the apostles’ doctrine to do its work in their gathering (2:13).

3. They upheld the apostle Paul and his co-laborers in prayer and with godly affection (3:6).

4. The believers maintained a consistent walk of strong faith and practical love for all the saints as a testimony before the world (1:3, 7-8; 3:6-7).

5. They exercised brotherly love not only toward one another in their immediate fellowship, but also toward other saints in a broader fellowship of their local geographical area (4:9-10). This represents inter-assembly involvement instead of isolation.

6. They were students of the Scriptures, having grown in spiritual maturity and understanding. Note the repeated use of the phrase, “for ye know...” (5:1-2).

7. Each served one another as a body of believers and church family, edifying and comforting (5:11).

Some closing observations. First, their fellowship had two hallmarks: faith in the truth of God’s Word and love for one another. Healthy doctrine produces Christ-like practices and God-honoring customs.

Second, it is interesting to note the instructions from the first epistle which are repeated in the second. This may give some indication as to what was obeyed, and what was still lacking at the time the latter epistle was written (e.g. 1 Thes. 4:11-12 and 2 Thes. 3:10-12).

Finally, we would be remiss if, after such a study, we failed to examine the church practice of our own assemblies. For what are we known? What characterizes our gathering of believers who claim strict adherence to New Testament church practice? How do we compare to Thessalonica? Searching questions like these should cause us to challenge and edify one another. 📌

Passion and Purity in Thessalonica

Cleanliness *is* part of godliness.

Along with the power of the Word and the work of the Spirit, Paul links the kind of men the evangelists were with the remarkable “entering in” they had in Thessalonica.

In an unholy world, the Christian gospel stands out for the dramatic change it makes in the lives of its adherents. Like the contemporary world, ancient Thessalonica was a depraved den of iniquity, but the liberating glad tidings of Christ effected a great change in the lives of the first believers when it came there. Their experience, coupled with the testimonies of many other ancient and modern Christians, shows that the gospel is indeed “*the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first and also to the Greek*” (Rom. 1:16). What is more, their conversion demonstrates the purity that stems from receiving the new life that the Lord gives to those who receive Him.

Situated along a major east-west route called the Via Egnatia, the seaport of Thessalonica had seen its share of peripatetic philosophers and clerics. There were many belief options in the city—none of them offering any certainty or transformation of life. Idolatry was pervasive in every part of the community with a plethora of temples to various deities, including Dionysius, Zeus, Artemis, and many other false gods.

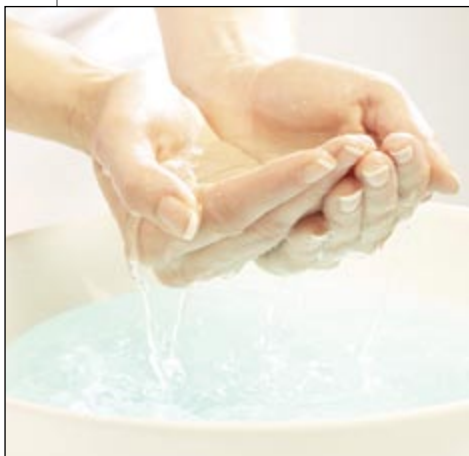
The veneration of these idols encouraged immorality and had no power to liberate the people from their lusts. As one commentator points out: “...a number of cults promoted a lifestyle that would have been viewed as immoral from a Christian perspective.” For example, the adoration of Aphrodite entailed sexual immorality, and drunkenness was central to the worship of Dionysius. Just like

today, there was much money to be made in selling spiritual lies to beguiled souls. That many of the Thessalonian believers had been won to Christ from this background is evidenced by the statement in 1 Thessalonians 1:9: “...ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.”

The purity of the message and its messengers

The motivation and methodology of the Christian missionaries set them apart from the peddlers of competing religious truth claims. Their arrival in Thessalonica followed intense persecution in Philippi, yet these intrepid preachers did not soft-pedal the message. Instead, they fearlessly proclaimed the truth to whomever would listen. As Paul describes his preaching, “*For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile*” (1 Thes. 2:3). In other words, the content of their proclamation was not false—it was a historically accurate account of the truth as revealed by the Lord Jesus. Nor did their preaching lead to impurity. Lastly, they were men of character, not deluded devotees of falsehood.

Preaching the gospel was hardly a lucrative or safe career. In fact, Paul affirms that no ulterior motives undergirded their gospel. Unlike the pagan philosophers, they did not place monetary demands on the new converts; furthermore, they actually labored in tent-making to supply their own needs (v. 9). Moreover, they were parental in their actions towards the new believers. Their approach was gentle, like a nursing mother with a small infant (v. 7). Wisdom marked their exhortation, like a loving father advising his precious children (v. 11). Their behavior was exemplary of the love of Christ in action, characterized



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PASSION AND PURITY IN THESSALONICA *continued*

by purity. As another has written:

“Such a picture...warns all of the followers of Christ against the temptation of avarice and ambition and inspires them to emulate the courage, the purity, the tenderness, the self-sacrifice, and the fidelity which the apostle claimed and which all who knew him could testify he had embodied in his life.”

Purity is God’s will for the believer

Often, believers ponder what the will of God for their lives might be. 1 Thessalonians 4:3 makes it clear that sanctification is one aspect of His will. Just as the gospel is pure, so it calls its recipients to purity of life and thought. It gives them the power to overcome sin and live for God. This epistle has several references to holiness, but, in chapter four, the spotlight is specifically turned on the sin of sexual immorality. In the ancient Greco-Roman world, sexual mores were libertine. All sorts of perversions were commonplace, and indiscriminate promiscuity between men and women was regarded as natural. To not indulge one’s physical impulses was considered abnormal. As mentioned before, in Thessalonica, the worship of many of the gods and goddesses involved ritual prostitution and abandoning oneself to the basest desires of the heart.


Of course, modern attitudes toward the use and abuse of the body are similar to the ancient views that Paul faced. Many people think nothing of sex outside of marriage. Pop culture glamorizes adultery and fornication in song, literature, and film. Modesty and chastity are viewed as hopelessly antiquated ideals, only followed by zealots and prudes. The restriction of sexual activity to marriage is considered unhealthy and strange.

In contrast to the prevailing mindset of both the ancient and modern worlds, Paul points out that the proper use of one’s body is determined by the believer’s relationship to God and His will (1 Thes. 4:1-6). The Lord Jesus said that the one who loves Him would keep His commandments (Jn. 14:15). Purity characterizes all of the Lord’s actions. His purpose in salvation is, “...that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto

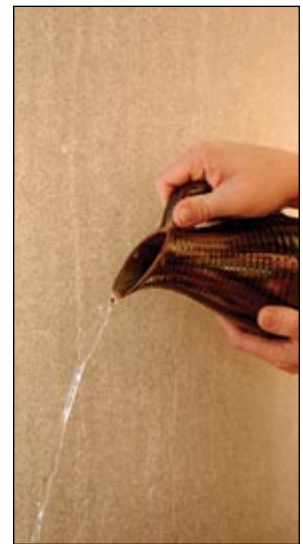
Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Titus 2:14). In a parallel passage, Christians are told that their bodies are “members of Christ” and “bought with a price,” as well as being described as temples for the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:13-20). In light of the great redemption that purchased them—in addition to their current standing in Christ—believers cannot use their bodies for illicit pleasure. Christians are to use their bodies to please the Lord.

Purity is to characterize our relations with others

Some scholars believe that 1 Thessalonians 4:4 is referring to the wives of the brothers when it uses the word “vessel” (especially when compared with 1 Pet. 3:7). This is not certain, for the New Testament uses that word in a variety of senses, including one’s own body (e.g. 2 Tim. 2:20-21). It is evident, however, that a Christian should not sin against his brother in the Lord by committing adultery or defrauding him in any way. Verse 6 makes this clear, saying, “*That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified.*”

Purity must especially be the prevailing moral atmosphere within the Church of God, lived and breathed by those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus. It must characterize our thoughts, words, and deeds; moreover, it should mark us out from the defiled world around us. Let each of us search within and ask: Lord is my heart pure before You? Do I cherish any idols before You? Is some sin clouding my vision and communion with Christ? If so, we must repent and set our affections on things above, asking the Lord to cleanse us from the defilement that surrounds us and give us a fresh appreciation of Christ (1 Jn. 1:9-2:2; Col. 3:1-10). Purity flows from knowing Christ and allowing His Holy Spirit to produce His fruit within us. As believers walk with the Lord, His purity will transform them into His own morally beautiful image (1 Jn. 3:1-3). 

Purity must especially be the prevailing moral atmosphere within the Church of God...



...lived and breathed by those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus.



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Give me the ready hand rather than the ready tongue.
—Giuseppe Garibaldi

Action springs not from thought, but from a readiness for responsibility.
—Dietrich Bonhoeffer

The trouble with the future is that it usually arrives before we're ready for it.
—Arnold H. Glasgow

Ready—or Not

Armies call being prepared “a state of readiness.” Here’s our checklist.

My dictionary gives the following meaning of “ready”: “in a suitable state for an activity, action or situation; fully prepared.” When I was a little fellow playing Hide and Seek in the fading light between supper and bedtime, I couldn’t have given you the exact definition of the word, but I knew just what it meant when the person counting to one hundred called out, “Ready or not, you must be caught; hiding around the goal’s ‘it’.”

A few Greek words translate as “ready” in the NT, but the meanings are similar enough to use them together in a non-technical article like this. I simply want to remind us of the call raised frequently to be ready to respond to our Commander’s orders at a moment’s notice.

1. Ready to give: Paul enjoined Timothy and Titus to regularly remind the saints (including us, of course) to “*be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate*” (1 Tim. 6:18). And again: “*Put them in mind...to be ready to every good work*” (Titus 3:1). This would include keeping out of debt as much as possible, living within our means, having some provisions on hand, and being vigilant as we look for others who may have a need which we are able to meet.

2. Ready to respond: “*But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear*” (1 Pet. 3:15). Obviously this requires that my hope for my children and me is something greater than our getting a good education so we can have a good career so we can enjoy a good lifestyle and have a good retirement. Otherwise who would ask me about my hope if it is identical to the generally accepted flight plan for earthbound sinners?

3. Ready to preach: “*As much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also*” (Rom. 1:15). This is really counting the cost! Rome was Nero country, the place where Paul knew he would likely give his life for the Lord. This is not holding a gospel meeting in the relative safety of our building each week; this is taking the news into the enemy’s stronghold.

4. Ready to be offered: Remember the motto of the China Inland Mission: an ox with a yoke and an altar, and the words “Ready for either.” That seems a long way from where I live, but not so far from the lives of our brothers and sisters around the world. Life or death (Php. 1:20), full or hungry (4:12), “*By honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report*” (2 Cor. 6:8), Paul’s only objective was that God be glorified in him. This was Paul living out Romans 12:1 and 2.

5. Ready to leave: Here are the words of the Lord: “*Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not*” (Lk. 12:40). Pietism, so-called, has fallen on hard times. The accusation is made that such a belief in separation from the world and anticipation of the Lord’s any-moment return makes one of no earthly good. Church history tells another story. Does being ready mean idly waiting? By no means! “*Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing*” (v. 43). Work like there’s no tomorrow, because that may be true.

6. Ready to be wed: When the way is hard and the burdens are heavy and the sky seems leaden and dark, spend some time looking through your trousseau. The day is soon coming when the true Hallelujah Chorus will be sung (Rev. 19:1, 3, 4, 6). “*Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready*” (v. 7). 🍷

UPLLOOK

If the outlook is dark, try the uplook.

SAVIOUR! WE LOVE THEE!

SAVIOUR! WE LOVE THEE, long for Thy return;
The night is dark, and oh, our spirits yearn
To hear the call out from the radiant sky,
The calling Home, the resurrection cry.

This thrilling word that ends this night of gloom,
That binds death's power, and triumphs o'er the tomb;
When in a moment we shall mount above
And know the fullness of Thy heart of love.

Oh, wondrous call that bringeth to Thy side
In unmarred beauty Thy beloved Bride,
To know Thy love, its wonders to explore,
In rapture bow, and worship evermore.

Oh, wondrous love! to see Thy face divine,
To know the whispered joy of being Thine.
Oh, tell me not of glories I shall see,
This is the deepest—being near to Thee.

Lord Jesus, come! Thy Bride her Lord would see,
And know the joy of being like to Thee;
So worlds on worlds will see what grace has done,
As long as everlasting ages run.

—SAMUEL TREVOR FRANCIS, 1834-1925

There is a difference between loving the Lord and loving "His appearing" (see 2 Tim. 4:8). When I was a boy, I found myself ready to do something wrong. At that very moment, I saw my father turn the corner. Now I loved my father, but I certainly didn't love his appearing.

Agape love in the Bible always involves sacrifice, so the obvious question is: what sacrifices am I making as evidence that I love His appearing?