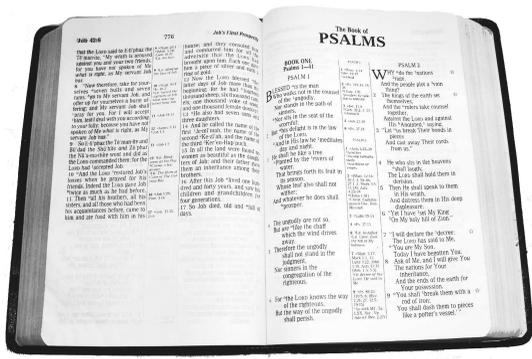


PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God's holy Word simply explained and applied



November 2017

Psalm 119

1 Thessalonians chapters 1 and 2

PSALM 119

Psalm 119 is the longest psalm and it breathes a deep love for the Word of God. Philip Henry, father of the great Bible commentator, Matthew Henry, once advised his children that to love this psalm would bring them ‘to be in love with the rest of the Scriptures.’ Spurgeon writes, ‘It contains no idle word; the grapes of this cluster are almost bursting full with the new wine of the kingdom. The more you look into this mirror of a gracious heart the more you will see in it ... Again and again have we cried while studying it., “Oh the depths!” Yet these depths are hidden beneath an apparent simplicity.’ (THE TREASURY OF DAVID).

Psalm 119 is an acrostic psalm which has twenty two sections containing eight verses. Working through the Hebrew alphabet, the verses in each section begin with the same letter (eg. verses 1–8) each begin with the letter ‘Aleph’. Various words are used in the psalm to describe the things contained in Scripture. Matthew Henry explains their meaning:

- God’s ‘*law*’, because they are enacted by him as our Sovereign.
- His ‘*way*’, because they are the rule both of his providence and of our obedience.
- His ‘*testimonies*’, because they are solemnly declared to the world, and attested beyond contradiction.
- His ‘*commandments*’, because they are given with authority, and (as the word signifies) lodged with us as a trust.
- His ‘*precepts*’, because they are prescribed to us, and not left indifferent.
- His ‘*word*’, or saying, because it is a declaration of his mind, and Christ, the essential, eternal word is all in all in it.
- His ‘*judgments*’, because they are framed in infinite wisdom, and because by them we must both judge and be judged.
- His ‘*righteousness*’, because it is all holy, just, and good, and the rule and standard of righteousness.
- His ‘*statutes*’, because they are fixed and determined, and of perpetual obligation.
- His ‘*truth*’ or ‘*faithfulness*’, because the principles upon which the divine law is built are eternal truths.

For further reading:

‘The Treasury of David’ by C.H. Spurgeon. There are many editions, but I recommend the full seven volume edition.

‘Psalm 119, an exposition by Charles Bridges’, published by Banner of Truth

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Blessed are the undefiled in the way

Most people want meaning and fulfilment in their lives and this psalm gives us the secret of happiness. The first two verses begin with a beatitude, '*Blessed,*' and what glorious blessings belong to those who love God and who obey his Word (cp. The Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:3–12). One of the great lies of Satan is to deceive people into believing that a holy life is a miserable, kill-joy existence. That is nonsense! It is sin which brings misery, suffering, despair and death. Obedience to God's will brings lasting joy and peace.

Blessed are the undefiled in the way (1). Who are these blessed people? They are those *who walk in the law of the LORD*. God blesses them because they *keep his testimonies* and they *seek him with the whole heart* (1–2). Half-hearted seeking after God is not good enough. God has commanded that we keep ourselves from sinning and be diligent in our obedience to his precepts (3–4). The way of blessing is to keep ourselves unspotted from this world and to be cleansed from our sin through the precious blood of Christ (James 1:27; 1 John 1:7).

The psalmist has briefly described those who are blessed and he treasures that blessing from God. He recognises that we cannot be holy without the gracious help and work of God in our lives. He thus turns to the Lord in prayer, saying, '*Oh, that my ways were directed to keep your statutes!*' (5). When we sin and disobey God's Word, we will feel ashamed when we come to read that holy Word (6). If we have no sense of shame and sorrow when we sin, we should question just how real is our Christianity.

Have you been straying from the Lord and not keeping his statutes? I urge you to repent of your sin and to seek the Lord for his forgiveness. Those who know the hand of God upon them are fearful of losing the enjoyment of his presence in their lives (8). When we know and obey God's Word, we are able to praise him *with uprightness of heart.* **Do you seek God with the whole heart (2)? Do you praise him with uprightness of heart (7)?**

How can a young man cleanse his way?

These verses tell us how we can be *undefiled in the way* (1). *How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to your word* (9). Many young men are prone to be thoughtless, careless, and full of self-confidence. The words, *'by taking heed'*, are especially relevant to them because Satan will see to it that there are snares and problems in the way. We rejoice that the Lord freely forgives us and cleanses us from sin but we do have a problem with keeping ourselves clean. This psalm begins by showing that earnest prayer is the essential companion to principled obedience to God's holy Word (1–2). We are again reminded of this in verses 9 and 10. We will wander from God's commandments if we are careless in the Christian life (10). The world, the flesh, and the devil all seek to draw us away from God.

We have already seen that we must pay attention to God's Word which is essential in our sanctification (9; cp. John 15:3; 17:17). We should also hide that Word in our hearts (11). This means memorising it and learning how to apply its teaching to our own lives. We need to meditate on Scripture and contemplate the ways of God. We cannot meditate on the Word if we rush our Bible readings or allow our minds to wander when we should be paying attention to preaching. **What does the Word of God mean to you? Do you treasure it more than all your earthly possessions so that you rejoice in it? Do you delight in the Bible so that you will not forget its teaching? (see verses 14–16).**

We live in a world that is wicked and soiled. The way of the Christian is a clean way (9), which produces a clean heart (11), clean lips (13), a clean mind (15) and clean pleasures (14–16). We are called to shine as lights in this dark world (Matthew 5:16; Ephesians 5:8). We shine by being clean!

Prayer: *With my whole heart I have sought you; Oh, let me not wander from your commandments!* (10).

Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from your law

Spiritual desires should be apparent in our lives if we truly love the Lord. Desire after God is seen in a longing:

- For grace to live a life of obedience to God’s Word (17). When we ask God to deal bountifully with us, our motive for such a request should come from a desire to obey the Lord.
- For understanding. If we are to keep God’s Word, we need to understand it. We must pray for this and verse 18 contains a prayer that should be found on our lips before we open the pages of the Bible: *‘Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from your law.’* Some professing Christians hanker after fresh revelations apart from the Word of God but that is foolish. We need to have our eyes opened to see and to understand the wondrous things in the Bible.
- For our heavenly home. The believer is a stranger and a pilgrim on this earth (19; cp. Hebrews 11:13). The wickedness of the world around us and the reproach and contempt of the ungodly should drive us to seek comfort from the Word of God (21–23).
- For the Word of God: *‘My soul breaks with longing for your judgments at all times’* (20). This was not an emotional ‘high’ soon to disappear but an intense and continual longing for the Word of God. How intensely do you desire the things of God?

Meditation on the Word of God is a great antidote to the hurt caused by those who speak against us (23). There has been a great upsurge in ‘counselling’ in the church because believers do not know God’s Word or how to apply its counsel to their lives. **When we delight in God’s Word, we will find it our counsellor and infallible guide (24).**

*Father of mercies, in thy Word
What endless glory shines!
For ever be thy name adored
For these celestial lines.*

(Anne Steele)

Revive me, according to your word

In these verses, we find the psalmist in the depth of depression with his soul clinging to the dust and melting from heaviness (25,28). It would appear that he was in despair because of sin in his own heart (*the way of lying*, '29). What must we do when we feel low?

- We must do what the psalmist did and cry out to the Lord. He pleaded, *'Revive me according to your word ... strengthen me according to your word'* (25,28). The promises of God's Word are all true. We need to look to them and be encouraged by them (cp. Luke 21:33; Hebrews 10:23).
- We must declare our ways to God (26), confessing our sins and telling him of our difficulties and fears. Though God knows what we need, we must pray (cp. Luke 18:1; Ephesians 6:18; Hebrews 4:16). We need to have fellowship with God in prayer.
- We need to pray that God will teach us his statutes and make us understand his Word. We will then be able to encourage ourselves by meditating on God's wondrous works (27).
- We must seek God's help in overcoming sin: *'Remove from me the way of lying'* (29). Satan is a liar (John 8:44). He promises so much when he tempts us to sin. These promises are empty; they lead to loss, not gain, and to misery rather than happiness. Eve found this to her cost when she believed the lies of the devil and rebelled against God's commandment (Genesis chapter 3). *'The way of truth'* is the choice of the child of God (30).
- We have to cling to God's testimonies if we want to be released from clinging to the dust (31; cp. verse 25). We will then have a heart enlarged with love and praise to God and be enabled to run in the way of his commandments, eager to obey the Lord.

Have you been clinging to the dust? Call upon the Lord to revive you and to enlarge your heart so that you will soon be running in the way of God's commandments.

Incline my heart to your testimonies, and not to covetousness

We cannot lead godly lives without the help of the Lord! In every verse of today's reading, the psalmist calls upon the Lord for help. We need no instruction in the way of sin but we do need the Lord to teach us the way of his statutes. We also need to understand the Word of God if we are to persevere in the Christian life (33–34; cp. verse 27).

It is a wonderful thing to delight in the Word of God (24,35) but there are many distractions to keep us from that delight. The psalmist prays, '*Incline my heart to your testimonies, and not to covetousness*' (36). Many of us have battles with the deadly sin of covetousness, which is idolatry (Luke 12:15; Colossians 3:5; 1 Timothy 6:9–10). Spurgeon comments, 'The crime of covetousness is common, but very few will confess it; for when a man heaps up gold in his heart the dust of it blows into his eyes, and he cannot see his own fault. Our hearts must have some object of desire, and the only way to keep out worldly gain is to put in its place the testimonies of the Lord' (THE TREASURY OF DAVID). Let us make the prayer of the psalmist our own prayer.

Temptation to covetousness and other sins often comes through the eyes. Achan confessed after his theft was discovered, '*When I saw ... I coveted ... and took*' (Joshua 7:20–21; cp. Genesis 3:6; 2 Samuel 11:2). Do you control your television viewing and use of social media or do you waste precious time watching worthless or sinful things? Do you choose your reading material with care? Do you feast your eyes on things that you know will arouse impure or covetous thoughts? How we all need to pray, '*Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things*' (37).

The psalmist also prayed, '*Establish your word to your servant*' (38). He prayed for certainty in God's Word – 'make it sure to me and make me sure of it' (Spurgeon). Have you wandered away from God through covetousness? Pray with the psalmist, '*Revive me in your way ... revive me in your righteousness*' (37,40).

I will walk at liberty, for I seek your precepts

How often do you pray expressing desires such as found in this psalm? We need to pray for the mercies of God revealed in salvation according to his Word (1). Let us think about these mercies: We have been saved from sin, death and hell; we have forgiveness and peace with God; we have the priceless privilege of prayer and we are able to enjoy communion with him. We have the presence of God with us wherever we go; we have an eternal inheritance in heaven where we shall go to be with our precious Lord for ever. The thought of the mercies of God should fill us with such wonder and joy that our mouths will be opened in praise. We will echo the words of Psalm 89, verse 1, *‘I will sing of the mercies of the LORD forever; with my mouth will I make known your faithfulness to all generations.’* When we know the mercies of God, we have an answer for those who may scorn or reproach us, and boldness to declare God’s Word (42–43,46; cp. Acts 26:19–28).

Perseverance in holiness is another fruit of God’s mercy to us. We will desire to keep God’s law for ever and ever (44). The enjoyment of salvation brings liberty to our souls; this is not the freedom to sin nor to do as we please, but freedom to be holy, to do what God requires of us in his Word. *‘I will walk at liberty, for I seek your precepts’* (45). Sin is slavery, but holiness is liberty (John 8:34–36). Charles Bridges writes, **‘Every fresh chain, by which we bind ourselves to the Lord, makes us more free ... Men of the world see what religion takes away, but they see little of what it gives; else would they reproach – not our folly – but their own blindness’** (EXPOSITION OF PSALM 119, pages 113,117).

Our reading closes with another expression of delight in God’s Word. The psalmist so loved the commandments of God that he lifted up his hands in a gesture of longing after them (47–48). Bridges asks, ‘Why thus is the Bible read only – not meditated on? Because it is not loved. We do not go to it, as the hungry man to his food, as the miser to his treasure. The loss is incalculable.’ (EXPOSITION OF PSALM 119, page 120).

I remembered your judgments of old, O LORD

These eight verses remind us of the comfort that we have from God's Word when we suffer affliction or when proud sinners scorn us (50, 52). When we pray, we come to a promising God. We should think about his promises and repeat them as we cry to the Lord (49). 'Faith trusts – not what the eye sees, but what the word promises.' (Bridges – EXPOSITION OF PSALM 119, page 123). We will only be able to comfort ourselves with God's precious Word if we know it and have it hidden in our heart: *'I remembered your judgments of old, O LORD, and have comforted myself'* (52). When we ponder the righteous dealings of God in times past, we are able to encourage ourselves (cp. Micah 7:15; 2 Peter 2:5–9).

Have you noticed that the ungodly are rarely ashamed of their sinful ways. They do not scoff at the superstitious ideas and practices of their companions but they love to ridicule the Christian? The psalmist writes, *'The proud have me in great derision'* (51). Spurgeon comments, 'Proud men never love gracious men, and as they fear them they veil their face under a pretended contempt. In this case their hatred revealed itself in ridicule, and that ridicule was loud and long ... It is the nature of the son of the bondwoman to mock the child of the promise (Genesis 21:9–10).' (THE TREASURY OF DAVID).

The antics of those who defy God's holy law should arouse us to great indignation. We cannot be indifferent to their wickedness (53, 136, 158) and this should challenge us to pray for them and to bring the gospel to them. **The godly person has better songs than those of the world!** We have a treasury of psalms and great hymns, rich in theology, that are increasingly neglected and are being forgotten. On our pilgrimage to heaven, we should be singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs (54; Colossians 3:16). If we endure sleepless nights through pain or anguish let us remember the name (character) of God (55). The more we meditate on his glorious person, the more we shall be encouraged in him. Comfort, assurance and blessing will be ours as long as we keep his precepts (56).

You are my portion, O LORD

We will know contentment when we are able to affirm, ‘*You are my portion, O LORD*’ (57; cp. 1 Timothy 6:6). The first two words of this statement are in italics in the text of your Bible, indicating that they are not found in the Hebrew. The statement is one of wonder and joy – ‘*My portion, O LORD.*’ We should repeat these words when Satan or the world seek to dangle before us their passing pleasures of sin. Charles Bridges comments, ‘A portion implies, not a source of ordinary pleasure, but of rest and satisfaction, such as leaves nothing else to be desired ... other objects indeed may be subordinately loved: but of none but himself must we say — “He is altogether lovely” (EXPOSITION OF PSALM 119, pages 142–143). When God is our portion, he has first place in our affections and we have joy and satisfaction on earth, eternal life and an inheritance in heaven. When God is our portion, what more can we desire?’

When the Lord is our portion:

- We will keep his words, turn our feet to follow his testimonies, and be quick to obey his commandments (57, 59–60).
- We will be whole-hearted in prayer, seeking God for his favour (58).
- We will remain steadfast when the wicked oppress us (61).
- We will give thanks to God. The psalmist was so full of praise to God that he says, ‘*At midnight I will rise to give thanks to you because of your righteous judgments*’ (62; cp. verse 52).
- We will have a teachable spirit (64).

The believer has the Lord for his portion and the saints as his companions (63). Christians need the fellowship of other Christians for mutual encouragement and care. If we have no desire for such fellowship, we are not biblical Christians (cp. Acts 2:42,46). The earth is full of God’s mercy for those who have eyes to see (64). Let us think about that mercy and give thanks to the Lord. **Let us always remember that God is our portion and live accordingly!**

Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word

Spurgeon describes these eight verses as ‘the witness of experience, testifying to the goodness of God, the graciousness of his dealings, and the preciousness of his Word.’ The psalmist had prayed, ‘*Deal bountifully with your servant*’ (17) and here he acknowledges God’s answer, ‘*You have dealt well with your servant, O LORD, according to your word*’ (65). We do not always acknowledge this in adversity and may say with Jacob, ‘*All these things are against me*’ (Genesis 42:36). All those things were not against Jacob, however! God was working them together for him for good, as he was soon to discover (Rom. 8:28).

We need to depend on God for all things but how often do we pray, ‘*Teach me good judgment and knowledge*’ (66)? Have you ever prayed this prayer for yourself? We all need to increase in our knowledge of God and of his precious Word. Solomon prayed such a prayer for himself when he became king over Israel (1 Kings 3:9). Paul prayed for Christians in the early church that they would increase in knowledge and discernment (Philippians 1:9–10; Colossians 1:9). We need to exercise discernment (‘*judgment*’) in these evil days.

We learn from hearing and reading the Bible and the Lord also has lessons for us to learn in the school of affliction. This is one of God’s bountiful dealings with us which brings precious fruit: ‘*Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word*’ (67). God chastises us when we stray from him because we are his children and because he loves us. Chastening *yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it* (Hebrews 12:5–11).

The Lord does us good, but we must not be surprised when the devil does evil things to us. He uses the proud and ungodly to plan mischief against the child of God. The psalmist recalls their slander but he is all the more determined to keep God’s Word with his whole heart (69). He esteems God’s law as greater treasure than heaps of gold and silver coins (72). **How much do you value God’s Word? The answer is seen in the time you spend reading it, memorising it and obeying it.**

In faithfulness you have afflicted me

The truth that God has made us and fashioned us encourages reverence and gratitude towards him and dependence upon him. The psalmist acknowledges this when he prays for spiritual understanding (73). We live in very confusing times when false teaching has taken root in many churches and we too need to pray for good judgment and discernment (66,73). The person who has spiritual understanding trusts and hopes in God's Word at all times. He is an encouragement to other believers (74). Are you the kind of person to whom other believers can turn for encouragement (79)? **When a discouraged believer turns to you, do you tell him of the faithfulness of God in your experience? Are you able to comfort him from the Word of God?**

What is our confidence in suffering and in trial? It is to know that God is too wise to be mistaken and too good to be unkind. We can say, *'I know, O LORD, that your judgments are right, and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me'* (75). We saw yesterday that God chastens us because he loves us and that affliction is for our good (67,71). What delightful expressions are found in verses 76 and 77 – *'merciful kindness ... tender mercies'*! Spurgeon comments 'He who has been grievously afflicted, and yet tenderly succoured is the only man who knows the meaning of such choice language' (THE TREASURY OF DAVID).

The psalmist prayed that the proud who had mistreated him would be put to shame. He also called upon God to keep him from shame through having a heart that is blameless regarding his statutes (78,80). Do you bear a good testimony so that you do not need to be ashamed? Believers are described as God-fearing and God-knowing (79). Warmth and devotion to God goes with knowledge of him. Spurgeon observes, 'We neither care for devout dunces, nor for intellectual icebergs. When fearing and knowing walk hand in hand they cause men to be thoroughly furnished unto every good work' (THE TREASURY OF DAVID).

Revive me according to your lovingkindness

The persecution of the wicked can bring great anguish and depression to the child of God. The psalmist had been so oppressed by his enemies (84–87) that he describes himself as fainting as he waited for deliverance from God (81). He feels like an empty wineskin which had become shrivelled as it was hung by a fire (83). He cries to God, ‘*My eyes fail from seeking your word, saying, “When will you comfort me?”*’ (82).

Spurgeon comments, ‘A humble eye lifted up to heaven in silent prayer may flash such flame as shall melt the bolts which bar entrance to vocal prayer, and so heaven shall be taken by storm with the artillery of tears. Blessed are the eyes that are strained in looking after God. The eyes of the Lord will see to it that such eyes do not actually fail. How much better to watch for the Lord with aching eyes than to have them sparkling at the glitter of vanity.’ The first owner of my copy of Spurgeon’s ‘Treasury of David,’ had it presented to him by Spurgeon himself in 1887. In 1914, he pencilled in the margin, ‘Tried and Tested’. **This is the testimony of many a child of God! Is this your experience?**

What must we do when in deep trouble?

- We must never lose our confidence in God’s Word. The psalmist at his lowest ebb continued to hope in the Word of God and he was able to say to the Lord, ‘*All your commandments are faithful*’ (86). He trusted God’s Word and continued to obey it (87).
- We must also persevere in prayer though we may not feel like praying. The psalmist cries to God, ‘*When will you comfort me? ... help me ... revive me*’ (82,86,88). If you are feeling weak and low through opposition of the ungodly take heart! Seek the Lord saying, ‘*Revive me according to your lovingkindness, so that I may keep the testimony of your mouth*’ (88).

For ever, O LORD, your word is settled in heaven

What is the believer's confidence and comfort in time of affliction?

- It is in the Word of God and in the assurance that he is faithful. '*For ever, O LORD, your word is settled in heaven*' (89). Men's ideas change so often, that it is foolish to rely on them, but God's Word is eternally settled in heaven and it will never change (cp, Isaiah 40:6–8; Luke 21:33).
- It is also in the fact that God is eternally faithful: '*Your faithfulness endures to all generations*' (90). We know that God will never fail nor forsake those who love him.
- God is in control of all things (91) and it is good to remember the words of Thomas Lynch:

*Say not, my soul, 'from whence
Can God relieve my care?'
Remember that Omnipotence
Has servants everywhere.*

God's law is our essential help in his affliction (92). When God's Word is our delight, we find encouragement from it in times of need. Those who belong to the Lord can be assured that he will deliver them (94). Those words, '*I am yours*', remind us of our great privileges. God has purchased our salvation at tremendous cost and he lovingly cares for us! **Do you seek God's precepts? Are you determined to remember them (93–94)?**

The word, '*consummation*' (96) is translated '*end*' (AV) '*limit*' (ESV). There isn't any perfection in this world but God's *commandment is exceedingly broad* (96); it is perfect and without limitation. Martin Luther said, 'I have covenanted with my Lord, that he should not send me visions, or dreams, or even angels. I am content with this one gift of the Scriptures, which abundantly teaches and supplies all that is necessary both for this life and that which is to come' (quoted by Charles Bridges, EXPOSITION OF PSALM 119, page 235).

Oh, how I love your law!

Every child of God should be able to exclaim with the psalmist, ‘*Oh, how I love your law!*’ (97) and, ‘*How sweet are your words to my taste!*’ (103). The Lord is wonderful in his grace and mercy towards us. He is our dearest friend and a delight in his Word is an evidence of our love for him. If we love God’s Word, it will show in our lives:

- We will take time to meditate on its teaching because it is sweet to our taste (97, 99, 103). We will say that God’s Word is ever with us (98). Matthew Henry comments, ‘A good man, wherever he goes, carries his Bible along with him, if not in his hands, yet in his head and in his heart.’
- We will obey God’s Word (100–101). We will not only rejoice in its promises but also delight in keeping its commands (John 14:15).
- We will refrain our feet *from every evil way* and *hate every false way* (101, 104). If we are to keep God’s Word, we must keep ourselves from sin.

Love for God’s Word brings great understanding (98–100). When we are biblical in our thinking we have something that the world’s great teachers lack; that is spiritual understanding. We understand why man is sinful and why the world is plagued by wickedness and suffering. We know the way of salvation through the Lord Jesus. We know God’s directions for a holy and satisfying life. Without such understanding, many mistakes are made in ordering national and personal affairs (cp. 1 Kings 3:9).

Verse 99 does not mean that we do not need anyone to teach us. There is a necessary place for teachers in every church (Romans 12:7; Ephesians 4:11–12; 2 Timothy 2:2). Beware of people who despise the instruction of God’s Word and arrogantly claim that the Holy Spirit is their teacher (cp. Proverbs 1:7). **Do you have spiritual understanding? If not, is it because you do not love the law of God?**

Your testimonies I have taken as a heritage for ever

There is much spiritual darkness in the world and we were once part of it (cp. John 1:5; Ephesians 4:17–18; 5:8). God has not left us to stumble along or to hopelessly grope forward in the darkness. He has given us his precious Word to guide us: ‘*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path*’ (105). Spurgeon comments, ‘Each man should use the Word of God personally, practically, and habitually, that he may see his way and see what lies in it. When darkness settles down upon all around me, the Word of the Lord, like a flaming torch, reveals my way ... Happy is the man who personally appropriates God’s Word, and practically uses it as his comfort and counsellor, — a lamp to his own feet. “*And a light unto my path.*” It is a lamp by night, a light by day, and a delight at all times’ (THE TREASURY OF DAVID).

When did you last make a solemn vow to the Lord? The psalmist vowed to keep God’s righteous judgments (106) It is good to make promises to God. Did you make promises to the Lord after your conversion, when you were baptised or when you were in trouble? Have you kept those promises? We have already seen that every Christian knows seasons of affliction (67,71,75). One of benefits of affliction is that it should drive us to call upon the Lord (107; cp. verse 25).

Christ’s death has put an end to sacrifices for sin but we are to offer sacrifices of praise to God; these are ‘*the free-will offerings*’ of our mouths (108; cp. Hebrews 13:15–16; 1 Peter 2:5). When we feel that our life is threatened, we must never forget God’s Word nor stray from it (109–110). While the psalmist ‘carried his life in his hand, he also carried the law in his heart’ (Spurgeon). People often speak of the value of their national or cultural heritage. The Word of God is a far more precious heritage: ‘*Your testimonies I have taken as a heritage for ever, for they are the rejoicing of my heart*’ (111). **Joyful obedience to God’s Word is an evidence that we value our great heritage (112).**

You are my hiding place and my shield

The man who loves the Word of God has no time for evil-doers and their ways (113,115) The believer can have no part in the sinful ways of the ungodly (cp. Psalm 1:1–2). This does not mean that we should have no contact with sinners (cp. 1 Corinthians 5:9–10). If that were the case, we would never be able to tell anyone of Christ. Remember, the Lord Jesus often accepted hospitality in the homes of sinners.

Where is our confidence in a world that is hostile to the gospel of Christ? Our confidence is in God: *'You are my hiding place and my shield; I hope in your word'* (114). Let the world hate us and Satan attack or accuse us, but we are secure in Christ. How wonderful to know that our Protector is the sovereign King of the universe, the eternal, almighty God! **Why should you fear men when God is your Friend? Why should you be ashamed of your hope (the Word of God, 114,116)?**

*Be thou my shield and hiding place
That sheltered near thy side,
I may my fierce accuser face
And tell him thou hast died*

(John Newton)

The end of the wicked is too dreadful to contemplate and the psalmist wrote, *'My flesh trembles for fear of you, and I am afraid of your judgments'* (118–120). Henry Martin, missionary to India and Persia, died in 1812 at the age of thirty-one. This is what he wrote in his journal (vol. 1, page 382) concerning the judgments of God: *'In prayer in the evening I had such near and terrific views of God's judgments upon sinners in hell, that my flesh trembled for fear of them. The passages of God's holy Word, that proved the certainty of hell-torments, were brought to me in such a way as I never before felt. I flew trembling to Jesus Christ, as if the flames were taking hold of me! Oh! Christ will indeed save me, or else I perish'* (Quoted by Charles Bridges, EXPOSITION OF PSALM 119, page 310)

It is time for you to act, O LORD

When we are converted to Christ, we are brought into the family of God. We become his children (cp. John 1:12; Romans 8:14–17) but it is also our privilege to serve God (John 12:26). The psalmist describes himself as God’s ‘*servant*’ three times in these verses (122,124–125). When we serve the Lord, we become the target of Satan and his evil servants (‘*oppressors*’ and ‘*the proud*’, 121–122).

Persecution and difficulties should drive us closer to God and make us call upon him in prayer (121–122). A ‘*surety*’ is a guarantor who answers for us. The Lord Jesus is our surety (Hebrews 7:22). Bridges comments, ‘At an infinite cost — the cost of his own precious blood — he delivered me from mine oppressors — sin — Satan — the world — death — hell’ (AN EXPOSITION OF PSALM 119, page 315).

We live in difficult times when there is increasing rebellion against God’s holy law. Wicked people are not content with disobeying God’s law, but also seek to make it void, driving it out of society. This is evident in some of the legislation being passed in Britain and in Brussels which is totally opposed to God’s holy law. Christians are now suffering persecution for their refusal to accept wicked practices. We should pray, ‘*It is time for you to act, O LORD*’ (126). This is not suggesting that we can order God to work. Prayer must always be with a submissive spirit. Matthew Henry writes, ‘Some read it, and the original will bear it, “*It is time to work for thee, O LORD;*” it is time for every one in his place to appear on the Lord’s side, against the threatening growth of profaneness and immorality. We must do what we can for the support of the sinking interests of religion, and after all, we must beg of God to take this work into his own hands.’

The more we see of this world’s wickedness, the more we should love and treasure the Word of God and to hate every false way (126–128). The way of rebellion against God is one of these false ways. Let us always seek to honour God by our obedience to his Word.

The entrance of your words gives light

We are again reminded that those who cherish the Word of God will obey it (129–131). The testimonies of the Lord are wonderful in what they say about God; they are wonderful because they are free from error, wonderful in their promises, wonderful because they comfort and build us up, wonderful because they bring spiritual enlightenment. *‘The entrance of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple’* (130). The mind of sinful man is full of darkness and ignorance, but what a glorious change comes when God’s Word enters our hearts and minds! When God shines in our hearts through his Word, even those of us who do not possess great intellect receive spiritual understanding (cp. 2 Corinthians 4:4–6). Spiritual enlightenment always comes through the Word of God and never apart from that Word. Do not listen to those who claim to have fresh revelations from God; they will lead you astray.

*The Spirit breathes upon the Word
And brings the truth to sight;
Precepts and promises afford
A sanctifying light.*

(William Cowper)

The psalmist prays that God will look upon him and be merciful to him so that he would be delivered from the dominion of sin and from the oppression of the ungodly (132–134). He then prays, *‘Make your face shine upon your servant’* (135). When God makes his face shine upon us, we know his smile on our lives (cp. Numbers 6:24–26) and we do not need to fear the frown of men! John Trapp observes, ‘The faithful in the world are like a pearl in a puddle; they lose nothing of their virtue, though amidst the vicious’ (NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARY, page 647, published by the Sovereign Grace Book Club).

The godly man sorrows over the rebellion against God’s law by those who are lost (136). He weeps because the wonderful testimonies of God are slighted and because he knows that sinners will perish in hell. **Do you earnestly desire the salvation of sinners? Do you ever weep as you pray for them?**

Your testimonies ... are righteous and very faithful

These verses speak of the righteousness of God (137,142) and his Word (138,144). The Lord is righteous and his judgments are upright (137; cp. Revelation 15:3). *'Your testimonies ... are righteous and very faithful ...The righteousness of your testimonies is everlasting* (138, 144). .

God's Word is not only *'very faithful'* but also *'very pure'* (140; cp. Proverbs 30:5). The Hebrew translated *'pure'* means refined and free from dross. The Bible is free from the dross of error which is found in the books written by men and it has no scum of uncleanness. The Christian loves God's Word because it is *'truth'* (142). The more we test God's promises, the more reliable we prove them to be. The psalmist again expresses his zeal for the Word. He was agitated within because his enemies had forgotten God's words (139). Though the ungodly forget God's Word, the believer should never forget it but have it hidden in his heart (141; cp. verse 11)!

We are not exempt from troubles and anguish but when they come upon us, we will continue to delight in God's commandments (143). Spurgeon writes concerning verse 143, *'Only the man who is acquainted with the struggles of the spiritual life will understand the expression before us. Let the reader herein find a balance in which to weigh himself. Does he find even when he is begirt* with sorrow that it is a delightful thing to do the will of the Lord? Does he find more joy in being sanctified than sorrow in being chastised? Then the spot of God's children is upon him'* (THE TREASURY OF DAVID). * *'Begirt' = 'surrounded'*.

'Very faithful ... very pure'. — **Do you love, obey and delight in God's Word?**

*O, may these hallowed pages be
My ever dear delight
And still new beauties may I see,
And still increasing light.*

(Anne Steel)

You are near, O LORD

Spurgeon writes in THE TREASURY OF DAVID, ‘The whole passage shows us: How he (the psalmist) prayed (verse 145). What he prayed for (146). When he prayed (147). How long he prayed (148). What he pleaded (149). What happened (150). How he was rescued (151). What was his witness as to the whole matter (152.)’

We need to be more disciplined and more fervent in the life of prayer. The psalmist cried out to God with his whole heart, rising early in the morning (145–147; notice the repetition of ‘cry out’ and ‘cry’ in each of these verses). Dare we face the day without first seeking God’s blessing on all of our activities? Many of us are only urgent and fervent in prayer when we are in trouble. Spurgeon observes, ‘He who has been with God in the closet (the private place of prayer) will find God with him in the furnace.’

What is our confidence in prayer? It is the unfailing promises of God which enable us to hope in his Word. Let us often meditate on the words of Scripture and remember the steadfast love of God (147–149). *Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need* (Hebrews 4:16). Bridges comments, ‘Your soul would not be so empty of comfort, if your mouth were not so empty of prayer’ (EXPOSITION OF PSALM 119, page 387).

*O what peace we often forfeit!
O what needless pain we bear!
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer.* (Joseph M. Scriven)

The psalmist was threatened by the wicked who were far from God’s law but were drawing near to him. How was he comforted and reassured in a time of trouble? – ‘*They draw near who follow after wickedness ... You are near, O LORD*’ (150–151). The Lord is near to us at all times. **This is a great comfort to us as we mingle with the ungodly in our place of work and in our neighbourhood.**

Plead my cause and redeem me

Salvation is far from the wicked (155) but deliverance is never far from the child of God. Here the psalmist calls upon God to consider (look upon) his affliction and his affection for the Word of God (153,159). Men often consider and do little, but when God considers, he acts in his good time. The believer has many enemies (157–158) but with God on our side, what have we to fear? We are able to call upon him, *'Plead my cause and redeem me'* (154). Satan accuses us before God (Revelation 12:10). He has a strong case but we are not to despair. Our great Advocate who pleads our cause with God the Father is the perfect, righteous Saviour (1 John 2:1). The Father always hears the Lord Jesus who pleads the merits of his own righteousness and blood shed to save and to justify sinners (John 11:41–42; Romans 5:8–9; 8:34; Hebrews 9:12; 1 Peter 1:18–19). **Are you feeling stricken under the accusations of Satan? If you are a Christian, do not despair but look to the Lord Jesus who pleads your cause.**

The plea, *'Revive me'*, (*'quicken me'* – AV) is found nine times in this psalm (25,37,40,88,107,149,154,156,159), three times in today's reading. Charles Bridges writes, 'Often as this petition has been brought before us, in the course of this psalm, it is too important ever to be passed over. Let us at this time use it for the purpose of self-inquiry. In what respects do I need quickening grace? Are my views of sin, and especially of the sin of my own heart, slight and superficial? Do they fail in producing humility, abasement, tenderness of conscience, circumspection of conduct? If it be so — Quicken me, O my God! Does my apprehension of a Saviour's love serve to embitter sin to me? To crucify sin in me, to warm and enliven my heart with love to him, and zeal in his service? If I am convicted of coldness to such a Saviour, and sluggishness in such a service, I need to pray — O Lord, quicken me! And how do I find it with regard to prayer itself? Are not my prayers general — unfrequent — wandering? Is not my service too often constrained, a forced duty, rather than a privilege and delight? O Lord, quicken me!' (EXPOSITION OF PSALM 119, page 410).

Great peace have those who love your law

The psalmist had many enemies, including princes, who persecuted him without a cause (157,161). Charles Bridges points out that the principles of God are very different from those of the world: ‘God chastises his people for their sins; the world persecutes them for their godliness (John 15:19). So it has been from the beginning (Galatians 4:29), and will continue to the end (2 Timothy 3:12).’ (EXPOSITION OF PSALM 119, page 424).

If you love the Lord, your godliness will be reflected in your attitude to the Word of God:

- Your heart will stand in awe of God’s law (161). If you do not reverence God’s Word, you know little of the fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom (Psalm 111:10).
- You will rejoice in God’s Word as one who finds great treasure (162). Do you read it and hear it with the eagerness and enthusiasm of a seeker after spiritual treasure?
- You will love God’s Word (163,165,167).
- You will gladly obey the Word of God (166–168).

If you love God’s Word, you will hate and loathe all forms of lying, eg. false teaching, deceit and hypocrisy (163). You will frequently praise God (164) and his peace will be seen in your life. *Great peace have those who love your law, and nothing causes them to stumble* (165). You will not allow persecution, chastening, perplexity or hardship to rob you of your peace or make you stumble!

Bridges writes, ‘But never let us lose sight of the recollection, that all our ways are before God! That every act, every thought, every desire, every word, is registered by conscience as his viceregent, and laid up in his book of remembrance! Well would it be for us, if we walked less before men, and more before God; if in secret, in business, at home and abroad, we heard the solemn voice — “*I am the Almighty God: walk before me, and be thou perfect.*” (Genesis 17:1).’ – EXPOSITION OF PSALM 119, page 454.

I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek your servant

This final section of the psalm expresses the need for us to depend upon God at all times. The psalmist cries out to the Lord for understanding (169), deliverance (170), help (173), life (175) and restoration (176). The prayerless Christian is sinful because he presumes that he can get along in his own strength. We all need to call upon God every day, seeking his gracious help to enable us to lead a life that honours and glorifies him.

The word ‘*come*’ (169) should be translated ‘come near’ as in the AV which reads, ‘*Let my cry come near before thee, O LORD.*’ It is possible to go through all the motions of prayer without knowing real communion with God. **If we pray out of a sense of duty rather than a sense of delight our prayers will degenerate into an empty charade and they will not come near before the Lord.** A hymn that we sing rightly asks the question, ‘I often say my prayers, but do I ever pray?’ The godly person is always ready to praise God and to speak of his Word (171–172,175). When did you last utter heartfelt praise to God?

The psalm closes on a note of realism. The psalmist prays, ‘*I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek your servant, for I do not forget your commandments*’ (176). The psalmist had often protested his innocence in the face of slander coming from his enemies, but in the presence of God, he is ready to confess his sins. Barton Bouchier (quoted in THE TREASURY OF DAVID) writes, ‘What an insight into our poor wayward hearts does this verse give us — not merely liable to wander, but ever wandering, ever losing our way, ever stumbling on the dark mountains, even while cleaving to God’s commandments! But at the same time what a prayer does it put into our mouths, “*Seek thy servant,*” — “I am thine, save me.” Yes, blessed be God! there is One mighty to save. “*Kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.*” ’

1 THESSALONIANS

After planting the church at Philippi, Paul and his companions moved to Thessalonica (now called Thessaloniki, the second largest city in modern Greece, with a population in 2011 of 325,000; metropolitan Thessaloniki has over 1 million). Paul preached in the synagogue and many were converted to Christ, both Jew and Gentile (Acts 17:1–9). Jewish opponents raised a mob to attack the apostles, but Paul and Silas escaped by night, going to the town of Berea. The date for these events was probably the early summer of AD 50 and Paul wrote his first letter to the Thessalonians some nine to twelve months later.

Paul was very concerned for the infant church which was suffering persecution. He had sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to encourage them, to establish them and to bring news of them to him (3:1–5). Timothy came to Paul (who by this time was in Corinth – Acts 18:5) with the good news that the Thessalonians were standing firm and making the gospel known despite persecution. He reported that some were needing further instruction concerning the second coming of Christ. Paul wrote to them as soon as he had received Timothy’s report to encourage them and to deal with their problems.

Outline of 1 Thessalonians

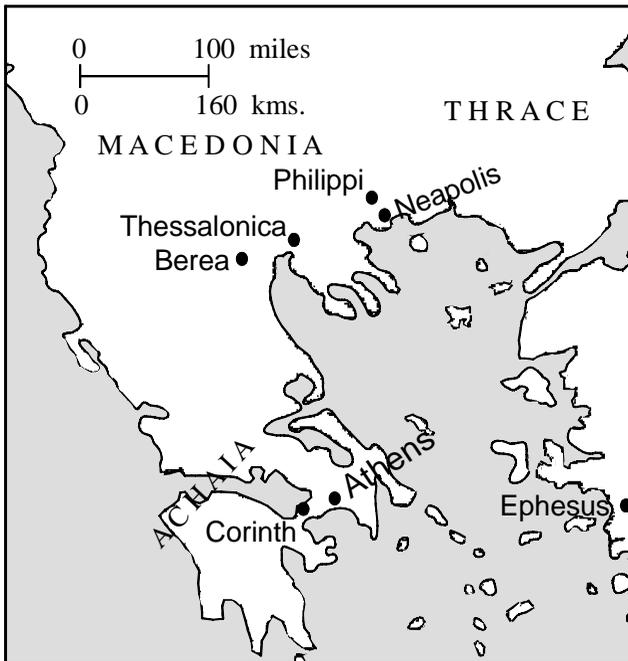
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|--|---|--------------|
| 1. Opening greetings | – | 1:1 |
| 2. Paul’s thanksgiving for the Thessalonians | – | 1:2–10 |
| 3. Paul’s ministry among the Thessalonians | – | 2:1–16 |
| 4. Paul’s concern and prayer for the Thessalonians | | 2:17 to 3:13 |
| 5. Living the Christian life | – | 4:1–12 |
| 6. The second coming of Christ | – | 4:13 to 5:11 |
| 7. Various exhortations | – | 5:12–22 |
| 8. Closing prayer, greetings and benediction | – | 5:23–28 |

A recommended commentary on 1 & 2 Thessalonians

Readers of these notes will be aware that I often quote from William Hendriksen, whose New Testament commentaries I find most helpful.

Phil Arthur, pastor of Free Grace Baptist Church, Lancaster has written New Testament commentaries on 2 Corinthians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, and Hebrews. I have also found Phil's work helpful and very practical. If my notes whet your appetite for further study on 1 & 2 Thessalonians, do purchase and read Phil's commentary (*PATIENCE OF HOPE – 1 AND 2 THESSALONIANS SIMPLY EXPLAINED*. — Published by Evangelical Press, Welwyn Commentary Series).

Macedonia and Achaia



The daily Bible readings in 1 and 2 Thessalonians will each cover several days to allow us to understand the riches of the teaching that they contain.

In God

The opening greetings in this letter are from Paul, Silvanus (Silas), and Timothy. Paul describes the Thessalonian church as being ‘*in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*’ (1; cp. 2 Thessalonians 1:1). Christians are also known as those who are ‘*in Christ*’ (eg. 2 Corinthians 5:17; Philippians 1:1). Being ‘*in God*’ means that we are surrounded by the love and care of the Almighty! We can say with Moses, ‘*LORD, you have been our dwelling place in all generations*’ (Psalm 90:1). *Your life is hidden with Christ in God* (Colossians 3:3).

The Christian is ‘*in God*’ because of his election by God (4). To realise that God graciously chose us in Christ before he created the world should cause us to worship him with much gratitude and praise (cp. Ephesians 1:3–6; 1 Peter 1:2–5). We must never think that God chose us because we deserved to be saved, nor because he foresaw that we would choose him. Such a view is not Biblical and fails to understand the meaning of the word ‘foreknowledge’. An evidence of being ‘*in God*’ is that we have turned to God from our sinful ways (9).

The Thessalonian church had been born in persecution and suffering (6; 2:14; 3:3–4; 2 Thessalonians 1:4–7; Acts 17:5–9) but they were ‘*in God*’ who is greater than any foe who dared oppose them. Undaunted by persecution, they *sounded forth the word of the Lord* (8). Being ‘*in God*’ makes all the difference in the world to our lives. **Are you fearful? Are you facing problems and difficulties? Are you suffering ridicule, scorn and opposition as a Christian? Remember that you are ‘*in God*’ and take heart!**

*In heavenly love abiding,
No change my heart shall fear;
And safe is such confiding,
For nothing changes here:
The storm may roar without me,
My heart may low be laid;
But God is round about me,
And can I be dismayed?*

(Anna L. Waring)

Your work of faith, labour of love, and patience of hope

When the apostle Paul prayed for the Thessalonian Christians, he gave thanks to God for them as he called to mind their *work of faith, labour of love, and patience of hope* (3; cp. 5:8). Let us think about the way in which these graces were displayed in the lives of those early Christians:

- ‘*Your work of faith*’ – Christianity was not a theory to them, but a living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This faith was apparent to all by the work it produced in their lives. Their ‘*work of faith*’ may here refer especially to their faithfulness in sounding forth the gospel in the midst of fierce persecution (7–8). If we do not have a faith that shows itself in good works, it is dead (James 2:1, 26)!
- ‘*Labour of love*’ – John Eadie, commenting on the Greek word for ‘*labour*’ writes, ‘Kopos is earnest and toilsome service, into which the whole heart is thrown, travail of soul, often self-denial and exhaustion.... The noun kopos comprises all the labour which belongs to Christian love ... (it) busies itself in kindness of all shapes, in the doing of which it spares no pains and grudges no sacrifice’ (COMMENTARY ON THE GREEK TEXT). What motivates such sacrificial toil? Whole-hearted love for the Lord Jesus Christ and his people!
- ‘*Patience of hope*’ – There is nothing uncertain about the Christian hope. The Greek word translated ‘*hope*’ means ‘confident expectation’. the word ‘*patience*’ can also be translated ‘endurance’ or ‘perseverance.’ They persevered in their work for God despite the persecution that raged against them. They were not quitters! Their faith and hope was not in men but *in our Lord Jesus Christ*.

The Thessalonians were reminded that their service was *in the sight of our God and Father* who had chosen them (‘*election*’ – verse 4). Their vigorous faith puts many of us to shame. **Does your pastor have good reason to be able to thank God for your *work of faith, labour of love, and patience of hope*?**

In power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance

What lay behind the quality of the lives of the Thessalonians? Surely it was the quality and power of the message that they heard before they came to faith in the living God! The message was more than just words. Paul writes, *‘For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance’* (5). Let us think about these words:

- *‘In power’* – Our word ‘dynamite’ comes from the Greek word translated ‘power’. Paul’s message came with tremendous power which transformed thousands and thousands of lives. *The gospel is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes* (Romans 1:16). God saves souls through the preaching of the gospel.
- *‘In the Holy Spirit’* – There was the unction of the Holy Spirit on the preaching of the apostles. Something is bound to happen when the Spirit of God works through the preaching of the Word of God. Let us pray much that our preachers will be empowered by the Holy Spirit in their ministry.
- *‘In much assurance’* – There was deep conviction in Paul’s preaching and he expected to see God work through the preaching of the Word. **We cannot separate our lives from our message. There was great blessing upon the preaching of the apostles because they were men whose lives were blameless and godly.** Paul reminded the Thessalonian Christians, *‘You know what kind of men we were among you’* (5; cp. 2:10).

Many professing Christians do not want to listen to the preaching of God’s Word. They want fun and entertainment in church. We must not yield to such shallowness! We need to recover confidence in the power of God to use the preaching of his Word in the salvation of sinners. Let us now pray for our pastors and for missionaries, that their gospel will come not *in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance.*

Examples

The Thessalonian Christians were young in the faith (see introduction to the book, page 26). Paul was able to commend them because they had become *examples* to other believers throughout Macedonia, Achaia and beyond (7). Their pattern of life is also an example and a challenge to all of us:

- They became *followers* of the apostles and of the Lord (6). The Greek word translated ‘*followers*’ is also translated ‘*imitators*’ (2:14). They imitated the Lord and his apostles by godly living. The beauty of the Lord Jesus could be seen in them. New Christians often imitate those of us who are well-established in the faith. What kind of example do we set?
- They received God’s Word *in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit* (6). There was much opposition to the preaching of the gospel in their city (see Acts 17:5–9). The Lord Jesus reminds us that many who appear to receive the Word of God with joy, stumble and fall away when tribulation or persecution arises (Matthew 13:20–21). The Thessalonian Christians were not like that. The Greek word translated ‘*affliction*’ means ‘pressure’. The pressure of persecution did not dampen their enthusiasm for the Word of God. The reception of the Word brought *the joy of the Holy Spirit* into their suffering. Spiritual joy is not worked up in meetings charged with high emotion, but is rather linked with the reception of God’s Word into our lives.
- They *sounded forth* the Word of the Lord (8). The Greek verb translated ‘*sounded forth*’ means ‘to sound out as a trumpet’. Suffering did not deter them! They did not whisper God’s Word but boldly proclaimed it. They were able to sound out God’s Word because they had joyfully welcomed it into their own hearts (6; cp. 2:13).

We all set a good or a bad example. We will have to give an account of our lives on the day of judgment. What kind of example are you?

You turned to God from idols

The experience of the Thessalonian Christians demonstrates that conversion to Christ means a complete change of life:

- *'You turned to God from idols'* (9). Most of them were Gentiles rather than Jews, hence their involvement with idol worship before their conversion. Mount Olympus (where the torch of the Olympic games is lit) is only 60 miles from Thessalonica. The Greeks believed that their gods lived on the summit of this mountain and gods such as Zeus and Hermes were household names. Idol worship was ingrained into their culture, but when they turned to the Lord, they forsook their idols. Their lives were completely changed. The living God demands our total allegiance if we are to follow him. The old sinful ways must go! We do not have the same idols as the Greeks but there are more subtle forms of idolatry such as materialism and covetousness from which we must turn (Colossians 3:5). We cannot please God if we live for self-gratification and pleasure (2 Timothy 3:1–4).
- *'To serve the living and true God'* (9). We are saved in order to serve God. The word translated *'serve'* means *'to serve as a slave'*. We cannot have Christ as our Saviour without owning him also as our Lord! God is the living God, the true God. Are you serving him as described in verses 3 and 8? Conversion should lead to joyful service.
- *To wait for his Son from heaven* (10). The Lord Jesus rose from the dead and forty days later ascended into heaven. One day he is coming again with great power and glory. To wait for him means to be ready for him (just as we make ourselves ready to receive guests when we wait for them to arrive at our home). Jesus *delivers us from the wrath to come*. If he returned today, would you be ready? Be sure to repent of your sin and turn to God if you are not!

The change in the lives of the Thessalonians was evident for all to see (9). **Do those with whom you live and work see that you serve the living and true God?**

We were gentle among you

Paul now reminds the Thessalonians of the ministry of Silas, Timothy and himself among them. They had been witnesses of the high standards set by Paul and his fellow-workers (10; see also the expression, ‘*as you know*’ – verses 1,5,11; cp, 1:5).

The ‘*gospel*’ is mentioned four times in these verses (2,4,8,9). They had enjoyed great success in their evangelism. What was their secret?

- They were bold to preach the gospel despite opposition, conflict, and persecution (2).
- They did not compromise their message to please men: *But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts* (4).
- Their behaviour had always been beyond reproach (3,5–6): *You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you* (10).
- They were so zealous to make Christ known that they laboured and toiled night and day to pay for their own support as well as serving in the work of the gospel (9).
- They had a great love for those to whom they preached. This was seen in their attitude to the Thessalonians. They did not only share the gospel with them, but also their own lives (8). They were like loving parents: *We were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children* (7). They had also *exhorted and comforted* every one of them *as a father does his own children* (11). Such an example is a great challenge to us in serving Christ. We must be firm and unyielding in the face of error, but always gracious and gentle.

Let us always seek to honour God by being approachable, kind and understanding to Christians and to unbelievers. **Our witness will be more effective if we are Christlike. Let us not be ‘hard’ but gentle and tenderhearted in our attitude to others.**

That you would have a walk worthy of God

During their visit to Thessalonica, Paul Silas and Timothy had *exhorted* (pleaded with urgency and feeling), and *comforted* (spoke kindly), and *charged* (testified to) every one of them, as a father does his own children (11–12). What was the thrust of their pastoral ministry? It was that the Thessalonians *would have a walk worthy of God*. We represent our Lord and Saviour here on earth and our walk (or lifestyle) must be one that commends our Christian profession (cp. Ephesians 4:1; Philippians 1:27; Col. 1:9–10).

We share the same salvation as the Thessalonians with all of its privileges and responsibilities. We have to live a life *worthy of God* because he has graciously called us into *his own kingdom and glory* which is a kingdom of *righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit* (Romans 14:17). **Think about this! Almighty God, the Creator of all the universe who has breathtaking power, majesty and wisdom, has called you into his own kingdom.**

This call is a call to holy living (4:7) and if you do not obey God, you are not walking worthy of him. He has also called us into his own glory. We are bound for heaven where we will see our blessed Saviour! Without holiness no one will see him (Hebrews 12:14).

If we are to walk in a manner worthy of God, we must be disciplined in our devotional life. Daily prayer and Bible reading are most important for spiritual growth and strength. We must be involved in the life and witness of a sound, biblical church, looking for opportunities to serve the Lord. We must also avoid anything that will lead us in the way of temptation and sin.

*Ye souls redeemed with blood
And called by grace divine
Walk worthy of your God
And let your conduct shine;
Keep Christ, your living Head, in view
In all you say, in all you do.* (William Gadsby)

The word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe

The Thessalonians had received God's Word *in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit* (1:6). They had also welcomed the apostles' preaching *not as the word of men, but ... as the word of God* (13). Their experience of persecution and their attitude to the preaching of God's Word was like that of the churches in Judea (14–16). Some preaching is dreadful, lacking in spiritual instruction or being deadly boring in its delivery but we must not give up on preaching because of poor preachers. Do not listen to those who dismiss the preaching of God's Word as unnecessary, or who claim that a ten minute sermon is more than enough. Preaching is a necessary and vital element for the health of the local church. Paul encouraged Timothy, '*Preach the word!*' (2 Timothy 4:2).

If we love the Lord we will be eager to hear his Word preached. The Thessalonians welcomed the apostles' preaching not as the word of men but as *the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe* (13). God's Word will not profit you if you fail to receive it *with faith* or if you *have become dull of hearing* (Hebrews 4:2; 5:11). You will be a dull hearer if unnecessary late nights make you tired, or if you do not prayerfully prepare yourself to hear God's Word each Lord's Day. If you come to hear God's Word with faith and expectation in your heart, it will change your life. In his poem, 'The Deserted Village,' Oliver Goldsmith speaks of the effect of the preaching of a godly man:

*Truth from his lips prevail'd with double sway,
And fools, who came to scoff, remain'd to pray.*

The Word of God effectively worked in the Thessalonians so that they were strong in suffering. Persecution did not keep them away from meeting to worship and to hear God's Word. Dare you make shallow excuses for being absent from the house of the Lord? **Pray for your pastor and for preachers of God's Word. Pray that the Word of the Lord will grow mightily and prevail in the darkness that surrounds us.**

