

The First Epistle to the Thessalonians

Introduction

The city of Thessalonica was situated on the northern part of the Aegean Sea, on the Thermaic Gulf. It was a prominent city of the Roman province, Macedonia. Its inhabitants were mostly Thracians. Thessalonica was a wealthy and large city and for a time, the most influential centre in the northeastern part of the Roman empire. On account of its great commerce many Jews had settled there and a flourishing synagogue existed in the city.

The visit of the Apostle Paul to Thessalonica is recorded in the seventeenth chapter of the book of Acts. It took place after his ministry in Philippi. It seems that the persecution there hastened his departure. Paul had said to the magistrates, "They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison; and now would they thrust us out privily? Nay, verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out." When this came to the ears of the authorities, they became frightened for it was illegal to scourge a Roman citizen. "And they came and besought them, and brought them out, and desired them to depart out of the city. And they went out of the prison and entered into the house of Lydia; and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them and departed" (Acts 16:37-40). Of his experience Paul writes in his first letter to the Thessalonians. "For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain. But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention" (1 Thess. 2:1-2). Leaving then Philippi with Silas (Silvanus) and Timothy they went along the famous highway, the Via Egnatia and reached the city of Thessalonica. On the way they passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia. On their arrival Paul followed his usual custom and visited the synagogue.

For three Sabbaths, the record in Acts tells us, he reasoned with them out of the Scriptures. The Scriptures, of course, were the Old Testament Scriptures, for the New Testament was then not in existence. The way he dealt with his Jewish brethren is the pattern still for reaching the Jews with the gospel. He opened the Scriptures, and without mentioning the name of the Lord Jesus at all, he showed that the Old Testament teaches that the Messiah (Christ) promised to them must suffer and rise from the dead. This great truth that the sufferings of Messiah come first and the glory follows, had been forgotten by the Jews. A crucified Christ was their stumbling block (1 Cor. 1:23). They looked only to the glory-side and the accomplishment, through Him, of the national promises. And after Paul had demonstrated from the Scriptures "that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead," then he boldly declared that "this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ." The predictions of the suffering and the resurrection of Christ were fulfilled in the Lord Jesus. But he must have preached more than that. He also taught that Christ would come again. This we learn from the fact that the unbelieving Jews, in bringing Jason, who had believed, with other brethren before the rulers, accused them of "turning the world upside down," and "that there is another King, one Jesus" (Acts 17:5-7). His second Epistle also shows that he had given them instructions in dispensational and prophetic truths (2 Thess. 2:5).

The Church in Thessalonica

As a result of his testimony a church was at once gathered out. "And some of them believed and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few" (Acts 17:4). From this we learn that a number of Jews were persuaded that the Lord Jesus is the Christ and accepted Him as their Saviour and Lord. But the church was mostly composed of devout Greeks. These were not heathen, but Greeks who had given up idolatry and had become Jewish proselytes. They were convinced that paganism was wrong and seeking for light attended the synagogical services. Of this class a great multitude believed. The third class

mentioned are women who occupied positions of distinction. Not a few of them believed. The Epistles Paul wrote to the church of the Thessalonians also shows the character of those gathered. That the majority of them were Gentiles is learned from the statement that they had turned to God from idols (1 Thess. 1:9). The evils against which he warns (1 Thess. 4:1-8) were mostly practised by the Greeks; and they belonged mostly to the poorer, the working class (1 Thess. 4:11).

Paul's First Epistle: When and for What it was Written

The Epistle to the Thessalonians is the first Epistle Paul wrote. Even the most outspoken critics acknowledge that it is a genuine document. Irenaeus (about 140 A.D.) bears witness to this Epistle. There are many other historical evidences, besides the contents of the Epistle, which prove conclusively that Paul is the author of it. All this is not necessary to follow in this brief introduction. The Authorized Version has a postscript "written from Athens ." This claim is made on account of the apostle's statement in chapter 3:1-2. "Wherefore, when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left alone at Athens . And sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith." It is surmised that Timotheus carried this letter to the Thessalonians. This is incorrect. The Epistle was written after Timotheus had returned from his visit to Thessalonica. The sixth verse of the third chapter furnishes this evidence. "But now when Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings of your faith and love, and that ye have good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us." Timothy came from Thessalonica with the good news of the happy state of the Thessalonian church and joined the apostle in Corinth (Acts 18:5). From Corinth Paul wrote this first Epistle about the year 52 or possibly a few months later.

The apostle had been compelled to break off suddenly his ministry in Thessalonica on account of the persecutions which had arisen in that city. "The brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea " (Acts 17:10). He must have felt that the new converts needed more instructions. Of this he writes in the Epistle. "But we, brethren, being taken from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavoured the more abundantly to see your face with great desire. Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again: but Satan hindered us" (2:17, 18). To comfort them in the midst of the persecution and in their sorrow, to encourage them in their conflicts, he was moved by the Holy Spirit to write this first Epistle. Timothy had brought to him the information of the tribulations they were undergoing. And they were especially distressed by the death of a number of believers. They sorrowed almost like those who had no hope, because they feared that these departed ones would have no share in the glory and in the kingdom of the returning Christ. To relieve them of their anxiety, to give them further light on the coming of the Lord in relation to those who are asleep and the reunion with them who have gone before, what will happen when the Lord comes for His saints, so that they could comfort each other, is one of the chief reasons why this letter was written.

The Coming of the Lord

The blessed hope of the coming of the Lord occupies a very prominent place in this Epistle. In our days we often hear the statement that the coming of our Lord is an unessential doctrine. Those who make such an assertion are ignorant of the fact that the blessed hope is a part of the gospel itself. Christian preaching and teaching which ignores the blessed hope, the coming of the Lord, is incomplete; it omits one of the most vital truths which the Spirit of God has linked with the gospel and with the life and service of the believer. The first Epistle the great apostle wrote is an evidence of this. In this Epistle one of the greatest revelations in the Word of God about His coming, is made known (4:13-18). It is the Epistle in which the doctrine of the coming of Christ is unfolded and shown to be practically connected with the Christian's life. Each chapter bears witness to it (1:9-10; 2:19-20; 3:13; 4:13-18; 5:1-11). Christians wait for Him; serve in anticipation of His coming when all service will be rewarded and the servant crowned; His coming is the incentive to a holy life, it is the comfort and consolation and when He comes and takes His own in clouds to meet Him in the air, it

will bring the unexpected judgment for the world. The second Epistle gives additional light on the visible manifestation of the Lord, what will precede that day and what is connected with it, when He comes with His holy angels. The fate of those who obey not the gospel and who receive not the love of the truth is made known in the second Epistle.

The Division of First Thessalonians

Simplicity and deep affection are the marks of this Epistle. We find nothing about Judaizers, these perverters of the gospel of Jesus Christ against whom Paul had to warn in his later Epistles. Warnings such as we have in Colossians and other Epistles are absent. The loving apostle is not grieved in any way, but happy on account of the gracious work going on in the midst of the Thessalonians, and rejoicing in them as his beloved children. In the study of this Epistle we maintain the division in five chapters.

- I. THE CHURCH OF THE THESSALONIANS AND ITS BLESSED CONDITION (1)
- II. TRUE SERVICE, AS MANIFESTED IN APOSTOLIC MINISTRY (2)
- III. AFFLICTIONS AND COMFORT (3)
- IV. THE SEPARATED WALK AND THE BLESSED HOPE (4)
- V. THE DAY OF THE LORD AND EXHORTATIONS (5)

Analysis and Annotations

I. THE CHURCH OF THE THESSALONIANS AND ITS BLESSED CONDITION

CHAPTER 1

- 1. Greetings and thanksgiving (1:1-4)
- 2. The gospel and its blessed fruits (1:5-7)
- 3. The blessed condition of the Church (1:8-10)

Verses 1-4

Paul, Silvanus and Timotheus were known to the Thessalonians, for they had been with them, and were the instruments of God used in bringing the gospel to them. He does not speak of himself as an apostle. In nine of his Epistles, Paul uses his title as apostle. In Romans and Titus, he calls himself also "a servant of Jesus Christ and of God." In Philippians, he speaks of himself and of Timothy as "servants of Christ Jesus." In the Epistle to Philemon, he also omits his apostleship, because this Epistle was a private letter. He asserts his apostolic title and authority in the strongest way, when he addresses the Galatians and the Corinthians, because these churches were troubled with false teachers who impeached his apostolic calling. As this trouble did not exist in Thessalonica, he does not call to their remembrance that he is an apostle. He did not parade his title, and only mentions it when the truth he preached and which he had received from the Lord was questioned.

He addressed the church in Thessalonica as "the church of the Thessalonians, in God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ." The church in Thessalonica is the only one addressed in this manner. The church is looked upon as the family of God, as the children of God, and God their Father through the Lord Jesus Christ. They were the happy children of God and in simplicity of faith knew

Him as their Father. What a transformation had taken place in these Thessalonians! They were idolators, worshipping idols; through believing the gospel, they were born again and now enjoyed the blessed relationship to God as Father. There is no other way into the family of God than the way by which these heathen had been brought there. We are sons of God by faith in Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:26). And John, in addressing the family of God wrote "I write unto you, little children (those born again), because ye have known the Father" (1 John 2:13). The apostle, who had declared the gospel unto them, thanked God always for them, and with his fellow laborers made mention of them in prayer. The life which they possessed manifested itself in faith, love and hope. These are the principles which form our character as Christians. Theirs was a work of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and the Father, labor undertaken by love; all their labor in service flowed from love, and they endured because they possessed hope, waiting for Him. The objects of faith, love and hope are the Lord Jesus Christ and God the Father.

Verses 5-7

The apostle mentions next the gospel and what it had wrought among them. "Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but in power and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance." Paul, Silvanus and Timothy had preached to them the good news of a free and full salvation by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and the gospel message came to them in power. He made the word effective in their souls and quickened them so that the great change took place by which they passed from death unto life; thus believing, the Holy Spirit was received by them, giving them full assurance. Here we have the divine order of salvation; the message of the gospel heard and believed; the Spirit of God manifesting His power in the conversion and the sealing of those who believed, and the consequence: the full assurance of the truth in all its blessed power and reality. But the gospel was not only preached by these messengers among the Thessalonians; the chosen instruments also witnessed to that gospel by their life and walk--"As ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sakes." They were living and blessed witnesses of the power of the gospel which they proclaimed. Their holy walk, their self-denial, their peace and quietness had its blessed effect on the Thessalonian believers, for they became imitators of the apostles. Inasmuch as the messengers followed closely the Lord Jesus Christ, the Thessalonians, being imitators of them, became thus imitators of the Lord, having received the Word in much affliction with joy of the Holy Spirit. And then in turn they became patterns to all that believed in Macedonia and Achaia. In these simple statements, we have a blessed manifestation of the real power of the gospel.

Verses 8-10

There was no need for Paul, Silvanus and Timothy to say anything about these Thessalonian Christians. It was not necessary to speak to others of what God had wrought in Thessalonica or to declare the genuineness of these new converts. The Thessalonian believers gave such a strong and full testimony that it was wholly unnecessary for the laborers to say anything about them. The word of the Lord was sounded forth by them with no uncertain sound. They were true lights in the world-darkness and were holding forth the word of life. Their faith toward God became widely known in every place. Throughout that region it became known through their witness of what the gospel is and what the gospel produces in the hearts and lives of those who believe.

And what was their testimony? It is stated in the last two verses of this chapter. "For they, themselves, report concerning us what manner of entrance we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from among the dead, Jesus, who delivereth us from the wrath to come." In these words we have the great essentials of true Christianity. The first is true conversion. They had turned to God from idols, not, as it is sometimes quoted, from idols to God; the power of God, in believing the gospel had turned them away from idolatry. They were now serving no longer dumb idols, but the true and living God. In this service they manifested the genuineness of their conversion. And there was another prominent characteristic: they waited for His Son from heaven, Jesus, whom God had raised from among the dead. They looked earnestly for Him, in whom they had believed, who had

died for them and of whom they knew He had been raised from among the dead, being now, at the right hand of God. According to His own promise to come again, they were patiently waiting for His coming from heaven, though they were ignorant of the manner of His coming. How He will come again, and what is connected with this great event, they learned fully from the two Epistles they received from the inspired pen of the apostle. To wait for the coming of the Lord is a vital characteristic of true Christianity; it is a part of the gospel. A sad testimony it is to the superficial knowledge of the gospel when men say and teach that the belief in the second coming of Christ is unessential and of no practical value. It is most essential and of the greatest value to the true believer. It presents the gloryside of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He who died for our sins, who is the glorified Man, the firstborn among many brethren, has promised to have all His own with Him to be like Him and to share His glory. This is the true object of the believer's expectation and hope. He has delivered us from the wrath to come. Therefore the Thessalonians, and all true believers as well, can wait without fear for that blessed event, for they know they are sheltered by Him from the wrath to come. Before this wrath comes He will take His own into His presence. He is our deliverer from the wrath to come.

II. TRUE SERVICE, As MANIFESTED IN APOSTOLIC MINISTRY

CHAPTER 2

1. Apostolic conduct and service (2:1-12)
2. Thanksgiving for the reception of the message and the opposition (2:13-16)
3. Looking forward to His coming (2:17-19)

Verses 1-12

The apostle now enlarges upon the brief statement in the previous chapter "Ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sakes." His conduct and character, as well as that of his fellow laborers, corresponded fully with the holy character of the truth they preached. They walked worthy of the gospel and worthy of the Lord. First he makes mention of the sufferings he and Silas endured in Philippi. They had been shamefully treated. They had been stripped and scourged cruelly with the lictor's rods and cast into prison with their feet secured to the stocks. The physical discomfort resulting from such a punishment must have lasted for many days, but it did not hinder their going to Thessalonica with confidence in God to speak the gospel there, where they also had much conflict. And what a witness he bore of their unselfish conduct while they were among them! This exhortation was not a deceit, that is, out of error; nor was it in uncleanness, emanating from any low motives of self-interest; nor in guile. God had approved them; their ministry was God-given and they were fully conscious of this fact. Being intrusted with the gospel (and what a trust it is!) so they spoke. They had no need to employ different schemes to be successful; they had full confidence in God and in the message He had given to them to proclaim. Therefore their whole aim was to please God who trieth the hearts and not men. Nor had they used flattery to win them; nor did they resort to flattering words as a cloak of covetousness using sweet phrases to get money out of them; not alone were they witnesses of all this, but he could say, "God is witness." They had sought nothing of men, neither money nor glory. They might have been burdensome to them as the apostles of Christ. They did not use their authority, which they might have used, asserting their dignity and demanding something from them. Their whole conduct was in true humility and in great self denial. (Many a "leading" evangelist of our day stands condemned by this beautiful example of a true servant of God. What God and gospel dishonoring schemes are used! What flatteries as a cloak of covetousness! How much man-pleasing!)

This is the negative side. On the other hand they were full of tenderness and kindness. A

boisterous, unkind, impatient spirit was completely absent in their ministry. "But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children. So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us." What blessed fragrance is, and will ever be, in these precious words! How little of this gracious, loving interest in souls is manifested today among the Lord's servants! Then he reminds them what he had done so as not to be a burden to any one when he preached the gospel of God unto them. He and his companion had worked day and night with their own hands. Paul was a tent-maker and worked with his own hands in Thessalonica and elsewhere (Acts 18:2; 1 Cor. 4:12). And again he appeals to them as witnesses as well as to God, "how holily and justly and unblamably we behaved ourselves among you that believe; as ye know we exhorted and charged every one of you, as a father his children, that ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto His own kingdom and glory." Having such a portion in the coming kingdom and being an heir of glory, the walk of every believer should indeed be worthy of God.

Verses 13-16

He thanked God without ceasing for the reception of the message which they heard from his lips. It was the Word of God, which Paul had preached, and hearing the message, they had received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God. This Word received in faith saved them and also effectually worked in them that believed. It is still the same. Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. The believer is constantly dependent upon the Word of God; it worketh in him effectually through the power of the Holy Spirit. The believer's practical sanctification in the daily life is by the Word (John 17:17).

They also knew what suffering meant. They became followers (imitators) of the churches of God in Judea in Christ Jesus. Those churches suffered persecutions from the Jews, but the Thessalonians suffered from their own countrymen. And what a solemn charge is brought here through Paul against his kinsmen, the Jews! They had killed the Lord Jesus and their own prophets; they persecuted the apostles. And not satisfied with this, they tried to keep the gospel they hated from reaching the Gentiles that they might be saved. The measure of sins was now filled up "and wrath is come upon them to the uttermost." The great apostle of the Gentiles, called to go far hence to the Gentiles, in this his first Epistle is used to pronounce sentence upon his own nation, which has been set aside until the fulness of the Gentiles is come in (Rom. 11:25-26).

Verses 17-19

He had an affectionate desire for them. Separated and bereaved of them (the more correct rendering) for a little season in person, but not in heart, he had great longing to see their face. Once and again he wanted to visit them, but Satan had hindered him. How the enemy hindered him in carrying out his desire, whether by attacks upon his body (2 Cor. 12:7) or by wicked men, we do not know. He then speaks of that blessed time when all hindrances will cease, when God's people are no longer separated, when those who ministered the Word and the fruits of their labors are gathered in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ at His coming. "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of glorying? Are not even ye before our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? for ye are our glory and joy." Here again the apostle mentions the coming of the Lord. The gathered saints before the Lord Jesus Christ will be the crown of glorying and the joy for the faithful servant, who then finds in the presence of the Lord, in the day of Christ, the fruit of his labors. To this consummation in glory Paul directed the attention of the Thessalonians and he speaks of them as his glory and joy, "for ye are our glory and our joy."

"It should be observed here, that the special fruits of our labors are not lost; they are found again at the coming of Christ. Our chief personal joy is to see the Lord Himself and to be like Him. This is the portion of all saints; but there are particular fruits in connection with the work of the Spirit in us and by us. At Thessalonica the spiritual energy of the apostle had brought a number of souls to God and to wait for His Son, and into a close union in the truth with Himself. This energy would be

crowned at the coming of Christ by the presence of these believers in the glory as the fruit of his labors. God would thus crown the apostle's work by bearing a striking testimony to its faithfulness in the presence of all these saints in glory; and the love which had wrought in Paul's heart would be satisfied by seeing its object in glory and in the presence of the Lord Jesus. They would be his glory and joy. This thought drew yet closer the bonds that united them, and comforted the apostle in the midst of his toils and sufferings" (Synopsis of the Bible).

III. AFFLICTIONS AND COMFORT

CHAPTER 3

1. Timothy, Paul's messenger (3:1-5)
2. His return with good tidings and the apostle's comfort and joy (3:6-10)
3. This earnest desire (3:11-13)

Verses 1-5

His longing for the beloved Thessalonians and his solicitude for them became so great that he could no longer forbear and he decided to be left alone in Athens and send Timothy to Thessalonica. He knew they had great afflictions and that there was danger that they might not endure and then his labors among them would have been in vain. He therefore sent Timothy whom he calls "our brother, minister of God and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ." The purpose of his mission was to establish the believers still more and to bring them comfort concerning their faith. This would result, under the blessing of God, in their steadfastness. "That no man should be moved by these afflictions, for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto"--it is the lot of all true believers. In fact he had forewarned them of all this when he was in their midst. "For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation, even as it came to pass, and ye knew. This was part of the apostolic message, as we learn from Acts 14:22. "Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God."

Tribulations had now come upon the Thessalonians and they were severely tested. He knew they were in the Lord's hands, that His watchful eye was upon them and that His power was sufficient to keep them. Yet he had deep concern and anxiety for them, for he also knew Satan's power. "For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labor be in vain." The day of Christ, when the servant receives the reward and the saints are "the crown of glorying" is in his thoughts. If the tempter succeeded he would not have that crown of glorying in the presence of the Lord. (See 1 John 2:28. "And now little children, abide in Him: that when He shall appear, we [the laborers] may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.") While Timothy was away Paul left Athens from where he had sent him to visit Thessalonica. Paul went to Corinth; it was there he received the good tidings from Thessalonica, and, as we state in the introduction, after Timothy's return he wrote this Epistle (Acts 18:5).

Verses 6-10

"But now when Timothy came from you unto us, and brought good tidings of your faith and love, and that ye have good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us, as we also to see you." It was good tidings Timothy brought to Paul. They were standing fast in faith; they continued in love, nor had they forgotten Paul. Their hearts longed for him as his own soul desired to see them. In the midst of tribulations which had come upon them they were blessedly sustained.

And how all this cheered the apostle. He is comforted. "Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith; for now we live if ye stand fast in the Lord."

He had also his sorrows, his afflictions and much distress. But the good tidings from the Thessalonians refreshed his spirit and filled him with new energy. As a servant of God he is so fully identified with those for whom he labored and whom he loved that he could say, "for now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord." He feels as if he could not render sufficient thanks to God for them and for all the joy wherewith he now rejoiced, on their account before God. He also prayed night and day exceedingly that he might see their face and help them still more, so that which was lacking in their faith might be perfected. Then, knowing himself dependent upon God and the Lord Jesus Christ, He looks to direct his way to them.

"What a bond is the bond of the Spirit! How selfishness is forgotten, and disappears in the joy of such affections! The apostle, animated by this affection, which increased instead of growing weary by its exercise, and by the satisfaction it received in the happiness of others, desires so much the more, from the Thessalonians being thus sustained, to see them again; not now for the purpose of strengthening them, but to build upon that which was already so established, and to complete their spiritual instruction by imparting that which was yet lacking to their faith. But he is a laborer and not a master (God makes us feel this), and he depends entirely on God for his work, and for the edification of others. In fact years passed away before he saw the Thessalonians again. He remained a long time at Corinth, where the Lord had much people; he revisited Jerusalem, then all Asia Minor where he had labored earlier; thence he went to Ephesus, where he abode nearly three years; and after that he saw the Thessalonians again, when he left that city to go to Corinth, taking his journey by the way of Macedonia" (J.N. Darby).

Verses 11-13

We must not overlook the testimony to the deity of our Lord of the eleventh verse. "Now God and our Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you!" The verb "direct" in the Greek is in the singular. God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ are in the thought of the apostle one, though, personally, clearly distinguished. It is a striking proof of the unity of the Father and Son.

He prayed "the Lord make you to increase and abound in love, one toward another and toward all, even as we also towards you." Love is the bond of perfectness and as such the true means of holiness "in order to establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints." This is the third time the coming of our Lord is mentioned by Paul in this Epistle. First he spoke of waiting for His Son from heaven as the characteristic of a true believer (1:9- 10); then we read of the gatherings of the saints in the presence of the Lord, the time of glory and joy, when the faithful servant will receive the reward (2:19-20), and now another phase is added. The Lord is coming with all His saints; it is now not the coming for His saints, but with them, in the day of His manifestation as well as the manifestation of all the saints with Him. It is the same of which we read in Col. 3:4, "When Christ is manifested who is our life then shall ye also be manifested with Him in glory." He also speaks of this in his second Epistle: "When He shall come to be glorified in His saints and wondered at in all that have believed (for our testimony unto you has been believed) in that day" (2 Thess. 1:10). In view of this coming manifestation in glory the Holy Spirit urges a walk in practical holiness, so as to be unblamable in holiness before our God and Father. It is an incentive to holy living.

"In reading this passage one cannot but observe the immediate and living way in which the Lord's coming is linked with daily practical life, so that the perfect light of that day is thrown upon the hourly path of the present time. By the exercise of love they were to be established in holiness before God at the coming of Christ. From one day to another, that day was looked for as the consummation and the only term they contemplated to the ordinary life of each day here below. How this brought the soul into the presence of God! Moreover, they lived in a known relationship with God which gave room for this confidence. He was their Father; He is ours. The relationship of the saints to Jesus was equally known. The saints were "His saints." They were all to come with Him. They were associated with His glory. There is nothing equivocal in the expression. Jesus, the Lord, coming with all His saints, allows us to think of no other event than His return in glory. Then

also will He be glorified in His saints, who will already have rejoined Him to be for ever with Him. It will be the day of their manifestation as of His."

IV. THE SEPARATED WALK AND THE BLESSED HOPE

CHAPTER 4

1. The separated walk (4:1-12)

2. The coming of the Lord for His saints (4:13-18)

Verses 1-12

"Furthermore, then, brethren, we beg you and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, even as ye received from us, how ye ought to walk and please God, even as ye also do walk, that ye would abound still more. For ye know what charges we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor (not in passionate desire, even as the Gentiles who know not God), not overstepping the rights of and wronging his brother in the matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all these things, even as we also told you before, and have fully testified. For God has not called us to uncleanness, but in sanctification. He therefore that (in this) disregards (his brother), disregards, not man, but God, who has also given His Holy Spirit to you" (corrected translation).

Having spoken of being unblamable in holiness at the coming of the Lord he exhorts them to live now in sanctification. The motive is to please God. The believer should constantly in his daily life ask himself this question, "Do I please God?" Exhortation to purity in abstaining from fleshly lusts follows. Fornication, licentiousness in various forms were closely connected with the idolatrous worship from which these Thessalonians had been saved. The lust of the flesh was a part of this former religion, as it is still today among different heathen religions. But why these exhortations? Because they were surrounded by these things on all sides, and because the old nature with its tendencies towards these evils was still present with them, as it is with all true believers. No circumstances or position can make the believer secure against these things, without exercise of conscience and self-judgment, and hence these solemn admonitions from the Lord. Each was to possess his own vessel (his own wife) in sanctification and honor, this would be a safe-guard against the numerous immoralities practised among the heathen. If in this matter any one overstepped the rights of another and thus wronged his brother by committing adultery, the Lord would be the avenger; it would be a complete disregard of God who has not called His people to uncleanness, but unto sanctification, to be separated from all these things. Needful were these exhortations for the Thessalonians as they are still to all of us.

And the best remedy against these evil things is brotherly love. He had no need to say much about it, for they themselves were taught of God to love one another. But he exhorts them to be quiet and to mind their own affairs, working with their own hands, as he their leader had exemplified it when he was among them.

Verses 13-18

"But we do not wish you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them that are fallen asleep, to the end that ye sorrow not, even as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, so also God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep through Jesus. For this we say to you in the Word of the Lord, that we, the living, who remain to the coming of the Lord, are in no way to anticipate these who have fallen asleep; for the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with an assembling shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we, the living who remain, shall be caught up together with them in

clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words."

These words contain one of the great revelations of the Bible and require therefore closer attention. It is a special and unique revelation which he gives to the sorrowing Thessalonians, occasioned by the mistake they had made when some of their fellow believers had died, and they feared that these departed ones had lost their share in the coming glorious meeting between the Lord and His saints. They sorrowed on their account like those who have no hope. (Their pagan neighbors had no hope of meeting loved ones again after death. Classic Greek and Roman writers abound with dreary expressions of the hopelessness of death.) We must remember that the New Testament was not yet in existence; only one of the gospels, was written; and not one of the epistles. And so the Lord gave to the apostle the special revelation which would quiet their fears and put before them the details of the coming of the Lord for all His saints, those who had fallen asleep and those alive when He comes.

Our Lord spoke that blessed word to His eleven disciples, "I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am ye may be also" (John 14:3). It is the only time He mentioned His coming for His own, and in speaking of it He did not tell them of signs to precede that coming, such as wars, false Christs and the great tribulation. It was the simple announcement that He would come again and receive those who are His to Himself. He did not say a word about the manner of that coming and how He would receive His own into glory to be with Him. Nor did the Thessalonians hear definite teaching on this from the lips of Paul. They knew He would come again; they waited for Him. But as to the manner of His coming and concerning those who had already fallen asleep and their relation to that event they were in ignorance. Beautiful it is to see how graciously the Lord answered the question of these sorrowing ones and how much more He adds for the comfort of all His people.

The first statement is in verse 14. "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, so also God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep through Jesus." Let us first notice that blessed statement that "Jesus died." Of the saints it is said that they have fallen asleep; but never is it said that Jesus slept. He tasted death, the death in all its unfathomable meaning as the judgment upon sin. For the saints the physical death is but sleep. (Some have perverted the meaning of "sleep," and, instead of applying it, as Scripture does, to the body, they apply it to the soul. Soul-sleep is nowhere taught in the Bible and is therefore an invention by those who handle the Word deceitfully.) And He who died also rose again; as certainly as He died and rose again, so surely shall all believers rise. God will bring all those who have fallen asleep through Jesus with Him, that is with the Lord when He comes in the day of His glorious manifestation. It does not mean the receiving of them by the Lord, nor does it mean that He brings their disembodied spirits with Him to be united to their bodies from the graves, but it means that those who have fallen asleep will God bring with His Son when He comes with all His saints; they will all be in that glorified company. When the Lord comes back from glory all the departed saints will be with Him. This is what the Thessalonians needed to know first of all. Before we follow this blessed revelation in its unfolding we call attention to the phrase "fallen asleep through (not in) Jesus"; it may also be rendered by "those who were put to sleep by Jesus." His saints in life and death are in His hands. When saints put their bodies aside, it is because their Lord has willed it so. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints" (Ps. 116:15). When our loved ones leave us, may we think of their departure as being "put to sleep by Jesus."

But blessed as this answer to their question is, it produced another difficulty. Hearing that the saints who had fallen asleep would come with the Lord on the day of His glorious manifestation, they would ask, "How is it possible that they can come with Him?" Are they coming as disembodied spirits? What about their bodies in the graves? How shall they come with Him? To answer these questions the special revelation "by the Word of the Lord" is given, by which they learned, and we also, how they would all be with Him so as to come with Him at His appearing. "For this we say to you by the Word of the Lord, that we, the living, who remain unto the coming of the Lord, are in no

wise to anticipate those who have fallen asleep." He tells them that when the Lord comes for His saints, those who have fallen asleep will not have an inferior place and that, we, the living, who remain to the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. When Paul wrote these words and said, "We, the living, who remain," he certainly considered himself as included in that class. The two companies who will meet the Lord when He comes, those who have fallen asleep and those who are living, are mentioned here for the first time. How the living saints will not precede those who have departed and the order in which the coming of the Lord for His saints will be executed is next made known in this wonderful revelation.

"For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with an assembling shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first, then, we, the living, who remain, shall be caught up together with them in clouds, to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words." This is an altogether new revelation. Nothing like it is found anywhere in the Old Testament Scriptures. In writing later to the Corinthians Paul mentioned it again. "Behold I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1 Cor. 15:51-52).

The Lord Himself will descend from heaven. He is now at the right hand of God in glory, crowned with honor and glory. There He exercises His Priesthood and Advocacy in behalf of His people, by which He keeps, sustains and restores them. When the last member has been added to the Church, which is His body, and that body is to be with Him, who is the head, He will leave the place at the right hand and descend from heaven. He will not descend to the earth, for, as we read later, the meeting place for Him and His saints is in the air and not the earth. When He comes with His saints in His visible manifestation, He will descend to the earth. He descends with a shout. It denotes His supreme authority. The Greek word is "keleusma," which means literally "a shout of command," used in classical Greek for the hero's shout to his followers in battle, the commanding voice to gather together. He ascended with a shout (Ps. 47:5), and with the victor's shout He returns.

The shout may be the single word "Come!" "Come and see" He spoke to the disciples who followed Him and inquired for His dwelling place. Before Lazarus' tomb He spoke with a loud voice, "Come forth." John, in the isle of Patmos, after the throne messages to the churches had been given, saw a door opened in heaven and the voice said "Come up hither" (Rev. 4:1). "Come" is the royal word of grace, and grace will do its supreme work when He comes for His own. But there will also be the voice of the archangel (Michael) and the trump of God. The archangel is the leader of the angelic hosts. As He was seen of angels (1 Tim. 3:16) when He ascended into the highest heaven, so will the archangel be connected with His descent out of heaven. All heaven will be in commotion when the heirs of glory, sinners saved by grace, are about to be brought with glorified bodies into the Father's house. Some teach that the voice of the archangel may be employed to summon the heavenly hosts and marshal the innumerable company of the redeemed, for "They shall gather His elect together from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Matthew 24:30-30. (Prof. W.G. Moorehead, Outline Studies.) But this is incorrect. The elect in Matthew 24 are not the Church, but Israel. Dispersed Israel will be regathered and angels will be used in this work. Furthermore the angels will do this gathering after the great tribulation and after the visible manifestation of the Lord with His saints. The coming of the Lord for His saints takes place before the great tribulation.

The trump of God is also mentioned. This trumpet has nothing to do with the judgment trumpets of Revelation, nor with the Jewish feasts of trumpets. It is a symbolical term and like the shout stands for the gathering together. In Numbers 10:4 we read, "And if they blow with one trumpet, then the princes, the heads of the thousands of Israel, shall gather themselves unto thee." The shout and the trump of God will gather the fellow-heirs of Christ. "The dead in Christ shall rise first." This is the resurrection from among all the dead of those who believed on Christ, the righteous dead. All saints of all ages, old and New Testament saints, are included. This statement of the resurrection of the

dead in Christ first disposes completely of the unscriptural view of a general resurrection. As we know from Rev. 20:5 the rest of the dead (the wicked dead) will be raised up later. He comes in person to open the graves of all who belong to Him and manifests His authority over death which He has conquered.

The dead in Christ will hear the shout first and experience His quickening power; they shall be raised incorruptible. What power will then be manifested! "Then we, the living, who remain, shall be caught up together with them in clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord." All believers who live on earth when the Lord comes will hear that commanding, gathering shout. It does not include those who only profess to be Christians and are nominal church-members, nor are any excluded who really are the Lord's. (The so-called first-fruit rapture, which teaches that only the most spiritual of all true believers, who have made a deeper experience, etc., will be caught up, and the other believers, though they are true believers of God, will be left behind to pass "through the great tribulation," has no spiritual foundation and is wrong.) The question, "Who will be caught up into glory?" is answered in 1 Cor. 15:23 -- "All who are Christ's." The change will be "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye" (1 Cor. 15:52). Then this mortal will put on immortality. It will be the blessed "clothed upon" of which the apostle wrote to the Corinthians: "For in this tabernacle we groan, being burdened; not for that we would be unclothed (death) but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life" (2 Cor. 5:4). Then our body of humiliation will be fashioned like unto His own glorious body. It is the blessed, glorious hope, not death and the grave, but the coming of the Lord, when we shall be changed. And it is our imminent hope; believers must wait daily for it and some blessed day the shout will surely come.

When He descends from heaven with the shout and the dead in Christ are raised and we are changed, then "we shall be caught up together with them in clouds to meet the Lord in the air." It will be the blessed time of reunion with the loved ones who have gone before. What joy and comfort it must have brought to the sorrowing Thessalonians when they read these blessed words for the first time! And they are still the words of comfort and hope to all His people, when they stand at the open graves of loved ones who fell asleep as believers.

Often the question is asked, "Shall we not alone meet our loved ones but also recognize them?" Here is the answer: "Together with them" implies both reunion and recognition. These words would indeed mean nothing did they not mean recognition. We shall surely see the faces of our loved ones again and all the saints of God on that blessed day when this great event takes place. The clouds will be heaven's chariots to take the heirs of God and the joint-heirs of the Lord Jesus Christ into His own presence. As He ascended so His redeemed ones will be taken up. Caught up in clouds to meet the Lord in the air; all laws of gravitation are set aside, for it is the power of God, the same power which raised up the Lord Jesus from the dead and seated Him in glory, which will be displayed in behalf of His saints (Eph. 1:19-23). Surely this is a divine revelation.

"How foolish it must sound to our learned scientists. But, beloved, I would want nothing but that one sentence, 'caught up in clouds . to meet the Lord in the air,' to prove the divinity of Christianity. Its very boldness is assurance of its truth. No speculation, no argument, no reasoning; but a bare authoritative statement startling in its boldness. Not a syllable of Scripture on which to build, and yet when spoken, in perfect harmony with all Scripture. How absolutely impossible for any man to have conceived that the Lord's saints should be caught up to meet Him in the air. Were it not true its very boldness and apparent foolishness would be its refutation. And what would be the character of mind that could invent such a thought? What depths of wickedness! What cruelty! What callousness! The spring from which such a statement, if false, could rise must be corrupt indeed. But how different in fact! What severe righteousness! What depths of holiness! What elevated morality! What warmth of tender affection! What clear reasoning! Every word that he has written testifies that he has not attempted to deceive. Paul was no deceiver, and it is equally impossible for him to have been deceived" ("Our Hope," February 1902).

And the blessedness "to meet the Lord in the air"! We shall see Him then as He is and gaze for the

first time upon the face of the Beloved, that face of glory, which was once marred and smitten on account of our sins. And seeing Him as He is we shall be like Him. How long will be the meeting in the air? It has been said that the stay in that meeting place will be but momentary and that the Lord will at once resume His descent to the earth. We know from other Scriptures that this cannot be. Between the coming of the Lord for His saints and with His saints there is an interval of at least seven years before the visible coming of the Lord and His saints with Him. The judgment of the saints, by which their works and labors become manifest must take place. There is also to be the presentation of the church in glory (Ephes. 5:27; Jude 24). Furthermore the marriage of the Lamb takes place not in the meeting place in the air, but in heaven (Rev. 19:1-10). He will take His saints into the Father's house that they may behold His glory (John 17:22). But what will it mean, "So shall we be forever with the Lord!"

"In this part of the passage, where he explains the details of our ascension to the Lord in the air, nothing is said of His coming down to the earth; it is our going up (as He went up) to be with Him. Neither, as far as concerns us, does the apostle go farther than our gathering together to be for ever with Him. Nothing is said either of judgment or of manifestation; but only the fact of our heavenly association with Him in that we leave the earth precisely as He left it. This is very precious. There is this difference: He went up in His own full right, He ascended; as to us, His voice calls the dead, and they come forth from the grave, and, the living being changed, all are caught up together. It is a solemn act of God's power, which seals the Christians' life and work of God, and brings the former into the glory of Christ as His heavenly companions. Glorious privilege! Precious grace! To lose sight of it destroys the proper character of our joy and of our hope" (Synopsis of the Bible).

V. THE DAY OF THE LORD AND EXHORTATIONS

CHAPTER 5

1. The day of the Lord (5:1-11)
2. Exhortations (5:12-22)
3. Conclusions (5:23-28)

Verses 1-11

"But concerning the times and seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape." The apostle next mentions the day of the Lord. This is the day when the Lord is revealed from heaven, the day of His visible manifestation. It is the day when judgment will be executed upon the world. While the coming of the Lord for His saints, as made known in the previous chapter, is unrevealed in the Old Testament, the day of the Lord of which the apostle now writes, is fully revealed by the prophets. (See Isaiah 2:12-22; Joel 2-3; Zeph. 1:14-18; Zech. 14:1-9, etc.)

Our Lord spoke often of that day as the day "when the Son of Man cometh," that is His own visible glorious manifestation. What precedes this day is also made known in the Old Testament prophetic Word; and our Lord gives us likewise the same information. "And there shall be signs in the sun and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory" (Luke 21:25-27). See Matthew 24:21-31. Judgment is in store for the world when that day comes, as judgments and tribulation are the forerunners which usher in that day. The world does not believe in such a day, but dreams of peace

and safety, in a continuance of prosperity, of expansion, universal peace and a constant improvement of earthly conditions.

"There shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation" (2 Peter 3:3-4). But while the world saith, Peace and safety, their hearts are failing them for fear and they tremble in anticipation of the future. Much of all this we see clearly in our times, so ominous and so solemn. There is a false hope, a false optimism; we hear of what this world war will accomplish, how peace and safety will come to the whole world; yet underneath it all there are hearts failing for fear. And when that day has come, when He has been "revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ," the Lord Jesus Christ will reign over the earth with His saints for a thousand years (Rev. 20). That will be the day of the Lord, as the present age is "man's day."

Before that day comes with its preceding judgments and the great tribulation, the coming of the Lord, for His saints, the fulfilment of chapter 4:16-18 must take place. Of this we shall find much more in the second Epistle. When the Lord comes for His saints, the world and those who were Christians only in name, will face that coming day. It is the beginning of it. After God's true children, the praying people of God, have been removed, the age will take its final plunge into apostasy and iniquity; judgment upon judgment from above will then be poured out, as we learn from the book of Revelation.

Because these judgments, the forerunners of the day of His visible manifestation, the times and seasons connected with these events, do not concern those who are the Lord's, the apostle states that there was no need to write them about it. The Lord had told His disciples before He ascended into heaven that it was not for them to know the times and the seasons. It shows that we are not to be occupied with the times and seasons, when the times of the Gentiles end, etc., but to wait and watch for Him, who will surely come suddenly for His own as a thief in the night.

"Had it been possible in the apostle's day to predict the centuries of delay that have, in fact, elapsed, disciples might indeed still have waited for their Lord, but watched they could not, and no 'thief in the night' could have troubled their slumbers. But for the heart, expectancy was needed; and they were to watch because they knew not. Thus for these watchers the times could not speak, and in fact when they do it will be for another people than the present Christian Church, and when this is already removed to be with the Lord in the manner which we have just had before us.

"For mere formal and worldly Christendom, the coming of the thief will then in a sense have taken place. Shut out in the outside darkness, when others have entered the chambers of light, no place of repentance will be left for the despisers of God's present grace. In a world which, having rejected the true King, will be left for that awful time to experience fully what Satan's rule is, they will fall under the power of his deception. Not having received the love of the truth that they might be saved, they will believe a lie; and comforting themselves with the cry of 'peace and safety,' sudden destruction will come upon them as upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape!" (Numerical Bible)

The words "they" and "you" make it still more clear that the day of the Lord is for the world. He does not say "When you shall say, Peace and safety" but when "they shall say." The apostle excludes the believer completely from that day when sudden destruction falls, for he says, "Ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day overtake you as a thief" And why? Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day; we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For that they sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. This is the character of true Christians, no longer in darkness, but children of light and of the day, and therefore belonging to that coming day to be with the Lord when He comes to judge, it cannot overtake them as a thief.

Being the children of the day we must watch and be sober; it is that which distinguishes true Christians from the mass of professing church-members and the world. The world and those who have a form of godliness, but deny the power thereof, do not watch, nor are they sober; and being sober, walking in separation from the world, its lusts and pleasures, the believer, having on the breastplate of faith and love, can advance against the enemy. He has also for an helmet, to protect him, this promised glorious salvation. Thus we can look always up, without fear, in the midst of danger when the judgment clouds are gathering over this present evil age. "For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to the obtaining of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ." Blessed knowledge and twice blessed assurance! that we might be delivered from the wrath to come and share with Him eternal glory. He died for us. "Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep (as to the body) we should live together with Him."

Verses 12-22

Exhortations follow. He wishes that those who labored among them should be acknowledged by them and very highly esteemed in love for their work's sake. If the apostle and his co-laborers looked upon them as their crown of rejoicing, their glory and joy (2:19-20), they should very highly esteem them as the instruments of the Spirit of God for their edification. Be in peace among yourselves. All self-will is put aside when the heart looks forward to that coming day, when laborers and the fruits of their labors are in His presence. Then peace among His own will not be disturbed. The disorderly are to be admonished; the faint-hearted comforted; the weak sustained, and patience to be manifested towards all. Then we have joy, prayer and thanksgiving as the characteristics of those who wait for His Son from heaven and look for that blessed hope. "Rejoice evermore"--our joy is in Him. The joy of the Lord is our strength. And what joy will indeed be ours when we remember that we shall see Him as He is!

"Pray without ceasing." Prayer is constantly needed, including the forgotten prayer, "Even so, Come, Lord Jesus." If this petition is never wanting, His coming for us will never lack reality. "In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." As we pray and ever take afresh from His own fulness grace upon grace, and remember all the abundant provision made for us in Him, and that the glorious future which awaits His own may burst at any moment upon us, then shall we give thanks in everything. "Quench not the Spirit." The Holy Spirit is not to be hindered in His action in the midst of His people. What sad consequences when He is quenched and how great the responsibility! Do not despise prophesyings--the forthtelling of the truth of God, speaking out of the fulness of the Spirit. "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil," or, as it is better rendered, "Keep aloof from every form of wickedness."

Verses 23-28

The conclusion of the Epistle begins with a prayer. "Now the God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is faithful that calls you, who will also do it." God is for all who have believed in Christ the God of peace. Peace was made in the blood of the cross; believers are both reconciled and sanctified through the peace that God has made for us in the work of His Son. We stand therefore in a blessed relationship with the God of peace, have communion with Him, and from this flows practical devotedness of life and walk to God. Believers are sanctified by the three persons of the Godhead; by God the Father, by the blood of Jesus Christ, the offering of His body, and by the Holy Spirit.

We are in Christ completely set apart for God, bought with a price and no longer our own. We possess a new nature and are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. This demands of us that we be wholly set apart to God in every faculty, whether of mind or body. This is our practical sanctification, which springs from our increasing knowledge of God. This practical sanctification is wrought in the believer by the power of the Holy Spirit, who attaches the heart to God, revealing God more and more, as well as unfolding the glory of Christ. This devotedness to God in spirit, soul and body,

depends upon the believer's apprehension of his relationship to the God of peace and his communion with Him. And this is progressive. Entire sanctification will be the blessed and eternal portion of all who are Christ's, when He comes, and we shall be like Him, "conformed to the image of His Son." The perfection comes with the coming of the Lord; in the power of this blessed hope shall we be preserved blameless even down here in this evil age. He is faithful who calls you, who will also perform it. Blessed assurance! He has called us to this life of blessed separation with Himself. He is faithful and will accomplish it. May we trust Him daily and stay close to Him.

"Observe again here, how the coming of Christ is introduced, and the expectation of this coming, as an integral part of Christian life. "Blameless," it says, "at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." The life which had developed itself in obedience and holiness meets the Lord at His coming. Death is not in question. The life which we have found is to be such when He appears. The man, in every part of his being, moved by this life, is found there blameless when He comes. This life, and the man living this life, are found, with their Head and Source, in the glory. Then will the weakness disappear which is connected with his present condition. That which is mortal shall be swallowed up of life: that is all. We are Christ's: He is our life. We wait for Him, that we may be with Him, and that He may perfect all things in the glory" (Synopsis of the Bible).

The apostle closes this First Epistle by requesting the brethren to pray for him and his co-laborers. With all the deep knowledge of the truth and the great revelations from the Lord, he felt his dependence and knew the blessing which comes from the prayers of fellow saints. He asks for the expression of affection among themselves and adjures them to have this letter read to all the holy brethren. And the final word "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you."