

CLASS NOTES -- FIRST THESSALONIANS

See a detailed study of the Thessalonian epistles, with regard to the pre-tribulation Rapture, in my book "Help in Hard Places." This book is out of print, at present, but the text of the book is available on computer diskette upon request.¹

1:2, 3. Prayer for others should include giving of thanks for what God has already done in their lives as well as petition.

1:3. "Work of faith" -- what we do: "labor of love" -- the incentive to do it.

1:3. My note at Col 1:4, 5 reads: *Here [Col. 1:4, 5] is the glorious spiritual triad which we see also in 1 Cor. 13:3 and the Thessalonian epistles. See "Help In Hard Places," pages 210, 211 or 193, 194.* It is not that **faith is a work**, but that **the "work" springs from faith** as its source, just as the "labor" springs from love, and the "patience" from hope.

1:4 - 10. When vs. 5 - 10 are true of a person, we can know his election of God -- that he is saved -- and should not doubt his salvation just because he has problems in his life. The Corinthians were carnal (1 Cor. 3:3), but they were saints by calling (1 Cor. 1:2). Euodia and Syntyche were about to split the church in Philippi, but their names were written in the Book of Life (Phil. 4:3).

1:5. See Luke 4:32; 1 Cor. 4:17, 19, 20.

1:5. The "power" here is not lung power (shouting), nor even the power accomplished by the work of the Holy Spirit (for that is described in the next expression -- "in the Holy Ghost"). It is the power due to the "manner of men" Paul and his evangelistic party were among them. This godly conduct is described in detail in 2:1 - 11. Their preaching was powerful (not in vain -- 2:1) because they were living evidence of what the gospel could do in the lives of those who believed. "In much assurance" -- that is, they **really believed** what they preached, and were fully assured that the message was the power of God unto salvation to all who believed it (2:13).

1:8. This verse says they had "trumpeted out" the word of the Lord. Compare 2 Cor. 4:13 and consider the trumpets of Gideon -- for the story of Gideon is surely the background for 2 Cor. 4:4 - 13. See my Class Notes on 2 Corinthians chapter four.

1:10. "Delivered us from the wrath to come" -- See the Amplified Bible where "delivered" is translated "draws to Himself." The footnote there says this is the "literal meaning of the verb 'to deliver' [Greek word "ρυστοι"]." This indicates that the "wrath to come" is the Tribulation, not the Lake of Fire. See 2 Thess. 2:2 where the drawing to Himself is expressed as a "gathering together unto Him."

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2:1 - 11. Compare 2 Thess. 3:7 - 9.

2:1. Their ministry was effective!

2:2. They had courage!

2:3 - 6. See 2 Cor. 2:17. In Jer. 48:10 the "work of the Lord" was the slaughter of the Moabites, the enemies of Israel. Thankfully, that is not the work assigned to us, but the principle stated in the first part of the verse may be applied to our work of the Lord also. How much greater the curse on those who seek to do the **spiritual** work of the Lord deceitfully!

2:4 - 6. Those things that tend to limit faithful ministry are: The desire for praise (v. 4); the desire to impress men (v. 5); the desire for material things (v. 5); and the desire for recognition or fame (v. 6).

2:7 - 11. In his relationship with the Thessalonians Paul exercised the gentleness of a nursing mother with her own children (v. 7) and the guidance and encouragement of a father with his son (v. 11). Compare the care given to Moses by his own mother when she was "hired" to take care of him (Ex. 2:7 - 9 and also Num. 11:12).

2:16. "The wrath **has come** upon them **to the uttermost**" (NASB). This was very early in Paul's ministry, long before Acts 28, and even longer before the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. It must be looking back to Acts seven and Paul's selection as the one to introduce the Age of Grace. This rules out the Acts 28 theory that the "joint body" was introduced when Israel was completely blinded and totally set aside at Acts 28:28.

Compare Gen. 15:16. When the iniquity of the Amorites was finally full, and the time for judgment upon them had arrived, the unbelief and iniquity of Israel at Kadesh Barnea, and their setting aside, postponed that judgment upon the Moabites for 38 years. In the NT (New Testament) -- when the Gentiles were ripe for the judgments of the Tribulation -- the unbelief and iniquity of Israel caused them to be set aside, even more totally, in Acts seven. This not only postponed, for nearly two thousand years, the judgments to be poured out upon the Gentiles, but opened wide the door of salvation and offered "amazing grace" to them in this Age of Grace.

2:18. Think about the wisdom of God's direction in our lives. "Humanly speaking," First Thessalonians would not have been written if Satan had not hindered Paul from going to see the Thessalonians. If Paul had not been put into prison at Philippi he would not have won the Philippian jailer. If he had not been in prison in Rome we probably would not have the Prison Epistles. Also Caesar's household would not have been won for Christ (Phil. 1:12, 13; 4:22), Onesimus would not have been reached (Philemon 10), and the preaching would not have been fully known that all the Gentiles might hear (2 Tim. 4:13).

2:19, 20. Several "crowns" are mentioned in Scripture. Here, and in Phil. 4:1, the "crown of rejoicing" is the glory and joy experienced in heaven due to the presence there of those we have won to Christ, and the fellowship we will have with them through eternity. The "crown of life" is given to those who endure temptation (James 1:12) or who are faithful unto death in times of tribulation (Rev. 2:10 -- Note, the name "Stephan" means "crown"). The

"crown of righteousness" is for those who have loved His appearing (2 Tim. 4:8). A "crown of glory" is for those who are faithful under-shepherds (1 Pet. 5:2 - 4).

3:1. Athens was about 250 miles from Thessalonica, "as the crow flies."

3:4. They had been told they would suffer tribulation, but **not** that they would go through the **Great Tribulation**. The tribulation of which he had warned them had already come to pass! This gives us the true interpretation of Acts 14:22.

3:8. Paul's concept of "really living" was to see his converts standing fast in the Lord. Compare Phil. 2:16.

3:13. The "coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints" does not refer to the coming in glory, but to the Rapture (see 4:14). Surely "all His saints" cannot mean all absolutely, or it would have to include those saints still living on earth also. At the Rapture He comes with "all his saints" of this age who are with Him in Heaven (Phil. 1:23; 2 Cor. 5:8). At the coming in glory it is not believers, but angels, who return with Him (2 Thess. 1:7). Rev. 12:7 tells us that the army in heaven is made up of "Michael and his angels." With Rev. 7:14 and 19:8 in mind many have concluded that the "armies which were in heaven ... clothed in fine linen, white and clean" (Rev. 19:14) are the saints. However Rev. 15:6 tells us that angels also are "clothed in pure and white linen."

4:1, 10. "More and more" -- we do not "arrive" at these ideals, but they are to be our goal, and we need to be always diligently on our way toward them! Compare Phil. 3:13, 14.

4:3. See the note below at 5:16 - 18.

4:6. "In any matter" is translated "in **this** matter [moral impurity]" by Conybeare.

4:11. "That ye be ambitious to be **unambitious**." This meaning is suggested by a footnote in Conybeare's translation of this verse. Not that we are to be lazy, but that we are not to be taken up with the selfish pursuit of recognition, power, wealth, fame, etc.

4:13 - 18. The OT (Old Testament) saints will not be raised at this time. See Rev. 11:18 for their resurrection.

4:13. There is no "larger hope" that all will someday be saved, as a Universalist friend wrote to me, but, for the unbelieving, there is **NO hope**. See Eph. 2:12 also.

4:14. At death it is not the soul, but the body, which sleeps. The word "sleep" is used because it has the idea of an awakening (a resurrection) in it -- and it is a more tender term than others used to describe death. See Dan. 12:2 where those who "sleep" are sleeping "in the dust of the earth." It is the **body** that is in view in this verse. In Matt. 27:52 it states that, at the resurrection of Christ, "the graves were opened; and many **bodies** of the saints **who had fallen asleep** were raised".

4:15. At this time in his life Paul expected to see the Rapture while he yet lived.

4:16. "The trump of God" -- see 1 Cor. 15:52. Compare Ex. 19:16, 19 in connection with the giving of the Law.

My note at Num. 10:2 - 10 reads: *The trumpets were to be used for almost every occasion of their lives: to assemble the people to worship (v. 3); to assemble the leaders (v. 4); to sound an alarm (vs. 5, 6); to call an assembly (v. 7); to go to war (v. 9); to announce the days of gladness, the days of solemnity, and the beginning of the months (v. 10); and to make their burnt offerings and their peace offerings a memorial (v. 10). Life for them was just one trumpet after another. Such an occasion as the Rapture will be would surely merit a trumpet -- and, being the final event on earth for us, it would be the "last trump." 1 Thess. 4:16; 1 Cor 15:52.*

4:17. "Caught up" -- This is the word used in Acts 8:39; 2 Cor. 12:2, 4. "In the clouds" should be "in clouds" (there is no definite article in the Greek) -- i.e. clouds of believers. Compare the "cloud of witnesses" in Heb. 12:1.

My note at Col. 3:4 reads: *The appearance of Christ in this verse must be the Rapture, and when He appears we will be "with Him" (1 Thess. 4:17; 5:12) -- not on earth, but "in glory." If the Rapture takes place at the end of the Tribulation and we return with Him to the earth to share in His "coming in glory," we would be with Him on earth. I think the glory here is a place, not a condition. See 1 Tim. 3:16 where "glory" appears to be a reference to heaven. (However Wuest says this verse is speaking of the saints accompanying Christ when He returns at the close of the Tribulation [but see the note at 1 Thess. 3:13] -- the "glory" would then be a condition, not a place. Also see Luke 9:31.)*

5:1, 2. There is a change in these verses from a program which does not have a time schedule to "times and seasons." Israel's program of the entire Tribulation Period is part of a time prophecy in Daniel nine. The Thessalonians evidently knew perfectly about the 70th week of Daniel's prophecy, but wouldn't have known about the Rapture unless Paul had told them (4:13). What they needed was instruction concerning the relationship between the "Day of the Lord" and the Rapture -- which he proceeded to give them in the next few verses.

5:2. See Rev. 16:15.

5:3. "Sudden" is the same word translated "unawares" in Luke 21:34. It is used only in these two verses.

It says sudden destruction will come upon them, but it does not indicate that the destruction will come all at once or that it will be quickly concluded. It is to come "as travail upon a woman with child." How does such travail come? It comes suddenly and irrevocably -- but comes and goes over a prolonged period, becoming progressively more severe until it culminates in the birth of the child that is the inescapable climax of the travail. How well this describes the **entire seven years** of the Tribulation! The message is to unbelievers in the last days of the age of grace that, without warning, the 70th week of Daniel nine will be upon them.

5:8. See Isa. 59:17; Eph. 6:16, 17.

5:8, 9. "Salvation" in both of these verses involves being spared from the "wrath" of the Tribulation.

5:10. This whole passage (4:13 -- 5:11) presents the believer's hope:

- As based on the death and resurrection of Christ (4:14; 5:10).
- As affecting both living believers and those who have died (4:16, 17; 5:10).
- As a deliverance: the dead delivered from death (4:14, 16); the living from the wrath of the Tribulation (5:9).
- As bringing comfort: concerning those who have died, they shall **not** miss the **Rapture** (4:18); concerning those who live, they **shall** miss the **Tribulation** (5:11).
- As a contrast with unbelievers who have **no hope in death** (4:13); and **no escape in life** (5:3).
- As the basis for exhortation to believers: to **sorrow** not (4:13); and to **sleep** not (5:6).
- As the beginning of an eternity "with the Lord" (4:17) that we might "live together with Him" (5:10).
- As a subject requiring teaching: lest they be ignorant (4:13), and that they might be edified (5:11).

5:16 - 18. Here are three specific items that are "the will of God" for us. See 4:3 for another one.

5:18. 1 Kings 21:4 (NKJV) reads, "So Ahab went into his house sullen and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him; for he had said, 'I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers.' And he lay down on his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no food." My note there is as follows: *Ahab is sulking again. See 1 Kings 20:43. Ahab sulked because he couldn't get what he wanted -- and sinned greatly. Hezekiah prayed because he was to lose his very life - and was heard by God. Both were feeling sorry for themselves. Though Hezekiah's prayer gained him 15 more years of life, the long-term results were a disaster. It is better to avoid "pity parties" in the first place. Neither man had the faith to give thanks in everything (1 Thess. 5:18).*

Daniel 6:10 (NKJV) reads, "Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days." My note there says: *Notice the circumstances under which he gave thanks! Compare Lam. 3:22, 23 with the situation faced by Jeremiah when he prayed (see 1 Thess. 5:18). He gave thanks before he made supplication (v. 11). See 1 Kings 8:48, 49; 2 Chron. 6:36 - 39; Psa. 5:7; Jonah 2:4; Rom. 1:21; Phil. 4:6.*

5:24. See Ezek. 36:36; 1 Cor. 1:9; 2 Thess. 3:3.

1 Cor. 10:13 (NKJV) reads: "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it." My note there reads, in part: *In the heart of a verse depicting our struggle, where we often experience defeat, we have the statement "God is faithful." Compare Lam. 3:23 with the context of most severe chastening; 1 Thess. 5:24 in the context of "the will of God" (1 Thess. 5:18) and our*

sanctification (1 Thess. 5:22).

5:27. Col. 4:16 (NKJV) reads: "Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea." My note there suggests: *Notice the emphasis on reading the word of God -- here and in Eph. 3:4; 1 Thess. 5:27; and 1 Tim. 4:13 (compare Neh. 8:8). Compare 2 Tim. 3:16, 17 with 2 Tim. 2:15.*

"And consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures." (2 Pet. 3:15, 16 (NKJV). My note on these verses points out that: *Paul's letters were acknowledged by Peter as Scripture, were early circulated among the churches, and were well known by the believers. How strange that Paul is not mentioned or quoted, and no reference made to the Body of Christ, in the book of Revelation (and, save for this single exception, in the General Epistles also) -- if, indeed, the Body of Christ is to go through the Tribulation!*

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