

Abounding Grace Christian Church

The Second Coming Letters of Paul – Part 13

First Thessalonians

I. Exposition of Chapter Five (continued).

A. Verse 15 – “See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.” – This is, obviously, a command against retaliation. Dr. Grant Richison writes:

“Mature Christians do not retaliate against the Christian or the non-Christian, people we like or people we do not like. Immaturity repays evil with evil and good for good. Maturity repays good for evil. The mature person can place justice in the hands of God. It is the responsibility of mature leadership to repay good for evil.”¹

1. **“...but always pursue what is good...”** – Instead of pursuing retaliation, Paul states that believers should pursue what is good. The word **“pursue”** means: **“to do something with intense effort and with definite purpose or goal.”²** The word **“good”** means just that – **“good.”** A parallel passage to this is **Romans 12:19-21** which reads:

“Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, ‘I will take revenge; I will pay them back,’ says the LORD. Instead, ‘If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals of shame on their heads.’ Don’t let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good.”

Romans 12:19-21 – New Living Translation

B. Verses 16-22 – **“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.”** – These verses give several commands to the believers as Paul begins to close this letter.

1. **“Rejoice always...”** – This word **“rejoice”** means; **“be glad, be delighted.”³** When our gladness is not based upon circumstances, but on the Lord Jesus Christ and on His Word, we can rejoice in the midst of anything. (cf. **James 1:2; I Peter 4:12-14**). Dr. Thomas Constable writes:

“A Christian’s joy does not spring from his circumstances, but from the blessings that are his because he is in Christ. “The Christian who remains in sadness and depression really breaks a commandment: in some direction or other he mistrusts God—His power, providence, forgiveness”⁴

2. **“...pray without ceasing...”** – Prayer is simply communication with God. It’s not just asking of God for things, it’s fellowshiping with God and would include our praise and worship. Regarding the phrase **“without ceasing”**, Donald Stamps in the *Fire Bible* writes:

“Prayer is simply communicating with God, which suggests a two-way conversation...For our blessing, the most important part of this communication is what He says to us. This means that we must take time and learn to listen to God in prayer...Therefore, praying continually has more to do with an open heart and mind (that stay in contact with God) than with an open mouth.”⁵

3. **“...in everything give thanks...”** – This does NOT say “for everything give thanks.” In other words, we don’t thank God for tragedy, disasters, disease, etc., because that implies that God sent those things. NO! We give thanks to God for His blessings and His deliverance from these things. During difficult times, we give thanks for what God has done and for what we’re believing Him for, “IN” the midst of these things happening. (e.g. **II Chronicles 20:1-30; Acts 16:16-26**).
4. **“...Do not quench the Spirit...”** – The word **“quench”** means: **“to extinguish a fire,”; “to cause a fervent activity to cease.”⁶** Paul is commanding the believers to stay on fire for God and to let the Holy Spirit have His way.

¹Grant C. Richison, *I Thessalonians* (Austin, TX: Grace Notes Publication, 1997), 127.

²Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 662.

³James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

⁴Thomas L. Constable, “1 Thessalonians,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 708. (The second sentence is a quote from A.J. Mason, “The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Thessalonians,” in *Ellicott’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 8, p. 145)⁴

⁵*Fire Bible: English Standard Version*, Donald C. Stamps, Gen. Ed. (Springfield, MO: Life Publishers Int’l, 2011), 2079-2080.

⁶Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 660.

“Believers must also be careful not to quench (suppress, extinguish) the fire of the Spirit. The form of the Greek verb actually means ‘to stop putting out’ the Spirit’s fire. Fear, carelessness, and sin can all dampen our response to the Spirit.”⁷

5. **“...Do not despise prophecies...”** – This goes along with not quenching the Holy Spirit. The word **“despise”** means: **“treat with contempt, look down on, ridicule”**.⁸ **“Prophecies”** refer to **“an utterance inspired by God”**⁹ This is one of the **“manifestations”** or **“gifts”** of the Holy Spirit as is mentioned in **I Corinthians 12:7-10; 14:1-40; Romans 12:6**. Apparently some of the Thessalonian believers were looking down on the gift. Donald C. Stamps in the Fire Bible writes:

“Paul encourages the believers to let the Spirit operate through people by his spiritual gifts (i.e., God-given abilities and empowerments to benefit the church), such as the gift of prophecy. This special gift enables a Christian to deliver a message or revelation directly from God under the impulse and prompting of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁰

6. **“...Test all things...”** – The word **“test”** means: **“to try to learn the genuineness of something by examination and testing,”**¹¹ The way we test any of the gifts, including prophecy is to be sure in agrees with the written Word of God. Anything contrary to the Word or contrary to God’s nature revealed to us in the Word, must be rejected.
7. **“...hold fast what is good...”** – We’re to hold onto and retain anything that is of God.
8. **“...Abstain from every form of evil.”** – The word **“abstain”** means: **“to be at some distance away from—‘to be away from’”**¹²

“Be happy [in your faith] and rejoice and be glad-hearted continually (always); Be unceasing in prayer [praying perseveringly]; Thank [God] in everything [no matter what the circumstances may be, be thankful and give thanks], for this is the will of God for you [who are] in Christ Jesus [the Revealer and Mediator of that will]. Do not quench (suppress or subdue) the [Holy] Spirit; Do not spurn the gifts and utterances of the prophets [do not depreciate prophetic revelations nor despise inspired instruction or exhortation or warning]. But test and prove all things [until you can recognize] what is good; [to that] hold fast. Abstain from evil [shrink from it and keep aloof from it] in whatever form or whatever kind it may be.”

I Thessalonians 5:16-22 – Amplified Bible

C. Verse 23 – “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

1. Paul comes back again to the subject of **“sanctification” (4:1-8)**. This verse is in the form of pronouncing blessing as he closes this letter. Remember, **“sanctify”** means **“to be set apart” from sin** and **“set apart” to God for His use and purpose**. It is the same word translated **“holy”** and also, therefore, means **“purity.”**
2. Paul is not presuming that the believers could possibly be sanctified completely in this life. This is not possible until we receive our glorified body at the coming of the Lord Jesus.
3. If we’re born again, we’re already sanctified (holy) in spirit. The spirit of man is that part of us that is born from above and is a new creation in Christ (**II Corinthians 5:17**). This is what is referred to as the **“new man”** which is **“...created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.” (Ephesians 4:24)**.
4. The **“soul”** of man is usually referred to as the mind, will and emotions. The spirit and soul together would be what the Bible refers to as the **“inward man” (II Corinthians 4:16; Ephesians 3:16)**. The soul is in the process of being sanctified as it is renewed to the Word of God (**Romans 12:1-2; James 1:21**).
5. The body, or the **“outward man” (II Corinthians 4:16)** will be sanctified in the future at the second coming of the Lord when it is changed from **“mortal to immortality”** and from **“corruptible to incorruption” (I Corinthians 15:51-54)**.

D. Verses 24-28 – Paul’s closing remarks.

1. **Verse 24** – He reminds them of the faithfulness of God who will carry out complete sanctification in the life of the believer.
2. **Verse 25** - He asks the believers to pray for him and his team.
3. **Verse 26** – A kiss on the cheek, or both cheeks as a form of greeting was the tradition of that day. It still is in some countries today.
4. **Verses 27-28** – Final words.

⁷The Complete Biblical Library: Acts – Revelation, Volume 2, (Empowered Life, Tulsa, OK, 2016.), 856.

⁸Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)*

⁹Louw and Nida, 439.

¹⁰Fire Bible: English Standard Version, Donald C. Stamps, Gen. Ed., 2080.

¹¹Louw and Nida, 331.

¹²Ibid., 724.